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**Working class feminism: Creating a politics of community,  
connection, and concern**

**Haywoode, Terry L., Ph.D.**  
**City University of New York, 1991**

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**WORKING CLASS FEMINISM:  
CREATING A POLITICS OF COMMUNITY,  
CONNECTION, AND CONCERN**

by

**TERRY L. HAYWOODE**

**A disseration submitted to the Graduate Faculty in  
Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
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**1991**

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**Abstract**

**WORKING CLASS FEMINISM: CREATING A  
POLITICS OF COMMUNITY, CONNECTION AND CONCERN**

by

**Terry L. Haywoode**

**Advisor: Professor Roslyn Wallach Bologh**

This work develops a theory of working class feminism that draws on literature of working class women and informal community organizations. Working class feminism takes as its starting point working class women's sense of community, affiliation and group membership. Rather than starting from individual identity, working class women view themselves as members of a network of loosely connected groups and affiliations that includes family, kinship and friendship circles, groups of neighbors and local organizations.

This dissertation locates the origin of working class feminism in the 1970s, at the intersection of several historical forces. In the period following World War II, white ethnic working class women were confronted by threats to the economic survival, social integrity and political viability of their neighborhoods. Using their own pre-existing social relationships, combined with approaches to political organizing learned from the social movements of the 1960s, they created

a new approach to neighborhood politics. This approach centered on the importance of community, both as an organizing tactic and as a goal. Through this approach they asserted the importance of community life and neighborhood culture in opposition to the growing emphasis on administrative rationality in government and corporate life.

Working class feminism differs from middle class feminism in its commitment to community as an extension of family and as the public arena that working class women claim. This theory disputes the division that locates traditional women's lives solely in the private sphere of the household. Instead, the theory argues that the sphere of community that working class women create bridges the public and private spheres and becomes a locus for political and social activism.

Drawing on their experience as community activists, members of the National Congress of Neighborhood Women, a working class feminist organization, created a college program that placed community at the center of its curriculum and administrative structure. This college program provides a working class feminist model for the transformation of other social institutions as well.

By developing the concept of working class feminism, this dissertation adds a new perspective to feminist thought and specifies a basis for a more inclusive women's movement.

## **DEDICATION**

**In loving memory of my parents:**

**Arthur Levey  
and  
Estelle Karp Levey**

**and for my children:**

**Alyssa Haywoode  
and  
Arthur Haywoode**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation focuses on the importance of community in the social life of working class women. I would like to acknowledge the importance in my own life of a number of communities who provided support, aid and encouragement in the process of writing of this dissertation.

My first community was of course my own family from whom I learned about working class life first hand. My parents, sister and I lived on the same block with assorted aunts, uncles and cousins. That block was itself a small world densely packed with the cross cutting currents of social life that constitute a community.

I was fortunate to be part of the Marx Seminar at the CUNY Graduate Center, a community that nurtured thoughtful and original work in the social sciences. George Fischer led the seminar and set a tone of absolute seriousness, respect for the individual and collective support. He served as the first chairperson of my dissertation committee. I want to express my enduring gratitude for his unstinting support, encouragement, patience, and help. It went far beyond what anyone has a right to expect.

It is no coincidence that Roslyn Wallach Bologh, who succeeded George as chairperson of my committee was also a member of the seminar. Roz was at the same time a passionate supporter of my work and a dispassionate and

rigorous critic. I am grateful to her for both, as well as for her insightful analysis of my work, and her generosity of spirit.

Natalie Sokoloff, a member of my committee and a former member of the seminar, provided encouragement and help from the earliest stages of the project to its completion. Bill Kornblum, whose work on working class community is a model for my own, not only supplied encouragement and help, but also guided me through the perilous shoals of bureaucracy. Mike Brown encouraged me to come to the graduate center and was a friend and mentor during my entire stay there, as well as serving on my committee.

An offshoot of the seminar was a women's writing group. In the group, Lorraine Cohen and Celine Krauss read and reviewed endless drafts and ideas with unfailing good cheer, thoughtful commentary and helpful suggestions. Nancy Naples firmly believed that I would complete this work even when I myself was not so sure. Judy DeSena and Bill DiFazio offered encouragement and the example of their own work on working class community.

The National Congress of Neighborhood Women is the organization that inspired this work. The women of NCNW embody the ideas and practices of working class feminism and formed another community. I thank them for permitting me to share their work. Many of them discussed with me the ideas that form the basis of this work. Laura Scanlon read and commented on several drafts of chapters and collaborated with me on a number of works about working class feminism and NCNW. Jan Peterson invited me to be a part of NCNW and



was my first informant. Christine Noschese, Connie Noschese, Rosemarie Reed, Sally Fisher, Ann Giordano, Mildred Johnson, Frances Allen, and many others shared their ideas and their histories as activists with me.

Avrama Gingold read drafts, encouraged and nagged this work toward completion. She and my children performed a minor miracle: they taught me to use the computer. My children Alyssa and Arthur Haywoode tolerated a house full of books and papers for longer than any of us care to remember. As they grew up, they too were recruited into reading drafts and looking up citations. Beverly Elkin's support, help, and clarity were invaluable. My sister, Arline Milstein, encouraged and cheered me for a long time. I thank them all for their patience and help.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Working Class Feminism: An Introduction**

Is there, or could there be a distinctively working class feminism? If so, what would a working class feminism look like? Those are the questions this work addresses. I claim there is a distinctively working class feminism and that it came into being at a particular time -- the middle to late 1970s -- and in a particular setting -- urban neighborhoods. Working class feminism is a response to political developments and historical changes affecting the survival of urban neighborhoods. Like the middle class forms of feminism that preceded it, working class feminism emerged through the specific confluence of factors with particular salience to working class women. Although the phenomenon I call working class feminism is historically specific, it is based on a legacy of past social action by working class women. This tradition is documented in the works of such feminist historians as Kaplan (1982), Kennedy (1979), Berg (1978), Stansell (1987), Rowbotham (1973) and Smith and Valenze (1988).

Working class feminism is grounded in the everyday life of working class women. Their everyday life has been strongly defined by a sense of attachment and affiliation, rather than by a sense of individualism. As a result of the paramount importance of attachment and affiliation, of what I and others term

community, much of the everyday life of working class women has remained outside the purview of scientific research and theorizing. Social science typically takes the individual for granted as the basic unit of analysis, and thus the communally grounded existence of working class women has been both unnoticed and unaccounted for. Working class women, the social world they create and the lives they lead represent a specific domain of social life in both urban and rural settings. In this work I define the group under consideration as limited to white ethnic working class women. Although there are strong hints that there is much overlap between the concerns of black and white working class women, it is not possible to generalize without having made a specific investigation of both groups. I have not done this.

With a few exceptions (Komarovsky, 1967; Rubin, 1976; and Rainwater et. al., 1962), the study of working class women was largely absent from American social science literature until the late 1970s. The portrayals of working class women's lives that do exist are fragmentary and one dimensional.

Two of the three studies (Komarovsky, 1967 and Rubin, 1976) mentioned above inquire into the lives of working class women mainly in terms of their roles in the family. In both, the family is narrowly delineated as the nuclear family, thereby excluding by definition, consideration of their respondents' roles and relationships in the extended family or larger community. Rainwater, et. al. (1962) in the earliest of these studies focuses on a related but somewhat different

theme, investigating the decisions made by working class women as consumers. In this situation, scarce resources give women few options.

In each of these instances, working class women are studied in terms of their weaknesses. In the setting of the nuclear family, they are perceived as being dominated by their husbands and as consumers, as exercising little autonomy. Two British studies of working class neighborhoods (Bott, 1957, and Young and Wilmott, 1957) investigate the world of working class women more deeply, emphasizing the communal character of social life and the importance of working class women's networks of support for personal and collective life in their neighborhoods. It is this latter aspect of working class women's lives that provides the foundation of the distinctive character of working class feminism.

The portrayal of working class women in the American studies cited above is a flattened out and empty one. The approaches and methodologies adopted by the researchers do not allow the significance of community in the lives of working class women to become visible. In each of the works cited, the main research tool was the solitary interview.

Researchers interviewed individual women either alone in their own homes or with husbands present. In that setting, their relationships with friends, neighbors and female relatives were not apparent, nor were their roles in community activities or organizations. The questions raised by the interviewers centered on women's household work, relationships with husbands and children, and views of marriage and family life. The researchers inquired about communication within the family, sexuality, and power and decision making in

the family. Their questions centered on family life. In sketching a composite portrait of working class women, they relied mainly on interview data and on their direct observation of women in their households at the time of the interview.

These researchers did not observe their respondents in the community setting and consequently had no opportunity to observe community interaction.

Studying working class women was defined as studying women in their families. It is therefore not surprising that the responses reported suggest that the women were resigned to narrow lives of monotony, drudgery, and lost illusions. One of these works describes the world view of working class women in the following terms:

She does not know what governs events and people beyond her ken. With such a meager chart, she tends to see the world beyond her doorstep and neighborhood as fairly chaotic and potentially catastrophic. She feels she has little ability to influence the larger forces which affect her life (Rainwater, p.52)

The title of still another study, Worlds of Pain (Rubin, 1976), suggests clearly the overall perspective taken in these works. These three studies formed the core of sociology's image of working class women and even today continue to be cited as descriptive interpretations of working class women.

An area of sociological inquiry in which one might expect an analysis of working class women to play a prominent role is that of community studies. Community studies are among the most interesting and enduring works in American sociology. Indeed, the earliest lineage of American sociology harks back to the Chicago School studies of various neighborhoods, groups and other

components of the social life of cities (Park and Burgess, 1929; Thrasher, 1927; and Zorbaugh, 1929). This distinguished collection of studies was followed by a number of equally engaging later studies of urban communities such as Whyte's Street Corner Society (1955), Gans's Urban Villagers (1962) and Liebow's Talley's Corner (1967), Kornblum's Blue Collar Community (1974) to mention only the best known among this body of literature. The community study approach has also been employed to investigate the social structure of smaller cities and towns (Lynd and Lynd, 1929 and 1937; Warner, 1963; and Vidich and Bensman, 1958).

However, as Lofland (1975) observed in her critical analysis of community studies, although the reader is made aware of the presence of women on the scene, they remain in the background. Lofland notes that women are only passively present in these studies, much like butlers in English murder mysteries. They are not depicted in a way that makes their lives real to the reader or that allows the reader to know what they do or how they are connected to the larger community. The very approach and methodology employed by the researchers direct attention away from the spheres in which women are important social actors. As Lofland notes, whom you find depends both on where you look and what you are looking for. Not surprisingly, by looking in bars, in political clubhouses, and on those celebrated and ubiquitous street corners, the researchers found a world of men.

These two groups of researchers investigated working class families and communities. Neither took note of the community building activities of working

class women. In their studies of working class families, female interviewers restricted their research to the household and nuclear family. In their studies of the larger community, male participant observers selected themes and sites in the community that did not invite the participation of women. Both groups of researchers overlooked the communal world of working class women.

Working class women do become visible to scholars and other observers when they become workers in the waged labor force. It then becomes possible to define and document their activities using the same categories as those used to conceptualize the activities of male workers. In the workplace, it is possible to investigate and assess women's skill, level of education, rate of compensation, and job performance (e.g., Wallace, 1982; Wertheimer, 1977; Baxandall, et. al., 1976). From the perspective of labor organizing, researchers may inquire into whether or not women workers are likely to join unions, attend meetings, support job actions or march on picket lines (Tax, 1980; Kessler-Harris, 1981). Critical analysts have studied women workers in terms of the segmentation of the labor market, the inequities of men's and women's pay scales, the problem of child care and the double day of working women (Sokoloff, 1980; Young, 1980; Hochschild, 1989). When women are paid workers, they enter a well-defined category and therefore become visible in terms of their membership in that category.

If these three groups of studies do not adequately present working class women, what is missing from these investigations? A more recent set of studies (Susser, 1982; McCourt, 1977; Seifer, 1975; Haywoode, 1983; De Sena, 1990)



provides a more complete image of working class women by emphasizing their activities outside the home and by presenting them in the context of their neighborhood communities. By displaying a more comprehensive representation of the diverse aspects of working class women's lives, these works make it possible to grasp the liveliness, complexity and significance of their lives and activities within their communities. This group of studies taken together indicates that the social construction, perpetuation and protection of community life and culture is a fundamental activity performed by working class women and one through which they define themselves.

By performing these community building activities, working class women are engaged in the process of creating social life. Human beings are both individual and social. The individual aspect of our being is in part biologically based and in part socially constructed. All people participate to some degree in the work of constructing the social. It is a fundamental aspect of human life to do so. Nonetheless, constructing, defining and maintaining the social is the specific task of some members of society more than others. The distinction between social and individual is reflected in the separation that has been created between public and private, between the household and civil society. Some members of society have become specialists in individual aspects and others have become specialists in the social.

It is often women who are specialists in creating and preserving social bonds. The importance of women's roles as creators and maintainers of family life, for example, has been discussed so frequently it has become a truism.

Ironically, this conceptualization of women's role serves the purposes of both conservative and liberal theorists. Conservatives believe that women's role in the family is an important function and they wish to keep women performing it, albeit with little reward or recognition. Liberals acknowledge this role because they wish to emancipate women from its constraints and inequities. Beyond the nuclear family, women's special concern for social life is clear though less apparent. In general, women do the emotional work of facilitating interpersonal and intergroup relations in a variety of settings, including the workplace and the household (Fishman, 1983; Hochschild, 1983). Similarly, it is women who actively create and maintain a particular social sphere, namely community. This sphere of community is, I suggest, the special domain of working class women.

Working class women become visible as significant social actors when we highlight the sphere of community. Unlike the image of working class women presented in earlier works in which their role is depicted as limited, fragmented and dependent, the community represents a world in which working class women are knowledgeable, competent, and capable of acting with authority. Working class women construct the social life of community through their actions in everyday life. The social sphere of community constitutes a bridge between public and private, between the household and the larger society. On the one hand, community may be viewed as an extension of the household for it too is a part of the surroundings in which a family lives. On the other hand, it is a part of the public world that is shared with others and shaped by larger events. By

participating in community life, working class women both extend their households and stake their claim on the larger world.

The foundation of working class feminism is the experience of working class women in communities. This aspect of working class women's lives is not noted in studies that focus on women in the family, women as consumers, or women as workers. It is scarcely noted in the classical studies of urban communities performed by male researchers. Although discussion in this work will be limited to the role of working class women in urban communities, there is evidence that working class women operate in a similar fashion in rural communities as well (Stall, 1982).

Feminist theorists as well as feminist activists have increasingly acknowledged the problems inherent in a perspective that focuses on women as a universal category. Ironically, the perspective shares a major flaw with the false universalization of "man" which explicitly claimed to include both men and women, but implicitly reflected a white middle class male bias. The universalization of women by a feminist movement condemning false universalizing has been contested by various groups of women who challenge its white middle class bias. This challenge and resistance, primarily by black and other minority women, (Hooks, 1984; Omalade, n.d.) has persuaded feminists to acknowledge the racial particularity of their own movement. However, the question of class and feminism still largely remains at issue.

In attempting to develop an analysis that combines class and gender, one may begin by considering women in general and feminist arguments as they

pertain to women as a category. However, it is equally necessary to take account of the specific situation of working class women. Middle class feminists may believe that working class women would take positions similar to their own, only to an even greater degree. It is possible to reach this conclusion because working class women are oppressed not only in terms of their gender, but also in terms of class. Therefore it is particularly noteworthy that this is not the stance that working class women actually take (Seifer, 1975; Haywoode, 1978; Fisher, 1981). To cite one important difference, working class women tend to express more sympathy toward men and to mention quite explicitly that this is one way in which their position differs from mainstream feminists. The following statement provides an example:

To be perfectly honest, women's liberation was not important. I don't appreciate some middle class woman telling me to get out of the kitchen....I happen to like my kitchen. I like being a mother and I happen to like being a wife. I don't think you have to give up those things to be a liberated person. I think it's a matter of knowing there's a place for your husband and there's a place for you in this world. (Marie Casella, quoted in Fisher, 1981, p. 152)

Working class women tend to reject analyses that categorically blame or exclude men. The two possible bases for this point of view are a class solidarity which allows them to see working class men as also oppressed or the importance that working class women attach to those family, ethnic and community ties that include men.

Because such differences are significant to them, working class feminists believe that they need to find a means of conceptualizing their own particular strengths and dilemmas. When an arena of discourse is constructed that allows

working class women to speak with their own voices, the issues they choose to address are often quite different from those selected by middle class feminists, mainstream, Marxist and radical. In the following pages I discuss some of these differences as a way of highlighting the particular features of working class feminism.

Betty Friedan (1963) and other early liberal feminists viewed women's difficulties as stemming from the limitations placed upon them as wives and mothers. Friedan discussed:

...women who adjust to the feminine mystique, who expect to live through their husbands and children, who want only to be loved and secure, who never make a commitment of their own to society or to the future, who never realize their human potential (p.300)

Liberal feminists challenged the prevailing assumption that being a wife and mother necessarily precluded having other opportunities to which they felt entitled by their educational and class status. These educated middle class women suffered status inconsistency, in terms of the strain between the expectations they had developed in their earlier years and the reality of their lives as housewives. Friedan (1963) describes the life of suburban housewives as "a slow death of the self" and "a living death for women." (p. 365).

In the years since publication of The Feminine Mystique, middle class liberal feminists have continued to challenge legal and social constraints that restrict equal access to the institutions that confer the opportunities and rewards to which they aspire. These constraints include legal discrimination, biased employment practices, the burden of household labor and child care, and the

inequitable distribution of resources, including power, within the family. Middle class liberal feminists have challenged gender bias in many institutions. An important goal of middle class feminism has been to remove those structural impediments that prevent women from claiming the same opportunities and rewards as men, and by removing those impediments, to create a more equitable distribution of the rewards and responsibilities of social life.

Middle class liberal feminists differ from their working class counterparts in terms of the emphasis they place on opportunities for women as individuals who are separate from the group, community or family and in terms of their willingness to evaluate family life and gender relations according to outside standards.

While The National Organization of Women and other groups campaigning for women's rights in the mainstream political arena have been mainly liberal feminists, much of the important theoretical debate about women in society has occurred within the framework of Marxist feminism. How does working class feminism compare with Marxist feminism? Marxist feminists begin their analysis with the issue of class exploitation through the twin categories of capital accumulation and the extraction of surplus value. They build on this model to develop a further analysis of the specific form that the exploitation of women takes. These models include women's role in the reproduction of labor power (indirect exploitation), as well as women's direct exploitation in a segmented labor market (Sokoloff, 1980; Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978). The question of how women's unpaid labor in the home is exploited and the nature of this

labor is discussed in a variety of works, (Sokoloff, 1980; Dixon, 1978; James and DallaCosta, 1975). Taken as a body, these studies augment Marx's overview of the social relations of production by investigating the position of women in class society. Further development of Marxist feminist theory appropriates the category of patriarchy from the radical feminists and presents it as coequal with that of capitalism (Hartmann, 1981; Young, 1980; Eisenstein, 1981).

Marx, of course, was keenly aware of the issue of community vis à vis the individual. Indeed, the loss of community may be one approach to understanding class society. As Marx saw it, the weakness of workers was based on the fact that each worker confronted the capitalist alone, shorn of the community that could have strengthened all and supported their position. What is required therefore is for workers to transform themselves from individuals into a collective whole, a community -- Marx's famous class for itself. However, the unit of analysis remained the individual worker, just as for Marxist feminists, it is the individual woman in her household or workplace.

Working class feminists do address some of the same questions taken up by socialist feminists, but their starting point is different. Following Sandra Harding's (1986) remarks in her discussion of what she terms Africanist ontology, working class feminism does not refer merely to the woman in the community, but to the primacy of community as a category of analysis.

Radical feminism differs sharply from working class feminism in that its analysis both universalizes and individualizes women. Radical feminist analysis traces the roots of women's problems to women's role in childbearing, in the

family, and in the universal sexism of all social orders. Radical feminists therefore wish to emancipate women from their role in reproduction, in the family, and in the community. The goal they envision is often a feminist separatist community of women who create a new social order, or one in which women establish a new way of living within the boundaries of an existing society. For working class women, this analysis is especially problematic. Its sweeping generalizations seem to ignore the specificity and particularity of their experience. Its separatist tendency disregards their attachment to sons, brothers, husbands and other men. Its focus on the patriarchal family as the source of women's oppression contradicts working class women's positive evaluation of their roles and relationships within the family and the community, especially their roles as mothers. When working class women express negative opinions about feminism, it is often radical feminism that they have in mind.

By comparing working class feminism with liberal, socialist and radical feminism, we are able to see how different starting points and different ways of being in the world create the basis of a different kind of feminism, both in conception and in action. Middle class feminism is geared to achieving results in terms of eliminating specific laws, policies, and traditions that restrict women's potential to assume a wide variety of roles in society. Radical feminism is interested in understanding and changing the deeper power relations in society, analyzing and ultimately eliminating the institutional basis of patriarchal relations. Socialist feminism adds to this analysis the mutually reinforcing



relationship of capitalism and patriarchy, investigating how the dominant class under capitalism benefits in concrete ways from the oppression of women.

Working class feminism approaches the analysis of women in society from a perspective that is not only different in content, but which grows out of a different grounding in the world. Because working class women create, perceive, and experience the world as based on extended affiliation, rather than individuality, they reject those aspects of feminism that they believe define women as being separate from others, rather than being rooted in concrete ties and relationships.

The feminism of working class women grows out of their own experience in a world they both inhabit and create. As previously noted, a central and defining characteristic of this world is a sense of community and a sense of affiliation with others. For working class women, it is the experience of being embedded in a social network, in which they are connected to others, that constitutes the deepest experience of their own humanity. It is this sense of affiliation, rather than a sense of individuality, that is the core experience of their life world. This is not, of course, to assert that middle class women are completely individualistic and working class women are totally oriented toward the group but rather that, viewed as a continuum, working class women are closer to the group-oriented end of the spectrum.

The network working class women create and in which they participate in urban neighborhoods is a loose and flexible one. It may expand or contract depending on the circumstances of their lives. There have been a number of

descriptions of this network in the sociological literature (e.g., Bott, 1957; Young and Wilmott, 1957; Stack, 1974; Susser, 1982). The network includes both nuclear and extended family, friends, neighbors, local shopkeepers, local officials, and others whose base of operations is the local neighborhood.

A central element of working class women's identity is women's role in family life. As one respondent stated proudly, "The woman is the heart of the family." Working class women's role in the family and their roles in the neighborhood are closely connected. The clear distinction between family and household as the private sphere and the outside world as the public sphere is much less sharply delineated in working class neighborhoods than in many other settings such as middle class suburbs. Thus the statement that the family is the primary locus of affiliation has a different meaning for a working class woman than it has for a middle class woman. Working class women in urban neighborhoods do not experience the family in isolation, but rather as situated within a community based network. For this reason, the working class woman who takes her primary identity from her role in the family is not cut off from membership in a larger social world, but rather is anchored in that world.

In her pioneering work All Our Kin (1974), Carol Stack analyses the central role of the kin-based network in a poor black urban community. This work highlights the continuing relationship between the kin network and the individual family and household. Household arrangements may shift and change in response to economic and personal needs, but the kin network remains the enduring social foundation of the lives of its members. This kin based social

structure provides its members with a network of exchange that allows them to maximize the scarce material resources of a poor community. However, the network is not merely a system of exchange: it is also a normative order with its own values, norms, and sanctions.

A number of themes emerge from Stack's work that are significant for the analysis of working class women. First, the women she studied define themselves and are defined by others in terms of their relationship to their kin network. Secondly, the relationship between the nuclear family, the extended family and the broader community is that of a continuum, rather than one of separation into distinct entities. Thirdly the community with its homegrown normative system constitutes a social world. Of course, many of the normative structures of the larger society penetrate this social world. The media are a continuing and insistent voice of mass culture, carrying societal norms into even the most isolated communities. Additionally, there is also an overlap between the neighborhood community and larger social institutions that are also carriers of values. Nonetheless, in many ways the system of norms in the community that Stack describes is independently constituted.

I argue here that a similar though less visible network exists in many working class communities, especially those communities that continue to remain ethnically defined. There are of course differences between poor and working class neighborhoods. The nuclear family plays a more central role in working class communities than it does in the poor community described by Stack. However, in both settings, the nuclear family is not a separate entity, but is part

of a larger network of personal identity, affiliation, and loyalty. In working class communities, as well as in poor communities such as the one studied by Stack, building this network is largely the work of women. The network is a strong and flexible social arrangement that provides support, mutual aid, companionship and a sense of belonging to its members. This network of identity and affiliation forms the basis of the strong sense of social integration that transforms a neighborhood from a geographic entity into the social entity that constitutes a community.

Community represents a hidden dimension of working class women's lives and struggles. It is a largely unnoticed dimension, in part because of the intensely local and particular nature of community life and in part because of the diminution of interest in local matters in favor of mass culture. I wish to advance a broader view of community membership as a central aspect of human identity. Participation in the community building process strengthens both individual identity and social integration. I locate the basis of this concept within a larger framework that conceptualizes community building as essential to the process of being fully human through the creation of liberating institutions.

I argue that the concept of being fully human, a concept taken from the work of Karl Marx, is implicit to feminist analysis, just as it is implicit in the analysis developed in many liberation movements. Women, through the women's movement, challenged the existing social and political order precisely because it denied their full humanity. In creating a new analysis of society and a new

social institution --the movement itself -- they lay claim to a fuller definition of their own humanity.

Like other liberatory social movements, the women's movement created a new chain of affiliation, a new community. Through participation in the movement, women did indeed experience themselves as more fully human. I include a number of elements in this concept of developing a more fully human identity. These become apparent when we identify some of the aspirations and outcomes of the women's movement. Through their activities in the women's movement, women were able to realize new aspects of their own individual potential, to participate in a new community and to create a new social institution -- the movement itself -- that held the promise of being an expression of their human goals rather than a repressive imposition of external necessity. These three elements -- developing one's own potential, participating in the shared life of a community, and consciously creating an institutional structure shaped to the needs of its participants -- are what I take to be the three components of a more fully human life.

Middle class feminism focuses on the individual aspect of becoming fully human. The emphasis on fulfilling one's individual potential that fills the pages of The Feminine Mystique (1963) has continued to be central to the movement as it developed. Friedan uses Maslow's work on self actualization as the theoretical linchpin of her argument. The collective life of the family or community is mentioned seldom, except as impediment to self realization.

In contrast, working class feminism focuses on the concept of community and especially on the process of constituting community in and through the social interactions of everyday life. In addition to emphasizing women's role in the process of building community, working class feminist thought has broader implications as well, providing a unique perspective on and analysis of social life in general and women's lives in particular.

In this work, I consider specifically the experience of working class women and the critical analyses they have developed to help them to understand their world. In many ways, working class feminism does build on the analyses and political work of other feminists. This is true even though feminist analysis and the mainstream women's movement have held little interest for working class, poor and minority women. I argue that the perspectives of working class feminists form a missing but essential and critical, element both of feminist analysis and of liberatory social movements in general.

When middle class women founded the current women's movement, they did so in self conscious opposition to many of the existing institutions of which they were a part. Early feminist analysis specifies how the family, the economic system, law and custom and human relations contributed to women's oppression.

Feminists argued that these institutions oppressed individual women and oppressed women as a class. As Dorothy Smith (1979) has noted, their analysis constituted virtually a new sociology, an analysis of society from the perspective of women. Members of the women's movement clearly voiced their opposition to oppressive aspects of these institutions. The core of their analysis was to

reveal the built-in gender bias of institutions previously assumed to be fair or at least neutral.

In contrast to this oppositional stance, working class women build their analysis on continuity, the continuity of their own role and position in family, neighborhood and community. Viewed from the outside, this approach may appear traditional, repressed and unliberated. Following the early analyses of working class women by Rainwater (1962), Komarovsky (1967) and Rubin (1979), some analysts have concluded that working class women are anomic and unintegrated into the social order (Dabrowski, 1981). Others may view them as engaged in the reproduction of the very social order that oppresses them.

Working class women interpret their own lives in terms of the continuity of their experience, their role in the neighborhood social institutions they create, and the value they place on that social life. Creating the social as a dimension of existence has been women's continuing work in their communities. In the past, these community creating activities were an un-self conscious and spontaneous pattern of life. As historical changes threaten the institutions that constitute the foundation of neighborhood communities, many women have become more self-consciously and openly political in their community building activities.

The neighborhood community was the ground of their existence, and threats from the outside world led working class women to attempt to better understand and to defend these communities. Both working class women's

informal social construction of neighborhood communities and their more self conscious political activism form the basis of what I term working class feminism.

Within the discussion of working class feminism, it is important to distinguish between the terms community and neighborhood, as used here. Both of these concepts are important for this work. Since these related ideas are easy to confuse, I would like to define each concept, to mention some of its common usages and to briefly discuss the relationship between these terms.

The term neighborhood is a common expression in everyday speech. People referring to "my neighborhood," give the term a meaning that is both geographic and social. "My neighborhood" refers to both the place where an individual resides and the social milieu in which that individual feels comfortable and at home. Residents of urban neighborhoods also refer to a particular location as being "in the neighborhood," meaning close by or to another location as "outside the neighborhood," meaning that it is farther away.

There is general agreement that the term neighborhood means a particular area within a city or town that has a distinct identity. However, naming and delineating the boundaries of a particular neighborhood is frequently more difficult. This is because the demarcation of a particular neighborhood is part of a historical narrative that residents and others have constructed about that area and because the definition may vary according to the perspective of the individual presenting it. First, there is the subjective component: individuals have a specific area in mind when they say my neighborhood. However, there is also an intersubjective definition, one that is shared by neighborhood residents. These



two definitions may or may not coincide. In addition, there is a public definition used in reporting about a neighborhood in the media, as well as an official definition that is used for purposes of government policy and for the allocation of resources. There is usually some degree of concurrence among the various delineations of a particular neighborhood, but they seldom agree completely. (For a related but somewhat different discussion of the idea of neighborhood, see Wellman and Leighton, 1983.)

Indeed, there may be a deeper significance in the debate over the "right" name of a particular area. The use of a particular designation for a neighborhood may be a code word for its racial or ethnic composition. For example, Brooklyn residents often note that newspaper reporters use the designation "Bedford Stuyvesant" for areas locally known as Crown Heights, Clinton Hill, and East New York. Since Bedford Stuyvesant is the single black neighborhood in Brooklyn known to many reporters if they see black residents, they conclude that they are in that area.

Differences concerning the name of a neighborhood may also reflect competing interests of various parties. Residents of gentrifying areas try to obscure their neighborhood's earlier and less prepossessing identity by adopting a more fashionable name. Thus infamous Hell's Kitchen has become the more decorous Clinton. Real estate agents who present their offerings as being in more prestigious locations, stretch the boundaries of various neighborhoods. In Brooklyn, for example, they describe much of Boerum Hill and even Red Hook as being "in the vicinity of" upper class Brooklyn Heights. Politicians divide

neighborhoods into election districts that reflect voting patterns rather than social identity. The Catholic Church classifies neighborhoods as parishes, and the Police Department organizes them by precincts. School districts are what is important to the Board of Education as well as to many students and their parents.

If one asks the residents of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, "where do you live?" some might respond by saying on the northside or on the southside. These important local distinctions that are both unknown and meaningless to outsiders. Others might say in "Saint Nick's," referring to the local parish, in Community Board One, referring to a local planning board, or in "the ninety sixth" referring to the police precinct.

I take note of these variations and their subjective importance to individuals who use this concept in a specific way. Indeed, taking local definition seriously is part of the perspective of working class feminism. In general, I use the term neighborhood to mean a geographic area recognized by its residents as having a distinct identity.

It is fairly easy to define the term neighborhood, though as indicated above, it is less simple to specify a particular neighborhood. The term community, however, presents issues that are considerably more complex. Community refers less to a geographic area and more to a feeling of shared, common identity that may be based on residential propinquity, but goes deeper than just sharing a common environment. As Wellman and Leighton (1983) point

out, a neighborhood may not be a community, and people may belong to a community that is not geographically based.

A number of classical social theorists have pondered the concept of community as they investigated the relationship between the changing organization of production and the transformation in social life that occurred as a consequence of industrialization. Marx's concepts of alienation, relations of production, and class consciousness (1973), Durkheim's (1915) investigations of social integration, Weber's category of rationalization (1973), Simmel's analysis of the Metropolis and Mental Life (1950), and certainly Tönnies' Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft (1957) all raise implicit and explicit questions about the nature of community and its significance in the modern world.

Within this group, some theorists, such as Tönnies, saw the transition from agrarian to industrial society as leading to the demise of community life as it had existed throughout most of human history. Others, such as Durkheim, were more optimistic and felt that while older social ties were indeed declining, new ones would arise from the new social arrangements to replace them. Marx in particular, while noting the decline of communal relations, saw the possibility for achieving community through intentional struggle to create a new social order.

This question of community has been inherited by modern sociology. It is once more a battleground in terms of clarifying the meaning and value of social life in the modern world. Conservative thinkers mourn the loss of community in modern life and view its passing as signaling an irreversible decline in the quality of social life (e.g., Nisbet, 1953; Berger, et. al., 1973). This view

is directly linked to conservative views regarding the role of women and to antagonistic attitudes toward the women's movement.

While conservatives yearn for the community of the past, radicals often yearn for a new community of voluntary communes, cooperatives and collectives fashioned on a notion of participatory democracy.<sup>6</sup> Despite this emphasis on community, many women who were members of radical organizations experienced a sense of alienation and powerlessness within these groups. Indeed it was out of this contradiction between the idea of community and the practice of male domination that the radical and socialist branches of feminism was born.

Just as radicals reject what they regard as the individualistic, egoistic, materialistic culture of contemporary capitalism, liberals may be defined in terms of their commitment to competitive individualism and individual freedom. They tend to think in terms of limited voluntary associations based on individual interests as replacing the more encompassing and restricting communities of the past. Some liberal feminists perceive their movement in this way, as a limited voluntary association of women organizing to further their own interests. In terms of the kind of analysis developed by liberal political scientists, such groups constitute not a movement, but an interest group.

Thus the term community conveys a variety of possible meanings, each connected with a particular ideological perspective. To these I add a particular association of community with working class women. From their perspective, the emphasis shifts from community as an abstract end to community as a concrete

practice within everyday life. Their approach provides a vantage point from which to consider other approaches to community.

The work of Carol Gilligan (1982) constitutes an important theoretical foundation for many varieties of feminist analysis. Gilligan calls attention to the gender bias of a popular theory of moral development. In formulating her critique of Kohlberg's moral theory, Gilligan shows how women's moral reasoning differs from that of men. She notes that women make moral judgments from a perspective based on attachment, affiliation and relationships rather than from the perspective of a morality of abstract principles. Following Gilligan, a number of feminist analysts have successfully reinterpreted a variety of institutions and relationships from the perspective of this morality of attachment. Observing the lives of working class women clarifies Gilligan's concept of a morality of attachment and makes it possible to carry Gilligan's work still further.

Starting from the concept of community, considered both as a way of life and as a category of analysis, it becomes possible to consider the presuppositions of various theoretical stances and concrete practices. The viewpoint of working class women takes community rather than the individual social actor as the starting point. This creates an angle of vision that provides a fresh perspective for understanding social life. Using this angle of vision makes it possible to identify those theoretical formulations that provide a basis for the analysis of working class feminism.

The analysis of working class feminism presented here builds on a consideration of Marx's concept of community, Durkheim's concept of the sacred, and Schutz's concept of intersubjectivity. In a sense, all of these classical formulations highlight a similar theme. They display the dialectical relationship between the individual and the social, indicating how the individual grasps/creates the social and is simultaneously created by it.

For Durkheim (1915), the process of creating the social world is most powerfully articulated through the realm of the sacred. Marx's (1973) concept of primitive communism provides a vision of community unimpeded by power relations and domination. Schutz's (1967) concept of intersubjectivity emphasizes the creation of the social as an ongoing process. Each of these theoretical approaches illuminates a particular aspect of community that is relevant for the understanding of working class feminism.

In Marx's theory, the communal core of primitive communism is eliminated by the advent of private ownership of the means of production and the development of class society. From the perspective of working class feminism, it is possible to regard what Marx terms "the development of class consciousness" in modern society as a reweaving of the fabric of community. People whose communal ties are severed by the individualizing direction of capitalist culture may develop new types of community as a form of resistance. The type of resistance envisioned in Marx's theory of revolution is based on creating community as both precondition and co-condition for the possibility of systematic opposition to domination. Working class feminism provides lessons

and examples of how it is possible to do this in the modern world. Some important works of modern feminism (Eisenstein, 1979; Barrett, 1980; Hartmann, 1981; Vogel, 1983) have debated the appropriate relationship between Marxism and feminism. Working class feminism, by emphasizing both class and gender in relation to community suggests one approach to the resolution of this dilemma.

Durkheim's great discovery (The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, 1915) was that the sacred embodies the social and that religious participation is an intensified form of social life. In religious ceremonies, the individual experiences his/her own act of creating the group through participating in it and simultaneously being enhanced and strengthened as an individual communicant. Durkheim's implicit dialectic of the sacred mirrors Marx's explicit dialectic of community.

To a degree, all communal life partakes of the sacred. In creating the communal lives of their neighborhood, working class women participate in this dimension of existence. Even the simplest acts of everyday life acquire a heightened value and intensity when they are also understood as elements of women's community creating activities, and thereby part of the sacred. As will be addressed in the course of this work, when women organize new political associations to defend their neighborhoods, these underlying themes become more explicit. It is not merely the physical neighborhood that women defend and maintain, but also the social ties that constitute their community.

Alfred Schutz's concept of the Lebenswelt (1970) provides an important analytical approach to the questions to be considered in this work. This concept

presents everyday life as lived experience and directs attention to the world as perceived and experienced by social actors. In the case at hand, the social actors are working class women in urban neighborhoods.

Schutz structures the world of lived experience into what he terms zones of relevance which are delineated by each individual's perception and experience. The zone closest to the individual, the known and familiar part of the world, Schutz terms the world within reach. In the present analysis, the world within reach coincides roughly with the local neighborhood. From the vantage point of working class neighborhood women, everything in this zone is known and subject to manipulation by the actor. The next zone of relevance is the zone within one's potential reach. The actor may not have experienced this zone directly, but believes it to be accessible, knowable, and potentially open to manipulation. The actor could go there if she wished. Beyond the zone within one's potential reach is the realm of the unknown, beginning at the edge of the knowable world and extending outward. In this zone, everything is problematic. The individual feels neither familiarity nor ease.

In the United States during the period from World War II to the present, aspects of neighborhood life previously perceived as part of the known and familiar world within reach became problematic. The world outside of the neighborhood was experienced as an invasive force creating changes in neighborhood life. These changes transformed the previously familiar world into one that is puzzling, unknown and enigmatic. Invasive change occurred in a number of ways that will be described in Chapter IV. Here I emphasize the



subjective experience of neighborhood residents, particularly working class women.

Changes originating in the world outside have an impact on local residents. They not only produce a decline in the quality of neighborhood life, but also lead to a shift in perception. The world previously taken for granted as within reach may now be called into question. It continues to appear "within reach," in terms of physical accessibility, but increasingly it is closed to the manipulation of local residents because outside events now shape neighborhood life. Thus the known and familiar quality of the neighborhood as the world within reach becomes increasingly elusive. It is the same neighborhood, but the experience of life within it has changed.

This raises the issue of how local communities respond to invasive changes that threaten their existence. Local residents may adopt either a radical or reactionary position in response to such events. Both are possible responses to the assault on working class neighborhoods and to the redistribution of resources from the working class urban neighborhoods to middle class suburbs.

In attempting to maintain and protect their neighborhoods, working class residents may, through local organizing, develop an approach that is implicitly critical and radical. If this occurs, localism becomes a form of resistance. On the other hand, the residents of working class neighborhoods may also respond in a way that is racist and reactionary, blaming newcomers to their neighborhoods for the problems they experience. (See for example, Reider, 1985) In both situations, their goal is to maintain the neighborhood in its present form. This

reactionary response to change has been highlighted in many accounts of neighborhood life. Using the concept of working class feminism to investigate everyday life in urban neighborhoods provides one approach to revealing the possibility for progressive response as well. Thus the concept of working class feminism suggests a way of understanding local politics as progressive.

Working class feminism provides insight not only into local politics, but into progressive social movements as well. The issues taken up by working class feminists mark the point of tension between the New Left and the women's movement. The New Left premised its analysis on class and later racial inequality. Starting with the social class analysis inherited from the traditional left, new left theorists broadened their scope to include race. Building on the momentum of the civil rights movement and prodded by the militancy of black progressives, New Left organizations acknowledged racial as well as class oppression. In addition, they based their criticism of society, not only on the principle of class inequality, but also on a particular historical manifestation of capitalist domination-- the Vietnam War. Gender inequality was not considered a question of fundamental importance.

Many women had participated wholeheartedly in the civil rights movement, the new left, the student movement, and the peace movement. The departure of substantial numbers of women from these social movements to form the radical and socialist branches of the women's movement indicates how they felt about their position in these movements (Evans, 1979; Bunch, 1987). Numerous early feminist writings critiqued male-dominated progressive

political groups. These mainly middle class and well educated women based the concepts that became the core ideas of the women's movement on their own experiences. They acknowledged race and class differences on a theoretical level, without attempting to specify the results of these differences. The New Left ignored gender, but the women's movement addressed class in only a general way. A theory of social change requires not merely the inclusion of both, but the inclusion of the ideas and experience of those who live the consequences of these abstract categories.

Working class feminism bridges this gap by building a movement, not on the basis of abstract ideas about class or gender, but on the basis of the real lives and experiences of those individuals who are both working class and female. The same historical juncture that saw the rise of white middle class feminism also created the preconditions for the development of working class feminism.

## Chapter II

### Earlier Studies of Working Class Women

Almost every work that deals with working class women begins by noting that very little scholarly work is available concerning this segment of American society. Even where it would be logical to include women, they are barely acknowledged. When she began her own research, Kathleen McCourt ". . . was struck by the absence of data on working class females" (1977, p.4). Other analysts make similar comments. Seifer (1975) and McCourt (1977) both note that even the modest amount of material that does exist emphasizes working class women as workers.

Because of the paucity of material available dealing with working class women, the few studies that do offer some insights or analysis take on a heightened importance. In this chapter I will survey four works that taken together constitute a viable starting point for the further analysis of working class women and their lives in urban communities.

The first is really a long pamphlet, rather than a full study. Absent From the Majority was written by Nancy Seifer in 1975 for The National Project on Urban America, a project of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) Institute of Human Relations. Like much of the material the AJC published during the period, it has a specific political aim, to present a more complex and nuanced

picture of the American working class, and to challenge media images of workers as reactionaries, "super patriots," and student bashing hardhats. The works commissioned by the American Jewish Committee were part of a larger body of literature that presented a similar point of view on the working class and that were published during this period (Shostak, 1969; Levison, 1974; Sexton and Sexton, 1971; Howe, 1977; Kornblum, 1974; Krickus, 1976).

The second work that was germane in framing my analysis does not take working class women as its subject, although its insights and perspectives are essential to an understanding of working class women and their world. Caroline Stack's All Our Kin (1974) is a study of a poor black community in a midwestern city. Like Seifer's work, it has an underlying political frame of reference. It was an effort to refute the culture of poverty/black matriarchy argument being advanced at that time to explain problems in the poor black community. Stack argues that this community was characterized not by a weakened nuclear family, but by a strong and functioning kinship system. In supporting her argument, she delineates how the complex structures of kinship, friendship, and networks of reciprocity function in the everyday lives of members of the community. In All Our Kin, Stack presents the clearest account of the importance of community networks and, as such, her work is essential to understanding the world of women in working class communities.

In Working Class Women and Grass Roots Politics (1977), Kathleen McCourt studies working class women in terms of their involvement in political concerns that affect their lives in a south Chicago community. McCourt describes

the impact of larger forces on the everyday lives of working class communities and investigates the factors that make it possible for some working class women to act in new ways by becoming politically involved. She studied a single community, but her analysis has implications for working class women and urban communities in general.

Ida Susser's Norman Street: Poverty and Politics in an Urban Neighborhood (1982) represents the next stage of this inquiry. Susser goes beyond analysis of the impact of political and societal change on the life of the community, and displays the political content of everyday life on a particular block in a poorer working class community. In Susser's groundbreaking study, the line separating everyday life from politics is melted away by a sustained and detailed analysis of the everyday activities women undertake to sustain both their families and their community.

Taken together, these works provide a foundation from which to understand the lives and political actions of working class women. What becomes clear through this process is that just as including women in the picture changes the definition of politics, so seeing the world from the perspective of working class women calls into question, in very fundamental ways, our ideas about the meaning of feminism.

In her forward to Seifer's work (1975), Aileen Hernandez notes that "the stirrings of feminism among white ethnic women are a challenge to the organized women's liberation movement. . . ." A former president of NOW, Hernandez discusses how broadening the perspective of the women's movement to include

both white ethnic and minority women can serve both the movement and society as a whole. Barbara Mikulski, in her introduction, notes that the political, economic, and social changes that impact on families and neighborhoods have forced even conservative working class women to acknowledge that they live in a changing world, one that challenges their values, their sense of morality, and the core of their identity.

Developing this theme of change, Seifer considers the possibility of developing coalitions between the women's movement and working class women. Feminists, she suggests, find it difficult to understand that the prospect of equality represents a threat as well as an opportunity to women brought up to be wives and mothers. All change is particularly threatening to the working class. For middle class individuals, change represents the possibility of new development and further advantage. For the poor, change may represent hope for a better life. Working class people try to hold on to the little they have, and thus change represents a gamble they are often unwilling to make.

For Seifer, the most fundamental fact about working class people is that they are not middle class. This means that for them, insecurity, and particularly economic insecurity, is a fundamental fact of life. Skilled workers or two-income families are the only ones who achieve any measure of economic security. In her demographic overview of the working class, Seifer estimates that seventy million people, of whom ten to fifteen million are minority group members, fall into this category. The group that she highlights is white and predominantly urban, with a smaller number of suburban and rural dwellers. Most live in traditional white

ethnic urban neighborhoods and modest suburbs in the northeast and the midwest. They are predominantly Catholic and frequently choose parochial education for their children.

Their neighborhoods serve as buffers between poorer ghetto areas and more affluent middle class communities, both of which usually receive more attention. These working-class neighborhoods, as community studies have noted (Whyte, 1955; Gans, 1962), constitute healthy, stable social systems. Despite their modest, and sometimes even dilapidated, appearance, these neighborhoods offer a number of positive values to their residents. These include stability, informal social support systems, ethnic shops and institutions, a feeling of neighborhood pride, family oriented social life, and a sense of community and group identity. These exemplify values of tradition and close knit social ties.

The women of these working-class neighborhoods are raised to view marriage and family life as their primary goals. They marry young, often immediately following high school graduation. They seldom consider attending college, a reflection of the low esteem in which education for girls is held. Their practices and ideas follow those of their parents and grandparents. Seifer notes that they are second and third generation descendants of European peasants who came to the United States from Italy, Poland, Greece, Russia, Hungary, and other countries of eastern Europe. Their lifestyle represents a melding of these traditions with local patterns of association and class based aspects of life.

Seifer's analysis is based on the changing prospects of these women over time. The decade of the 1950s was characterized by a mood of optimism and



prosperity. It was seen as the time of ". . . an America where those who were not yet middle class could look forward to soon becoming so" (1975, p. 10). This generally optimistic view glossed over the hidden reality of strong class distinctions. The prevailing ideology defined women as housewives and masked the underlying reality that many women were employed and for reasons of necessity. Drawing heavily upon Rainwater, Coleman, and Handel's Workingman's Wife (1962), Seifer makes a number of generalizations about working class women during this post-World War II period.

The women interviewed by Rainwater and his colleagues noted the centrality of the wife and mother role for their own sense of identity. The authors conclude that these women are dependent on their husbands for personal reasons and as a link with the outside world. Rainwater et al. conclude that these women have little independent contact with the world beyond their household. They accept their fate passively, and have little sense of possible alternatives. Seifer quotes Rainwater's observation that the women believe that "most significant action originates from the world external to herself rather than from within herself . . . when some feature of it approaches her, she responds to it . . . ." Interestingly, Rainwater et al. do question the widely accepted idea that everyone wishes to be middle class. Many of the women wish only that their children be well behaved and happy rather than rich or famous.

Rainwater's study takes as its central theme the question of how consumers make choices, and concentrates on individual women within the sphere of the household. No attempt was made to observe women in the

community or to ask questions about possible networks of cooperation among women. Would their results have been different had they done so? We cannot know. They portray working class women who live in a narrow and insecure world filled with days of endless chores; cooking, cleaning, washing and child care. Rainwater concludes that the women they studied live lives of constant insecurity about physical safety, economic well being and personal regard and affection. The best that can be said is that they manage to face their problems with a degree of fortitude and hope for the future. Seifer accepts Rainwater's conclusions uncritically, although her own observations of the lives of working class women are quite different.

In her analysis of the 1960s, Seifer notes that the appearance of prosperity continued into the early years of the decade. However, beneath this benign facade, many changes were occurring. Especially for working class people, life was becoming "more expensive, less safe, more bewildering and less stable" (Seifer, p. 15). Working class people got much of the fallout from rapidly occurring social change, and few of the benefits. Seifer delineates three areas of change that especially impact on working class families. These are: economic change increasing the financial pressure on working class families, changes affecting urban neighborhoods, and changes in the role of women.

A fluctuating economy led to inflationary pressures, making life more expensive at the very time that automation and changes in global economy meant fewer well paid working class jobs for men. These economic pressures combined with a new view of women's roles led to a sharp increase in the number of

women in the paid labor force, an increase that was especially marked among married women and mothers. Although women's employment increased in all categories, the increase is especially notable among women with school age children and among those whose husbands earned the lowest wages.

Changes in material conditions were correlated with a change in attitudes and beliefs. In the past, working class people had taken pride in self sufficiency and had scorned "government handouts." However, as women joined the labor force, their need for government services and subsidies became increasingly apparent. The issue of day care for preschool children provides an example of this change. Women's care for children's safety and well-being had been a cornerstone of the working class woman's self image and of the family lifestyle. Many working class people had opposed government subsidies for day care because they believed families should care for their own children. However, private day care was not affordable at the modest wages earned by working class women. Former opponents of day care became advocates, as economic pressures changed their lives.

Government policies impacted on their lives in other ways as well. Growing problems such as safety, street drugs, and the increasing need for social services meant that workers had to look to the government as supplier of services. Government policies began to impinge on working class neighborhoods in yet another way, as large scale change disregarded the value that working class people placed on their neighborhoods. Industrial growth, highway construction,

zoning changes, redevelopment, urban renewal, and real estate speculation impacted negatively on working class neighborhoods during this period.

Previously viable working class neighborhoods were totally destroyed by one or several of these forces. Boston's Italian West End was leveled for an urban renewal program, and a similar event occurred in a black neighborhood in nearby Providence. The sense of personal dislocation and discontinuity which results from this type of change has been noted in several other studies sponsored by the Institute for Pluralism and Group Identity. The outside world could no longer be ignored, because the neighborhood itself was threatened by forces beyond its boundaries.

Seifer reports that people in working class neighborhoods began to establish neighborhood organizations to deal with these issues. These groups often arose in response to a specific threat. Contradicting the image of passivity and resignation presented in Rainwater et. al., women played important and often leading roles in the new neighborhood groups. Working class women led campaigns to defend their neighborhoods from destruction -- fighting the building of expressways, the expansion of factories, blockbusting and real estate speculation. They led affirmative campaigns as well -- for daycare centers, senior facilities, and food cooperatives. The more they participated in community activism, the more self confident they became. They were a far cry from the frightened housewives described by Rainwater.

Seifer considers the relationship between working class women and the social movements of the 1960s. She notes that even though there is a

stereotyped image of working class people and progressive activists as being in opposition to each other, by the end of the decade the two shared more of what she terms "a community of needs" than either might have previously suspected. White ethnic workers found the black identity movement threatening at first, but after their original negative response, a number of white ethnic groups copied the model to form new ethnic movements of their own. Working class women remained uninterested in issues of the women's movement such as abortion and gay rights, but responded positively to concerns stressing workplace and public equality. The welfare rights movement may have seemed to many working class women like seeking a handout; they later had their own experiences with unresponsive government bureaucracies. The peace movement challenged their patriotism and their history of loyal military service, and by the time the Vietnam war drew to a close, many people had come to doubt its wisdom.

Seifer characterizes the 1970s as the decade in which working class women as a group changed from housewives to workers in the paid labor force. Although many women still viewed their housewife and mother roles as central, they began to enter the labor force in record numbers. By the early 1970s, the number of women workers had doubled since the late 1940s, and the number of working mothers increased eight-fold. By 1972, forty-three percent of women, roughly thirty-three million, were in the labor force. Fifty percent of mothers with children under eighteen work and nine of ten women will be in the labor force at some time during their lives. The average work span of women is twenty-five years. (Seifer, 1973, pp. 26-28) Characteristics such as education,

marital status, and number of children are indicators of whether or not women work. Availability of jobs and accessibility of affordable day care are also part of the equation.

For working class women, earning income is the main incentive to work. The jobs available to them are often low paying and insecure and provide little intrinsic satisfaction, although many women do enjoy being outside the house and meeting new people. The earning gap between men and women is particularly significant for the working class. Few women are unionized, making their position as workers even more precarious. Seifer notes that there is some labor movement participation among women, but they are by no means always welcomed by male workers or by the labor union hierarchy. Seifer concludes this chapter by a look at the job of housewife, its low prestige, its economic dependency, and its insecurity.

Changes in other aspects of women's lives, Seifer notes, lead inevitably to changes in their lives at home and in relation to their families. Women who work outside the home or who participate in community affairs become less dependent on their husbands, both materially and psychologically. In a society that draws invidious comparisons between white-collar and blue-collar workers, being able to support one's family without the aid of a wife's paycheck had been a source of pride for many working class men. A second income may ease the husband's financial burden but may also be a blow to his pride and self esteem. Working class men with relatively highly paid and prestigious jobs have fewer problems accommodating to the idea that their wives work.

Many of the changes that occur when women work outside the home also ensue when they participate in community organizations. Traditional community groups were often male organizations with women's auxiliaries. In newer community organizations, men and women participate on a more equal basis and some women assume leadership roles. Many women who have adopted more independent life styles as a result of outside employment or community participation claim that their relationships with their husbands have remained their same. Nonetheless, Seifer contends the rising divorce rate and other indicators seem to signal growing tension within working class families.

Another possible change in the lives of working class women is moving from a traditional urban neighborhood to the suburbs. For the working class family that has worked and sacrificed to purchase a suburban house, moving from the old neighborhood involves a loss as well as a gain. The family members lose the community network of extended family and neighbors. In contrast, suburban life may seem constricted and empty. The loose and changing network of friends and acquaintances which characterizes suburban lifestyles is in marked contrast to the stable and enduring ties of the working class community.

Looking to the future, Seifer believes that younger working class women will be more independent and have more choices available to them. Seifer believes that a more sensitive structuring of educational options will help to accomplish this change. Low expectations and low self esteem, fostered by an authoritarian educational system, limit working class women's view of their future possibilities. One study cited by Seifer of working class women who were

freshmen in college, indicates a growing optimism in this generation of working class women. The young women expected to successfully combine marriage, motherhood and satisfying careers. Certainly this is a more hopeful view of the future than their mothers had at their ages.

The women's movement has already had a profound impact on the thinking and the life possibilities of working class women. However, Seifer believes that the women's movement still suffers from the inherent middle class bias of its founders. It has not yet seriously examined the lives and issues of working class women or attempted to understand the basis for their disagreement with some of its premises. The expansion of the movement to include this group promises to strengthen both the movement and the working class women, who are excluded from it. Seifer concludes with a number of broad based policy recommendations in the areas of work, family, community and especially in education.

Seifer's work is important because she calls attention to the existence of working class women as a discrete group with its own lifestyles, interests, and relationships to other groups. Absent from the Majority may not be a scholarly work in itself, but it draws heavily on existing scholarship, bringing together the findings of a number of works which had not previously been linked. The only previous work to attempt to present an overview of working class women was Workingman's Wives (1962), a book that concentrated on women in the home and women as consumers.



Seifer presents a rounded view by looking at women as workers and community members, as well as homemakers and consumers. A particularly valuable contribution of Seifer's work is its historical perspective. Seifer indicates how historical changes affect the lives of working class women, presenting both new problems and new opportunities. Seifer views working class women as a part of the working class and assesses how generalizations which apply to that group also apply to them. She also views them as women and examines their relationship to other women and to the women's movement. She also emphasizes that in contrast to middle class women, religious and ethnic identity and community life are important elements of how these women think about themselves.

The second work that is critical to understanding the lives of working class women is All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community, (1974) by Carol B. Stack, an anthropologist. All Our Kin is not about working class women per se, but rather about female kin-based networks in a poor black community in the midwest. It is important for our understanding of the lives of working class women because of its analysis and description of female kin based networks in an urban community. In this respect, All Our Kin provides an important counter balance to studies that begin their analysis either with the nuclear family or with the lives of men in the community. Taking the nuclear family as a starting point, as do Rainwater, Komarovsky and Rubin, draws attention only to women's relationships with husband and children and their role in the household. Focusing mainly at the lives of men in the community, as Whyte, Gans and

Liebow do, renders the world of women relatively invisible and almost non-existent. Stack's work makes women's community networks and their importance in the lives of their participants visible in a striking and dramatic fashion.

Of course, there are substantial differences between the poor black neighborhood in which Stack conducted her investigation and the working class neighborhoods of various ethnic and racial categories that are the focus of this work. However, all who investigate how women live in urban neighborhoods are indebted to Stack for her clear and precise delineation of the networks in which these women live. I believe that Stack's work is critical for understanding urban communities in general, not just the particular type of community that she investigated.

Awareness of the existence of these networks and understanding how they work changes our perception of both poor and working class women. Instead of passive victims they can be seen as active individuals using the resources at their command to shape a world and create a culture. Their resources are often extremely limited, yet many poor black families exhibit "adaptive strategies, resourcefulness and resilience... under conditions of perpetual poverty." I would apply Stack's conclusions to urban working class communities as well. Obviously working class families do not face the same overwhelming obstacles as do poor minority families, but they too employ a networking strategy to ease difficulties, maximize their use of resources and create a community of shared understanding and meaning.

Stack begins her inquiry by examining and rejecting most of the social science literature which attempts to explain the lives of poor people and especially of poor minority people. She locates her own work within a body of literature (Lewis, 1967; Liebow, 1967; Valentine, 1968) that accepts the reality and importance of racial discrimination and poverty as limiting the material prospects of most ghetto dwellers. Her aim is to understand the world from the perspective of the people whose lives she is investigating.

Noting that the meager wages, welfare payments, and other forms of income are not and cannot be sufficient, Stack investigates how individuals and households manage to survive at even the most minimal level of subsistence. Few if any, individuals or households have a reliable independent source of income, and so they look to others in times of need. The two key concepts used in developing this system of exchange are kin and reciprocity. People in need ask favors of others. Individuals having goods or services to give or share, do so in anticipation of future times when others will help them. These exchanges takes place over a long period of time. A favor received may not be reciprocated for months or even years, but it constitutes a binding tie between giver and receiver that becomes one more strand of the complex, dense fabric of social life. The greater the number of such ties an individual has, the greater her chances of obtaining what she requires at a time of need. Viewed from this perspective, the fact that a man participates in different ways in the households of his mother, sister, and female companion may be seen, not as an indicator of family breakdown, but as a way of sharing scarce resources among needy people.

People establish reciprocal ties with a large number of kinfolk, whose relationships are determined in complex and subtle ways. The person who raises a child is socially defined as its mother. This is most often, but not always the child's natural mother. Children become part of their mother's kin network. A child may also have access to a father's kin network if the father has acknowledged paternity. These kinship ties can be strong even though the relationship between the mother and father was only a transient one. Indeed, access to the kin network of a child's father is more valuable than any assistance the father himself might provide to mother or child. Others may also enter a child's life in various ways -- stepparents, godparents, friends and neighbors, all of whom take some responsibility for the child. Each has the potential to become the child's fictive kin, and to give the child access to his or her kin network. The boundaries separating kinship and friendship are permeable and it is fairly easy to incorporate a close friend into a kinship network as a fictive aunt, uncle, brother or sister.

Within the networks that people establish, they share and "swap" not only goods, but residential space and, most importantly, children. When they have no place of residence, individuals and families "stay with" relatives and friends. The obligation to "put up" close kin is honored even at the cost of severe overcrowding. The ultimate sign of trust and friendship is allowing another woman to "keep" one's children. This may involve an evening or weekend of babysitting, an arrangement that lasts a number of months, perhaps during an illness or other time of trouble, or even a number of years. Mothers considered

too young or irresponsible may be pressured to relinquish custody of their children to close female kin. Thus a child may have more than one socially acknowledged mother. The opinion of the community and especially of older women is important in determining social parenthood.

Stack indicates the advantages and disadvantages of the way of life that she describes. The major benefit of this lifestyle is the multiple possibilities an individual has for support within the community. This is of critical importance in the economy of scarcity she describes. These rich and far flung social ties are also bonds of companionship and friendship. This is important because visiting and socializing are the chief forms of recreation available in the community. Thus membership in a kin based network confers a number of benefits.

The network supports an individual, and at the same time, it limits that individual's choices and possibilities of change. In one case, a couple receives a modest insurance settlement. For them, it might have been the beginning of a way out of poverty, but that does not occur. Instead the extra money results in the immediate cessation of their welfare grant as well as requests for help from kinsmen that trickle in relentlessly. All needs are pressing and all draw on pre-existing obligations. Soon the modest windfall is gone, shared among needy relatives and friends throughout the community and even outside of it. As the money disappears, so does the couple's one opportunity to improve their lives.

Opportunities for a modest degree of social mobility occasionally present themselves. An individual might marry, acquire a steady job, or form a stable relationship with someone who is steadily employed. As a result, that individual's

need to participate in the network declines and her prospect of building a solid base for her own family grows. Under such circumstances, an individual may consider withdrawing from the network. Yet it is necessary to balance present good fortune against future contingencies. The job could be lost, the relationship end, or the marriage break up. If this occurred, the individual would once again be poor, but without the resources provided by the network. Opportunities to develop a more conventional life style are limited by a knowledge that over the long haul, the network provides the only security possible for poor people.

Being a part of the network also means being subject to its scrutiny and social control. Gossip is an important medium of social control, expressing the normative consensus of the group and assessing the behavior of its members. Standards used to judge people's actions are based on norms of loyalty to the network. People seeking a favorable public image recount the good deeds and favors they have done for others. Stories are told about the ingratitude of those who are lax in meeting obligations. Mothers who do not care for children in an acceptable way are condemned, as are grown children who fail to live up to responsibilities to parents and siblings. People who abuse the network by asking too much or by asserting more rights than appropriate are also discussed and censured.

By far the preferred topic of rumor and scandal is that of romantic relationships and especially betrayals. Both men and women are sensitive to any disloyalty and are urged by their peers and elders not to allow their partner to make them look foolish. A woman confronted with persistent rumors of her

companion's infidelity may respond by having an affair of her own. In this way, gossip may lead to the ending of an otherwise viable relationship. Young women conclude that the network can be relied upon for the long run, but a man is only a "sometime thing." The older women who spread the stories, retain the loyalty of a network member, rather than losing her to a monogamous relationship.

In her analysis, Stack calls attention to those aspects of the kin-based network that are useful and necessary to participants. She emphasizes that the kin network is not a deteriorated nuclear family, but an ingenious adaptation to difficult conditions, providing greater flexibility than the more rigid and fragile nuclear family. She also shows how the network constrains members, making it difficult to escape from poverty. The same network that supports individuals and makes survival possible also restricts them and limits their life chances.

Stack applies her conclusions to poor black communities only. Her goal is to show how the racist assumptions of a biased social scientific community compound the racist practices of a biased society, blaming the victims of discrimination and poverty for the problems of their communities. The importance of her work goes beyond that. By emphasizing the female kin-based network, Stack provides a clue to how women live and function in many urban neighborhoods. The impoverished black families she studied may make greater use of kin networks than others, but similar networks exist and operate in many working class neighborhoods.

The networks in working class communities share a number of characteristics with those depicted in Stack's work. Like the one Stack describes,

the working class networks are functional, flexible, and useful for filling in the gaps of day to day existence. The networks comprise resource and information sharing, systems of mutual support, and normative communities that evaluate their own members and the outside world according to the group's consensual standards.

The working class network is different than the one Stack describes in that it supplements rather than replaces the nuclear family. Notably, however, as in the network Stack describes, the lines separating family and household from kin and neighborhood are blurred and indistinct. Kinship ties are strong and loyalty to family of origin is not replaced by ties to the family of procreation. Household composition may not be as flexible as that described by Stack, variable household compositions and the exchange of services among households are legitimate ways of meeting crises, taking care of old and infirm relatives, and stretching resources. Many families in the community I investigated lived within a few blocks of each other, or in apartments in the same building. Mothers and grown daughters, siblings and other relatives, all maintained close daily contact. Some stopped in for a meal or a visit. Others took meals together even though they lived in separate apartments. Informal child care was exchanged on an ad hoc basis.

Beyond the family and kinship unit, the network also constitutes a social world. It takes into account the cultural norms of the larger society, but selects those that seem relevant and rejects others. This social world is largely invisible to outsiders, because it is so intensely local in its focus. In the past, it tended to



reject the outside world, dealing with it only as when necessary, but, as Seifer points out, this no longer is possible. Stack contends that kin-based networks in poor black communities make it possible for people to live from day to day. In a similar vein, I maintain that the existence of comparable networks in working class communities makes possible new forms of political organization that enable working class people to defend their neighborhoods. For this reason, Stack's work is as essential for understanding working class neighborhoods as it is for understanding the poor black neighborhoods she addresses directly.

The themes of the present work are addressed most directly by Kathleen McCourt in Working Class Women and Grass Roots Politics (1977). The working class women McCourt met in her fieldwork did not reflect the passive and apolitical image presented in both popular and scholarly literature. Her case study draws its sample of 23 active and 17 non-active women from one particular neighborhood, the southwest side of Chicago.

All of McCourt's subjects were white working class women, as defined by income and husband's occupation. Most were the wives of blue collar workers. The active women were divided into two subcategories, very active and somewhat active. Very active women belonged to two or more organizations and held offices in at least one organization, or attended two or more meetings per month. These women were selected from organizations McCourt defined as politically assertive; that is, they made political demands and employed direct action tactics. Ideological positions were not a defining characteristic. Unlike Stack, who relied on participant observation, McCourt used the in-depth

interview as her main research tool. Results are reported in tables comparing the responses of the three groups and direct quotes are used to convey the flavor of the response.

In describing the community where the study is set, McCourt notes that increased activism is a response to a change in racial demographics and acceleration of the movement of black families into the community. While McCourt acknowledges that the response to such change was particularly highly charged in Chicago, she argues it reflects events in white working class communities elsewhere as well. Both school integration and residential integration have elicited strong community response.

The neighborhood setting for McCourt's work is a community of home owners of second and third generation European ethnic background. They are mainly Catholic and of Polish, Slavic, German and to a lesser extent, Italian and Irish descent. They value stable family life and such cultural traditions as church affiliation and parochial school attendance. Owning a comfortable home in a residential community often represents the culmination of years of hard work and the sacrifices of previous generations. These characteristics are similar to those used by Seifer to describe this group.

Antipathy toward blacks is expressed in a number of different themes. One of the most central themes expressed is fear and especially fear for physical safety. Another is defined in terms of familiarity and strangeness. People wish to remain in a stable situation, one in which the surrounding area is familiar and other residents are known. Changes are viewed as an assault on traditional

cultural identity. When a single black family moves onto a block, people believe it is inevitable that the block will "turn," becoming very quickly all black. Because people believe this will occur, they sell their houses in the classic pattern of the self-fulfilling prophesy. The blockbusting tactics of real estate brokers who use the first sale to a black family as a battering ram exacerbate the tension.

Residents have responded by establishing a number of community organizations. For the most part, these groups take a conservative position, attempting to slow the progress of black in-migration and to protect particular areas from integration. Some organizations are more progressive, and attempt to manage integration rather than prevent it, and to initiate dialogue between white and black community residents. A third type of organization deals with general community problems and takes no position on the topic of racial integration.

Although women have not achieved the highest level of leadership, they are part of the rank and file and middle level leadership of these groups. It was the desire to preserve their community and its way of life that motivated women to join all three types of organization. They do not see themselves as violating norms governing their roles of wives and mothers in becoming publicly involved. Rather, they see themselves as extending their care for their own households to care for the community.

McCourt portrays the women as being caught between the wish for the continuity and stability of traditional life styles and the possibilities of their new and more public roles. She suggests, as Seifer does, that this conflict between the

wish for things to remain the same and the inevitability of change mirrors the dilemma of working class people in general.

The women chosen for the study typify their group in a number of ways. All are mothers, most are married. Most are high school graduates. They range in age from 25 to 55, with a median age of 39. Some are employed in the paid labor force and others are not. Like many working class people, they are less geographically mobile than the population as a whole. They have remained in one house longer, moved fewer times, and tended to remain within the same area. Before joining assertive groups, many had participated in church groups, parents' associations, civic groups and such child centered groups as Little League and Boy Scouts. Neighbors take strong bonds and shared values for granted.

Just as stability and continuity are highly valued in the neighborhood, so is security important in personal life. Some women had had personal goals when they were younger, but relinquished them in the face of the realities of family life. Both men and women of the community generally agree that a wife has primary responsibility for family and household care. Opinion is divided about whether women may work. Some women are disappointed with the level of personal communication in marriage. While voicing a desire for greater understanding and intimacy, most accept their husbands' coolness or distance as simply the way men are. Marriages that provide security for women and children are highly valued and women believe it is their responsibility to minimize conflict so that family life runs smoothly. Religious and ethnic attachments remain strong, but there has also been some weakening of these bonds.

McCourt suggests that the women she interviewed were in transition from what Rainwater and Handel (1962) have termed a traditional working class life style to one they term a modern life style. In contrast to the predictable and narrow patterns of life reported by Handel and Rainwater, McCourt sees elements of change as well as continuity and tensions, contradictions and new opportunities in the lives and viewpoints of the women in her study. McCourt uses two categories -- political antecedents and psychological and structural antecedents -- to analyze what she terms the antecedents of participation. She addresses the question of why some women become active in assertive organizations while others do not. The first precondition for community involvement seemed to be an awareness of community problems. Women who became active were both more aware of and more concerned about community issues, focusing on racial change and on the quality of education in local schools. Inactive women mentioned fewer problems and the ones they chose were more idiosyncratic.

Politically active women believed that city government in general and their alderman in particular were unresponsive to the community. Less active women held a more sanguine view of government. Activist women expressed anger at the scant attention paid to their community by municipal government, and viewed political activism as a way to communicate their views and needs forcefully.

In contrast to reports of working class women's sense of powerlessness and passivity (Rainwater 1962, Rubin 1979, Komarovsky 1967), activist women

expressed a strong belief in their own ability to take action to address problems in their community. In describing their initiation into activism, most cited personal concern about a particular problem, combined with direct contact with an individual who encouraged them to become politically active. Most had the support of their husbands, some of whom were members of the same organizations.

McCourt also considers a number of personal factors as precursors to activism. She reports that most activist women were over forty, had no preschool children, and were not paid workers. As they neither had young children nor had entered the labor market, they had time and energy to take on a new role. Both active and nonactive women were longtime neighborhood residents and had families in the area, but the emotional attachment of the activist women seemed stronger. They voiced stronger desire to remain in the area and had more positive feelings about the neighborhood.

Another hypothesis investigated is that women become active because they feel they are treated unjustly as individuals or as members of a group. McCourt concludes that the activist women did not believe they had been treated unjustly because of either ethnicity or gender. There are hints that they believe they are treated unjustly in terms of social class. As they see it, wealthy people have what they need and the poor receive special benefits and programs. People like themselves, whom the women term "in the middle," receive few benefits and carry many burdens. These beliefs are shared by both active and non-active

respondents, however, and the correlation with political participation seems limited.

To summarize, McCourt concludes that activist women tend to be those who perceive a problem, whose lives will accommodate a new role, who strongly wish to remain in the neighborhood, and who have some feeling of class oppression. In addition, these women have the support of their husbands, with whom they share a number of interests. McCourt also asserts that these women tend to live in networks that are more loosely knit and less traditional, facilitating the breakdown of strict role segregation between husbands and wives. Under these conditions, if a member of an assertive group contacts a women who agrees with their goals, it is likely that she will become a participant.

After investigating the conditions under which working class women become activists, McCourt explored some of the broader implications of this activism. She investigates the relationship between community activism and such other themes as feminism, women's broader political participation, and race relations. McCourt contends that while the feminist movement supplies a general context for women's community activism, activists do not identify with the movement and reject its relevance for their lives. Women who are aware of their political competence and proud of their activism assert that they see no link between themselves and the feminist movement. Women who contend that women can solve public problems and are competent to hold political office would not vote for a woman as president.

To probe sex-role attitudes, McCourt used an index of seven questions. The women's responses were paradoxical. Items pertaining to sex roles in marriage and family life elicited conservative responses, with the most conservative responses coming from the most politically active women. Most respondents believe that women should marry and have children. They disapprove of abortion. One hundred percent of the inactive women, but only sixty percent of the active women believed that women should have "as much say as her husband in making important decisions affecting their families."

Although a majority of the women believed that women should receive equal pay for doing the same work, a substantial minority, including thirty percent of the active women, disagreed with this proposition. Most respondents said that girls should have equal educational opportunities. Two-thirds of the activist women, but only forty percent of the nonactive women, thought women capable of leadership in various fields.

When asked to comment directly on the feminist movement, respondents said that the concept of equality is not applicable to men and women, since gender differences contradict equality. They saw these differences reflected in the family and, because they value being wives and mothers so highly, opposed challenging the structure of family life. They saw the women's movement as attacking the validity and importance of marriage and motherhood as a central and integrating role. At the same time, they do want equal educational opportunities for their daughters and are supportive of those aspects of the women's movement directed at opening up new opportunities in the workplace.



McCourt suggests that contradictory responses concerning the public role of women may be understood in terms of differing perceptions of local politics and politics on a broader scale. Activist women believe that women can and should take the lead in dealing with problems of the local community. They are less certain about what role, if any, women should take on the larger political scene. One theme that emerges from the comments of McCourt's respondents is that there are certain rights they do not want such as the right to be drafted. Middle class women may want to share the advantages of men of their class; working class women know the limitations of their men's lives as well as of their own.

Beginning with the prevailing idea that women in general and working class women in particular tend to be apolitical, McCourt assesses the political participation and beliefs of respondents. Measures of political participation include voting, party affiliation, campaign work, participation in political action and discussing politics in everyday life. Most women vote, but active women are more likely to do so in any given election. A majority have worked in a campaign, participated in demonstrations, registered as independents, and discussed politics with their husbands. Active women believe they can exercise political power and are somewhat cynical about government's intentions. The perceived gap between government and corporate officials and themselves has been reduced; they now see these powerful individuals as ordinary people, not so different from themselves. McCourt concludes that women who participate

in community organizations become politicized in ways that change both their actions and their views of themselves and of the political process.

McCourt found that attitudes of respondents toward blacks and toward racial integration are more complex than might be supposed. Responses to questions measuring these attitudes elicited a generally liberal response. In most cases, the response was more pro-integration than that of a national sample. A majority of respondents reacted favorably to school integration and to the right to intermarry. Most would welcome a black friend as a guest in their home. Responses concerning residential integration were more mixed, but generally favorable. The two issues that elicited negative responses were what was termed government interference and the perceived unfairness of blacks as a group receiving benefits that the white working class had to work for as individuals to obtain. There was little recognition of the barriers of institutionalized racism and therefore little understanding of the need for public housing, day care and other public services.

Just beneath the issue of race lies the hidden but equally important issue of class. Most respondents perceived blacks as poor and at a lower class level than themselves. To be associated with them, then is to "go back" in terms of class, when they have only just achieved their present status level.

Most respondents accept class inequality as a given and even as a desirable element of social structure. At the same time, their own class position is perceived as being difficult, contradictory, and even unfair. They refer to themselves as middle class, but they are aware there are people who are more

powerful and privileged than they. McCourt theorizes that the issue of class consciousness is more mixed than many analyses suggest.

McCourt views women's response to neighborhood changes as part of a larger wave of discontent among working class people who believe that they are treated unfairly, even though they approve of the existence of a class system. Women who become activists are strongly attached to their neighborhoods and believe that political activity can make a difference.

Summarizing her findings, McCourt lists three themes that emerge from her work: the role transformation of working class women as they become activists, grass roots populism, and the potential for building alternative communities through assertive community organizations. She further notes the characteristics that predict political activity on the part of working class women as well as highlighting changes in women's lives resulting from that activism.

McCourt specifies four ways in which political activism effects participants: changes in political consciousness, self esteem, relationships with husbands and feelings about the community. Activist women become more aware and more involved as a result of participation. They believe that their actions can make a difference and they seek to broaden their political understanding. The changes in women's images of themselves are particularly striking. The respect they receive from others, a renewed faith in their intelligence and ability, the fears and doubts they have overcome all serve to broaden and deepen their sense of self. Taking action to affect one's fate rather

than passively accepting it has a positive impact on both physical and mental health.

Community participation also effects marital relationships. Some women enjoy a new level of serious discussion of public issues in their families, and gain a positive response to their more confident sense of themselves. In other cases, husbands are threatened by or doubtful about demands on their wives' time, the public role their wives are playing and the new associations that wives now have outside the home.

Some marriages are strengthened by women's expanding roles and others are threatened by women's changing ideas and actions. Women's attachment to their community, always strong in the activist group, is enhanced by organizational participation. It is further strengthened by their particular ties to political colleagues. These political relationships tend to become friendships as well. Working together leads to the formation of a deeper attachment which McCourt, following Schmalenbach calls communion, as opposed to the more passive community.

The changes these women experience bring new strains into their lives, but perhaps to a greater degree than they know, new opportunities as well. While her sample is modest in size and is based in a single community, McCourt believes that the changes she finds in the lives of these working class women reflect those in the lives of working class women as a whole.

McCourt's study is important to the present work for a number of reasons. She calls attention to the growing importance of political activism among working

class women, especially at the neighborhood level. She shows how these women reconcile their public role with an image of themselves as traditional housewives who support family values. To them, defending the community is an extension, not a contradiction of their role as defenders of the home. She alludes to the complex relationship between neighborhood activists and progressive political movements of the sixties and seventies. She cuts through the media image of working class activists as hysterical reactionaries and racists, defending the racial purity of their neighborhood at any cost, to display the reality of complex motives and issues. Her close examination of the circumstances in people's lives that promote activism has broad implications, not only for understanding the lives of working class women, but for an understanding of political life in general.

McCourt's work on the activism of working class women can permanently change our perception of the group, and make obsolete older conceptualizations such as those presented by Rainwater, Komarovsky and others. In a sense, McCourt's work presents the other side of Stack's study. During the period in which the research for these works was done, poor and working class blacks faced white working class groups in a series of pitched battles over schools, neighborhoods, and employment. Stack's closely detailed study of the kinship system among the black poor refutes stereotypes of shiftlessness, immorality and irresponsibility among this group. McCourt's study shatters images of the white working class as rigidly conservative and racist. Taken together, they present a powerful glimpse of the reality of neighborhood life and political possibilities among ordinary people.

Ida Susser's Norman Street: Poverty and Politics in an Urban Neighborhood (1982) is a somewhat more recent study of women's networks in a poor working class neighborhood in Brooklyn. Susser is interested in showing the impact of political change on the lives of ordinary people and how they mobilize resources to meet the challenges presented by these changes. Written during the late 1970s, Norman Street describes a period during which the fiscal collapse of municipal governments was leading to immense cuts in city services, at the same time as federal programs were also contracting. Building on Stack's analysis of support networks in the black community, Susser asserts that economic pressure led to the construction of similar networks in white working class communities. The formation of these networks was not only a strategy for survival, but a tactic of political organizing.

Susser begins her inquiry by asking what is perhaps the classic question about the American working class: why do American workers appear to be so politically inactive, especially when compared to the workers of other industrial societies? Susser addresses this question in part by broadening the definition of worker movements to include smaller scale organizing in communities as well as other local and ethnic organizing. She notes that by characterizing workers in terms of ethnic background and other categories, scholars have followed the popular usage of obscuring class similarities beneath lifestyle differences. She follows Aronowitz (1974) and Gutman (1976) in noting that working class struggles have occurred even if they have not followed classic Marxist models. Susser rejects the notion that some struggles are "pre-political" (Hobsbawn,

1955), noting that it is lack of opportunity that has limited movements which have been so described, not lack of analysis or understanding.

Like McCourt, Susser begins her analysis by noting that broad changes have undermined the way of life of working class people at her field work site, the Williamsburg-Greenpoint area in Brooklyn, New York. Although there are racial tensions in the area, racial confrontations such as those described by McCourt have not played a central role in the history of this neighborhood. Susser asserts that the real crisis of Williamsburg-Greenpoint is economic decline. The decline of this neighborhood is not a separate event, but rather part of a larger series of events which mark the decline of New York as a manufacturing city, which in turn is part of a major and enduring decline in the industrial bases of many older manufacturing cities in the east and northwestern part of the United States.

In analyzing this decline, Susser points to a number of factors. Demographic changes have transformed the population of New York City, making it poorer, darker, and differently structured in terms of age. There are greater numbers of both the aged and the very young, and fewer people in the middle years. Tens of thousands of middle class and working class white families have left. New migrants coming into the city have been poor, less skilled, and more likely to belong to minority groups. Most importantly, they entered a city in which manufacturing firms have left by the hundreds. The garment industry, for example, the backbone of blue collar employment in New York City, lost twelve thousand jobs in the single year of 1969. This economic downturn is

reflected in Williamsburg-Greenpoint's industrial base also. The neighborhood had always been a mixed use industrial and residential area and many neighborhood people worked in local industries. By 1976, a number of major employers had moved out of the area.

Williamsburg-Greenpoint retains many elements of an old fashioned ethnically oriented working class neighborhood. In many ways, traditional culture and life styles have remained remarkably viable, but as Susser demonstrates, the underlying reality of economic decline and service cuts has eaten away at the heart of neighborhood life.

In noting how general economic decline impacts on the neighborhood, Susser cites high unemployment, job insecurity, low wages and poor working conditions. There are a number of factories in the area, but only the largest and those with strong unions are considered desirable places to work. Smaller factories pay minimum wages and offer squalid working conditions. Military service and welfare also provide income. Some families patched together a living from low paid employment, military allotments and government aid. Susser notes that jobs brought into the area by the federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) were welcomed; in contrast to more prosperous areas, where they were scorned as too low paying and political.

In addition to employment, Susser views welfare services and landlord-tenant relations as central to the lives of local residents. In one chapter, she presents a blow-by-blow account of the process of applying for welfare. She notes that bureaucratic hairsplitting, lengthy, difficult forms, long lines and delays



as well as personal assessments made by workers all reinforce the lengthy and humiliating nature of the process, as well as the likelihood that eligible people will not receive aid. Susser details how rigid regulations coupled with arbitrary authority resulted in wrongful denial of benefits. Susser notes that poor people are subject to the power of landlords as well as the power of government bureaucracies.

Most of the book deals with various organizing efforts that occur on the block and in the larger neighborhood. Susser describes them and analyzes their success or failure in terms of the community dynamics. Some residents of Norman Street try to form a block association. A resident of the block who works for a local community agency, initiates the organization and is elected president. Susser describes the desultory nature of the meetings and the ineffectual actions of the group. They start a number of projects such as creating a park in a vacant lot, getting an abandoned building sealed and sponsoring a dinner dance. None are successful. The single project that is carried out is a street fair which few people attend. The event barely breaks even and leads to some tense moments between local youth and members of the band, some of whom belong to minority groups.

Susser compares the ineffectiveness of the block association, organized in response to an outside initiative with the success of two projects started by local people and serving a purpose that is clear to the organizers. The two successful programs are a Board of Education sponsored summer lunch program and a Police Athletic League sponsored play street. In both cases resources--in one

case, food and in the other, athletic equipment-- are supplied by the outside agency, but administration, distribution and safekeeping are provided by local residents. Susser shows how networks of kinship and friendship are used to recruit workers and to distribute goods for these programs. She shows how goods brought into the community through these programs have a positive impact on the lives of people on the block.

Susser's analysis of a community wide campaign demonstrates how local movements are organized and why they succeed or fail. The movement she investigates is a reaction to the threatened closing of a local firehouse. A number of firehouses had been removed from New York City neighborhoods as part of the city's "planned shrinkage" of municipal services. In addition to reductions in fire protection, Williamsburg-Greenpoint, and other neighborhoods had lost police protection, schools, library services, hospitals and other health care facilities. Local support for the firehouse campaign was not just a response to an isolated event but to a perceived threat to neighborhood survival.

Susser contends that local networks and patterns of association such the one on Norman Street, form the backbone of this larger community wide protest that unites members of various networks from different parts of the neighborhood. This observation agrees with McCourt's point that women joined political groups when invited to do so by a person who was already a member. The campaign to save the firehouse was a remarkable one. It maintained a high level of community support and participation for well over a year and a half.

Participants remained unified, willing to serve, unintimidated and undiscouraged throughout the campaign.

Susser alludes to the importance of underlying networks of kinship, friendship, reciprocity and trust that make sustained concerted action possible. She also notes a number of other factors that were important in the campaign. This community had a history of activism, including a recent battle against the expansion of a local factory. This campaign had mobilized residents to defend those whose homes were threatened with destruction. Neighborhood people could count on the support of the fire fighters and their powerful union whose interests coincided with their own. Fire fighters kept local residents informed about planned changes in the department. The struggle was aided by community organizers who were, though Susser does not mention this, progressive activists with ties to larger progressive movements. These organizers played an important role in the day to day work of organizing and in attracting publicity and outside interest for the campaign.

The firehouse itself played a critical role in the campaign. Occupied by neighborhood residents and dramatically renamed People's Firehouse #1, it was a visible symbol of people's struggle to preserve the neighborhood. It became the physical heart of the movement. One family moved into the firehouse and lived there for the better part of year. It was the site of political meetings, social and fund raising events. By end of the campaign, the people's firehouse was known nationally and indeed internationally. Widespread publicity put pressure on local politicians to declare their support for it as well.

The people who participated in the movement were mainly white ethnics, particularly those of Polish descent, the campaign also received the support of the nearby black and Hispanic communities. Veterans of the firehouse campaign helped other neighborhoods whose firehouses were threatened. Susser makes the point that ethnic differences were of little consequence in the campaign, in which the need to preserve the neighborhood was the central theme. In this respect there is a marked contrast between this mobilization and the one described by McCourt. Susser further notes that taking part in the campaign politicized many individuals, changing their view of the wider world and of their own ability to be effective within it. In this respect, her findings are strikingly similar to McCourt's data and also very important for the present work.

To Susser, the battles in Williamsburg-Greenpoint are part of the larger struggle of working class people in industrial cities such as New York. Their difficulties stem from the fact that they are now a surplus population in cities in which manufacturing is no longer a major industry. She notes that racial hostility and other techniques of social control are used to deter effective organizing or even a vision of common goals. She believes that understanding the working class requires examining not only work place struggles but also community life and struggles, such as those depicted in her study.

Susser's study is relevant to the present work for a number of reasons. Susser's delineation of life on the block depicts the intermingling of personal and political concerns at the level of everyday experience. The people of Norman Street came in contact with the political dimensions of social structure every day

through interactions with the welfare system, courts, landlords, municipal government, the school system, etc. Susser's work highlights the political dimensions of everyday life and reminds us how little of private life is truly private, especially among the least privileged members of society.

Susser also indicates how kinship and friendship based networks can become the foundation for the development of an organizing and social action network. She contrasts the ineffectiveness of social action which originates outside of the group with the ability of people to act decisively and cohesively when they perceive that they have a real interest in the outcome. Susser's work like McCourt's demonstrate's the newly important political role of working class women and shows how women build political networks outward from their household, kinship and community connections. In her analysis of the fire house campaign, Susser develops a typology of the conditions which enable working class people to organize and sustain a local action campaign.

These three works by Stack, Susser, and McCourt represent a new kind of community study. By starting with women's everyday life and by noting the impact of larger economic and social forces on women's lives, they present a picture of communities as social systems in struggle, rather than as social systems in equilibrium. Because they understand that change and conflict are central to the lives of these communities, they are also aware that participation in these struggles enables working class women to expand their self image and their relationship to the wider world.

Taken together, the works discussed in this section show how working class women have claimed their right to participate in public life. They have come to understand how events in the larger world shape and determine the life chances of their families and neighborhoods. They do not deal with the implications of these events as abstractions, but as specific and concrete forces effecting their own lives and the lives of their families. In responding to these challenges, working class women not only participate in public life, but also redefine the public sphere by challenging the boundaries which have fragmented the social world into the separate and unequal worlds of civil society and private households. The realm of community that women create through their everyday activities becomes the third element mediating between the public and private spheres and providing a base for the new politics of working class feminism.

### **Chapter III**

#### **Feminist Theory and Working Class Feminism**

The questions explored in this work can be located within an emerging body of feminist theory. The authors of this body of theory have taken the project of describing women's lives and experience as an occasion for a critical analysis of existing theory, methodology and empirical studies in a wide variety of intellectual disciplines. The result of this collective undertaking has been the feminist deconstruction of the fundamental premises of many areas of study and the beginning of a rebuilding of these disciplines and approaches from a feminist perspective.

In this chapter I will develop a brief overview of some of these feminist concerns viewed from the perspective of working class feminism. I will show how these concerns theoretically inform the concept of working class feminism and connect this formulation with the larger body of feminist theory and with a broader critical perspective in the social sciences.

The first area that I refer to is the feminist critique of methodology, an area that has been most strongly conceptualized in the work of Sandra Harding (1986). Her approach demonstrates that a feminist critique of methodology, as well as the development of a strategy informed by this critique, opens up areas

of inquiry that point far beyond the formal area of methodology. This approach leads to a new understanding of the process of intellectual inquiry and of the meaning of the findings and results of that process of inquiry. She shows how a methodology informed by feminism reveals new elements of the lives and concerns of women.

A second and related topic that I consider in this chapter concerns the meaning of such classical liberal formulations as the individual, the split between the public and private spheres and the meaning of moral agency and social action. In this section I examine a theoretically informed historical account of the lives of working class women in the nineteenth century. This work, viewed from the perspective of moral agency, challenges the basic premises of liberal individualism (Smith and Valenze, 1988). This study shows how women's collective action is informed and motivated by a collective moral concern. Another work (Pateman, 1987) supports this line of argument and directly addresses the liberal conceptualization of public and private spheres, developing an analysis that reveals some of the veiled implications of this theoretical framework. This work begins to develop the underpinnings of a concept of community and lifeworld which stands in opposition to the liberal doctrine of separate spheres. Finally, a feminist analysis of bureaucracy (Ferguson, 1984) shows how the bureaucratic mentality is related to liberal individualism, the separation of public and private and the rejection of the lifeworld. The author of this analysis indicates how bureaucracy denies and abrogates the communal life world of working class women.



A fundamental feminist analysis of methodology calls into question those methods of inquiry that have, both in the past and in the present, resulted in the exclusion of women and women's concerns from scientific, historical and philosophical consideration. In The Science Question in Feminism (1986), Sandra Harding raises some of these concerns. Using a broad-based framework that includes both the natural and social sciences as well as the philosophy of science, Harding raises issues that bear directly on the present work. Harding contends that what she terms an androcentric methodology excludes certain areas of inquiry. Therefore, the social structures created and inhabited by women largely fall through the cracks of prevailing methodologies.

Harding views the work of Max Weber as fundamental to setting the agenda for the social sciences and to understanding the development of what she terms androcentric science. She asserts that Weber's emphasis on rational and goal directed social action, combined with his stricture concerning value neutrality, resulted in a systematic masculine bias that patterns both the methodology and the subject matter of the social sciences. However, an opposite perspective, one that comes remarkably close to Harding's own work, can be derived from a different reading of Weber. I will develop this position after reviewing some of the concepts in Harding's work that are important for our present purposes.

In describing the masculine bias of sociology as a discipline, Harding follows an earlier critique developed by Millman and Kantor (1975). They list five assumptions, that they argue constitute the framework of a male biased

sociology. The first of these assumptions implicitly divides social actors into two groups. One group, mainly men, consists of those whose actions are rational, calculated and goal oriented. The other group, mainly women, but also the poor and members of minority groups, is driven by needs, feelings, impulses, etc. Harding observes that neither view of the motives of individuals can lead to a model of social action that includes the possibility of combining rational knowledge with feeling or emotion. This is an important point to which we will return later in the chapter, in the context of a discussion about the separation of public and private. Obviously an analysis that separates rational action from sentiment and emotion parallels an analysis that separates the public sphere of rational action and discourse from the private sphere as an arena of sentiment and attachment.

Masculine bias also leads sociologists to focus on the "public, official and visible" elements of social structure and to ignore those elements that are unofficial, private and less visible. Thus sociologists fail to take note of those unofficial spheres in which women exercise power and mastery, as well as those unofficial social structures which provide support for male privilege and achievement. In an observation directly relevant to the present study, Harding (1986) notes:

They make invisible the role of social interactions in local settings in community life -- the settings where women predominate -- in shaping those community wide interactions and policies where men appear as the creators of social structure (p.87).

The third category mentioned by Harding is particularly relevant for the analysis being made in the present work. This is the assumption that

there is a single society with respect to men and women, in which generalizations can be made about all participants, yet men and women may actually inhabit different social worlds (Millman and Kantor, 1975, p.xii, quoted in Harding, 1986, p. 87).

Harding observes that male dominated social structures are experienced differently by men and women. Women have a "problem of adjustment" within these structures. This results in a split between women's consciousness and their actions. Women attempt to adjust or compensate for the resulting tension through well documented patterns of self blame and lowered expectations. Harding notes that through consciousness raising, women came to understand this gap between consciousness and action, thereby enabling them to understand their feeling of discomfort in the male defined world.

Harding regards Dorothy Smith's analysis of the masculine world of administrative rationality as an especially important application of this "different worlds" assumption. Harding notes that the division of the world into such clearcut and mutually exclusive categories as work and leisure is one consequence of administrative rationality. This view is quite opposite to the more integrated perspective developed by women doing "housework" and "childcare" which includes elements of both. A central concern of the present work is the comparison of this administrative world view which is the basis of public policy with the life of the neighborhood as it is experienced by women. I argue that, just as housework includes aspects of both work and leisure so community, as women

experience it in urban neighborhoods, encompasses and bridges the public and the private spheres of the social world.

The fourth assumption Harding presents is that sex is frequently not viewed as an explanatory variable, though it may be an important factor. This is not to posit that biological differences dictate social life, but rather that the social definition of gender influences the social life of all gendered subjects and therefore what male observers may view as the world, is really a world --namely the world of men. This observation is specifically applied to community studies by Lynn Lofland (1975) in an essay in the Millman and Kantor collection. This work is discussed in greater detail in the chapter on community. In it Lofland details how the male biases of community researchers lead them to develop a male centered and therefore incomplete concept of the social structures that constitute community.

The fifth assumption centers on methodological concerns. Here Harding recognizes the possible problems of the male researcher whose work is uninformed by women's concerns or by any type of feminist perspective. In such a case, it is easy for the researcher to accept the definition of the situation provided within the context of a male dominated social world. Methodologies used by these male researchers are often better suited to elicit certain types of responses than others. The kind of responses elicited are often those which lend themselves most readily to bureaucratic classification, manipulation and control. The application of this analysis to community studies has already been done in

Lofland's paper (1975) cited above and is treated elsewhere (Chapter V) in this work.

Harding intends her analysis to provide a basis for her investigation of the relationship between gender and science, but it is also useful for the purposes of the present work. Harding finds in the works of Rose, Flax and Hartsock the rudiments of a feminist standpoint from which to construct a new basis for science. One of these is the activities of women in their everyday lives which Hartsock defines as "sensuous, concrete and relational," as opposed to the everyday lives of men which are defined by isolation and abstraction. The feminist theorists cited by Harding all define their work in terms of some relationship to Marxism. Hartsock notes that women's sensuous, concrete and relational labor deepens the materialist base of their social position. Extending this analysis, Harding suggests that proletarian men stand midway between working class women and middle and upper class men and women in terms of their work and therefore in terms of their consciousness as well.

Harding introduces Hartsock's definition of power as reciprocal empowerment rather than as domination; the power of caring, rather than power over others. This point is relevant for the present analysis because it echoes the way many working class women see their role in the social world. The working class neighborhood women I encountered in doing this work did not feel powerless, though they were certainly aware of the limits of their power. They experienced themselves as powerful within certain social contexts, including their families, their networks of relatives, friends and neighbors, as well as some

neighborhood institutions and the neighborhood community itself. This power took the form of competence, caring and relationships. Hartsock's definition of power helps to clarify the basis of their views.

Harding's distinction between men of the dominant class and proletarian men may be extended by positing a similar distinction among women. Just as men share certain elements of consciousness by virtue of their socially defined position as men so, it may be argued, middle and upper class women share the language and at least some of the assumptions of the men of their class. Obviously, a feminist standpoint cannot be a unitary standpoint. One goal of the present work is to suggest a framework for an alternative feminism grounded in the experiences and perspectives of working class women.

Harding poses a question to those who claim that scientific methodology as presently constituted is objective, bias free and follows its own logic to the accumulation of knowledge and understanding of the natural and social worlds. Harding asks of those who hold these beliefs: why is the reputed rigor of scientific methodology applied only to the process of answering questions, not to the process of choosing which questions will be asked? She holds that the questions that are asked express an unreflective androcentric world view that reinforces the existing positions of white bourgeois men.

Implicit in the nature of the issues posed are two basic premises. The first is that the knowledge gained through scientific inquiry will reinforce the dominant position of those who hold power, or at least will not call into question existing patterns of power and domination. The second is that the questions that

are asked will lend themselves to a methodology that maintains the social distance between the scientific investigator as the knowing subject and individual who is the object of investigation. It is the scientific observer who understands and the individual who is the object of the investigation who acts, and whose actions are understood by the scientist.

In contrast to this approach Harding suggests that feminist scientists, both men and women, are free to choose projects that do not presuppose the existing order, but that contain within them the germ of a critical stance.

For Harding this is not only a methodological stance, but a substantive position as well. This critical stance may also imply a greater closeness between the investigator and the subject of scientific inquiry. Thus a feminist social scientist investigating the lives of women may, at least partially, identify with these women and may become, sometimes by implication, sometimes directly, an advocate for those kinds of social changes which would acknowledge the realities of their lives and make society more responsive to them. In such a case, the relationship between the investigator and the subject changes from one of subject and object, active and passive participants in the research process to one that is more equal, more intersubjective and more dialectical, more like a conversation between two peers, each of whom both acts and knows.

In addition to considering the relationship between the researcher and her subjects, Harding presents the issue of the researcher's awareness of making a choice of the questions to be explored, as well as the methodological and political implications of this act. Here I believe, as noted above, Weber's

conceptualization of methodology may contribute to the construction of a feminist standpoint for research. Weber defined reality as an "infinite continuum," one that was so many sided as to always elude the total comprehension of finite human intelligence. Just as reality is infinite, so the tasks of understanding and comprehension are also infinite. No matter what vantage point the researcher chooses, it always represents a choice that necessarily emphasizes some aspects of reality and ignores others. The act of choosing is a critical part of the research process and one that reflects the interests of the individual making it. Since each age and culture represents a different way of viewing the world's infinite possibilities, there will always be new questions asked. Thus the scientific project that Weber envisioned is one of continuing change and flux.

Weber may not have foreseen a specifically feminist science, but his formal categories of inquiry certainly could include the possibility of feminist science as Harding defines it. Those who have reified Weber's category of value neutrality into an inflexible law are responding to only one element of Weber's multi-faceted view of methodology. As Harding and others have noted, the claim of value neutrality is often a camouflage for the researcher's tacit acceptance of the officially defined position. Accepting the established viewpoint permits these researchers to define opposing and critical perspectives not as based on other standpoints, but as deviant and unacceptable.

An examination of the lives of working class women leads us to call into question the premises of classical liberalism, especially the premise of the



autonomous individual. The concept of an autonomous individual has been an important presupposition of many strands of political and economic and social philosophy, especially those dating from the seventeenth century to the present. In this time period, the desire to escape the power of the church, the parochialism of the small rural community and the political power first of feudal lords and then of absolute monarchs, led to the idealization of the independent individual, working and striving on behalf of individual goals and benefitting from the result of that labor. This image of the autonomous individual is a component of the nineteenth century theories of laissez faire capitalism, the Protestant ethic and Social Darwinism. It is also a cornerstone of social contract theory and of a number of theories of the liberal state. Indeed, it is an underlying premise of the political ideas of those who fought the American Revolution. Using this approach, a person may claim rights as an individual in opposition to the power of various institutions, especially the state. The question the Supreme Court answered in the Roe v. Wade decision, of whether or not women's right of privacy includes the right to abortion, is an example of a right claimed according to this approach.

I posit here that investigating the lives of working class women calls into question the premises of liberal individualism. Working class women structure their lives in terms of affiliation and community rather than in terms of separation and individual identity. They experience themselves as members of a network of loosely connected groups and affiliations. Their definition of various situations and the choices they make are often based on their sense of

being part of a larger whole. This larger whole may be a small and tightly knit group, such as the nuclear family or a larger and more loosely knit one such as a whole community. They are wives and mothers, aunts and grandmothers, neighbors and friends, members of the church, the PTA, the block association, the neighborhood community, their ethnic group--among many others.

In their paper "Mutuality and Marginality: Liberal Moral Theory and Working Class Women in Nineteenth Century England" (1988), Ruth L. Smith and Deborah Valenze present a historical analysis of the ways in which the lives of working class women refute the premises of liberal morality. They contend that "... their (working class women's) history reveals distinctive moral behavior that starkly contrasts with the autonomous moral agent central to liberalism." What I term affiliation and community, Smith and Valenze call mutuality and jointness. They contend that the role of working class women as moral agents has been largely overlooked because it did not fit into the predominant image of moral agency as characterized by autonomy, independence, and universality. In contrast to this view of moral agency, the morality of working class women is defined by their sense of interdependence and their recognition of others of co-agents.

Smith and Valenze compare the concept of moral agency inferred from the lives of working class women with the predominant liberal view based on the presupposition of the unfettered independent actor. They contend that the liberal view limits the possibility of defining an action as moral to those cases in which individuals acting alone make clear cut choices. Thus many joint actions,

such as those in the family and the community, are not included. Smith and Valenze note that not only does this eliminate most activities of such marginal actors as working class women, but that it also rules out many activities of more centrally situated actors such as middle class men. They assert that the result of this restrictive definition is an abstract view of morality that focuses moral debate around issues of law and public morality, consigning other questions to the area of private "virtue."

The authors note the relationship between their position and that of various proponents of western Marxism or critical theory. They cite the works of Marcuse, Gramsci and Habermas in regard to similar questions, as well as Genovese's application of Gramsci's work to an understanding of the moral universe constructed by slaves in the United States. Each of these theorists locates a concept of morality in a particular historical and social reality, rather than in abstract universal principles.

Smith and Valenze also cite a related model of moral agency based on the work of Carol Gilligan (1982). They stress her contention that "female moral development tends to be based on relations and responsibility, while that of males is based on the adjudication of rights." (p. 281) They view her work as flawed because they contend that she does not sufficiently take account of historical and political factors. They focus on the importance of the dominant culture in defining and evaluating alternative moralities.

Smith and Valenze propose to supply this missing element with their own historical account. They note that there is a relationship between marginality and

the formation of an alternative morality. Marginality is not the result of a single factor, but rather various types of marginality may be defined by gender, race or class during a particular historical period. They posit that during the nineteenth century, women's sense of marginality was a consequence of class position as well as gender.

Smith and Valenze note that modernization theories suggest an evolutionary climb from the village community embedded in a feudal political and economic order to the modern state with its rationalized political relations. The joint and mutually dependent activities of village and tribal life are thus defined as simpler or less evolved social relations, to be superseded and replaced by modern individualism. From this perspective, individuals' assertions of rights -- which are really claims against the collectivity -- are easy to understand, but the individual's need for the collectivity becomes a more shadowy and problematic area. Nonetheless, these needs for the collectivity may be made visible through an analysis of the bonds of mutuality expressed through family, religion and community.

This emphasis on the "bonds of mutuality" leads Smith and Valenze to question the separation of the public and private spheres. Smith and Valenze share this approach with other feminist theorists. Like other feminists, they assert that the productive and reproductive work women perform within the "private" sphere has consequences and reverberations within the public sphere.

They also maintain that women did enter the public sphere as workers and as political actors, even during the nineteenth century, when their proper sphere

was the household. Working class women were particularly likely to do so; less protected by the social order, they were less bound by its constraints. Unlike middle and upper class women, they were not viewed as "ladies" whose fragility suited them only for the most protected situations.

By calling attention to the blurring of boundaries between the public and private spheres, Smith and Valenze help to account for various instances of the reported "unruly behavior" of working class women who participated in public actions. In the nineteenth century, working class women were less confined by the behavioral restrictions imposed by the cult of true womanhood on middle and upper class women. Whether or not they aspired to be ladies, working class women defined themselves primarily as the protectors and advocates of their families and communities. In this capacity, they worked for wages when the need arose. They took political action in response to such concerns as high food prices, unfair trading practices and unjust court decisions. They participated in and supported the early labor movement. The moral basis of these actions was women's sense of collective responsibility for their families and communities.

Smith and Valenze note that women were politically active during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. During this period, they suggest, working class women and men shared responsibility for their families and communities. Later in the nineteenth century, political activities of working class men centered on the labor movement. Women, viewed as within the household and outside the sphere of wage work or as marginal workers, were increasingly excluded from this political arena. Smith and Valenze posit that during this

period, women's continuing collective orientation was expressed in early Socialist movements such as Owenism and in popular religion.

Smith and Valenze contend that liberal individualism has created the contextual framework within which twentieth century analysts examine events of nineteenth century life. Viewed within this framework, the activities of working class women have appeared as marginal as well as "anachronistic, idiosyncratic or irrational" (p.296). These activities may be interpreted quite differently when seen as part of working class women's collective response to changes that impinged on their ability to care for and nurture their families and communities. In these acts of resistance, working class women became historical actors, as well as participants in the public realm of discourse and activity.

The historical analysis of Smith and Valenze suggests continuity between the public actions of working class women in the nineteenth century and those of the working class women in the present. Their explanation also provides an understanding of why and how the work of these women in creating, nurturing and protecting their communities has been devalued and ignored. Theorists of the left as well as those of other orientations have not come to terms with women's public roles because they accept a definition of women as outside of public life. Smith and Valenze reconceptualize the public and political life of a particular historical period. Their work draws our attention to the continuing importance of women in political life and provide a new way of understanding the present.

An important and related theme is discussed by Carol Pateman in her article "Feminist Critiques of the Public–Private Dichotomy" (1987). Pateman begins by noting that a central premise of liberal thought is the division of the social world into two separate spheres, the public and the private. She contends that feminist theory, while based on the premises of liberalism, simultaneously challenges the liberal emphasis on individualism and on the public sphere. In challenging liberal ideas, feminist critiques have become intertwined with radical critiques. Feminists, she contends, make a unique contribution to this discourse by calling attention to the patriarchal roots of liberalism.

Pateman contends that while liberalism and patriarchy are theoretical opposites, liberal social organization embodies patriarchal practice. Patriarchal theory posits a hierarchy in which women are subordinate to men. Liberal theory posits a society of free and equal individuals who are the bearers of rights. However, by constituting "society" as coequal to the public sphere and making rights an attribute of citizenship rather than of personhood, the patriarchal character of the liberal state is maintained and indeed institutionalized. Women are assigned to the private sphere, the sphere of household and family. Even in this sphere, Pateman points out, it is men who hold power and have ultimate authority over the household.

Pateman presents an example of this disparity in the work of the social contract theorist, John Locke. She notes that Locke advocates a liberal state based on the consent of free individuals. However, Locke distinguishes between what he terms political relations among citizens and the natural dominion of

parents over children and husbands over wives. Pateman notes the contradictions inherent in this analysis. The most obvious is that after placing women in a limited and subordinate position outside the public sphere, liberals continue to discuss the rights of individuals in universal terms.

In addition, their definition of the public sphere is itself limited and highly questionable. When examined more closely, the public sphere turns out to be mainly an arena in which individuals pursue private interests, within a legal framework established by a neutral state. What is lacking in this liberal analysis is a concept of the public sphere as an arena of discourse or as a community of shared responsibility -- in a word, a polity. It is precisely in this regard that the concept of community may offer a meaningful approach to the reconstruction of the concept of the public sphere as an arena of joint action and concern.

In her discussion of various views of the public and the private, the political and the social, Pateman shows how feminist analyses call into question the ideological underpinnings of modern political life. These feminist approaches point the way toward a new basis for understanding political, and therefore public life. Pateman's presentation of the different meanings ascribed to the women's suffrage movement provides an example of how feminist analysis may recast our understanding of the public sphere. She notes that John Stuart Mill, an advocate of women's suffrage, also advocated social equality for women. He contended that suffrage would mean little if women remained, in all other ways, subject to their husbands' authority.



Mill's position was liberal and feminist, as he advocated the formal extension of a right as well as a more fundamental change in social institutions. Other nineteenth century theorists argued in favor of women suffrage from the opposite point of view. They maintained that women should have the vote to enable them to strengthen and protect their special sphere, rather than to enable them to move out of it. Yet another perspective is advanced by Nancy Cott, a modern historian. She contends that suffrage gave women a new position in society -- as independent citizens -- rather than merely as family members, wives and mothers.

Pateman contends that Mill's argument demonstrates theoretically what the women's movement has shown in practice, namely that there is an integral relationship between the public and private spheres on many levels and in many ways. The significance of this relationship makes the separation of spheres a problematic and ideological formulation. Pateman notes a number of the implications which have been drawn from a feminist approach to the relationship between the public and private spheres. One is that women's participation in the public sphere, i.e. by voting, necessarily leads to a more equal position in the private sphere as well. Another is a rethinking of the Marxist position concerning the relationship of production and reproduction. Yet another is that women can and do enter the public sphere, though their presence may not be officially recognized. An example that she cites is that of working class women, who even in the nineteenth century, left their homes to work for wages.

Pateman indicates a direction for what she terms a total critique of patriarchal liberalism. She rejects the works of Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx as imperfect attempts at such a critique. She contends that these theorists failed to come to terms with the patriarchal roots of liberalism. A more comprehensive approach for the modern world would add an analysis of the participatory and critical social movements of the past quarter century and move toward developing a philosophy that includes both individuality and community, both public and private, both women and men.

Pateman hints at, but does not take, the next step, which is to develop an alternative feminist theory of public discourse and of the meaning of political life. I believe that such a theory would be grounded in the concept of community as developed by working class women in the everyday life of their neighborhoods and as theorized in the concept of working class feminism. It is in creating the structures of the lifeworld of their neighborhoods, that women experience a sense of connection to specific others and to the whole community which constitutes the authentic basis of public life. This sense of affiliation is experienced not as abstract and alien, but rather as concrete, connected and specific. It is continuous with, rather than opposed to, other human relationships. It grows out of specific relationships, concrete needs and real attempts to create institutions, solve problems, and respond to changes imposed by the outside world. It is a way of connecting to and participating in public concerns that is grounded in everyday life and therefore available to ordinary people.

Political theorists are aware of the connections that people and especially women build in their communities, but they have generally dismissed these informal social structures as being merely local, transitory, limited and not sufficiently grounded in theory. The local community has been viewed as a limited and fragmented public arena. Nonetheless, the model of neighborhood community remains as a social structure in which it is possible to bridge the gap between the public and private spheres in concrete ways which are incorporated into the everyday lives of ordinary people.

If the public sphere is taken to mean only the larger world of national or perhaps international discourse, then it is not only women who are excluded from it, but most men as well. Indeed the abstractness, complexity, and opacity of much public discourse develops logically out of the premises of patriarchal liberalism with its governing concept of separate spheres and its abstract definitions of public and private.

One level of feminist analysis is concerned with understanding the ideas and intellectual framework that support patriarchal liberalism. Another important level is the feminist analysis of those institutions that take liberalism as an ideological justification. Both from the perspective of feminist theory and from the perspective of everyday life, this second level of analysis is critically important. It is at this level that the working class women whose life world is at the core of my analysis come into contact with the social structures of the larger society.

The world of working class women is a world of personal, concrete and specific social ties, structured informally into networks which may or may not be congruent with the formal structures of institutions. This world stands in sharp contrast to the world of institutions patterned in terms of the principles of bureaucratic rationality. The bureaucratic world constitutes an attack on the world of neighborhood and community. As all types of social situations become increasingly defined in terms of bureaucratic rationality, the space previously occupied by neighborhood life is increasingly taken up by bureaucracy.

This development is analyzed in feminist terms by Kathy Ferguson (1984) in The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy. In this work, Ferguson begins by positing a fairly conventional definition of bureaucracy as:

an organization having the following traits: a complex, rational division of labor, with fixed duties and jurisdictions; stable, rule governed authority channels and universally applied performance guidelines; a horizontal division of graded authority or hierarchy, entailing supervision from above; a complex system of written record keeping, based on scientific procedures that standardize communications and increase control; objective recruitment based on impersonal standards of expertise; predictable standardized management procedures following general rules and a tendency to require total loyalty from its members toward the way of life the organization requires (p.7).

Beyond this definition, Ferguson notes that bureaucracy is a process as well as a structure, that it has emerged out of specific historical conditions and that it has served to accomplish certain political ends. To continue to exist, it requires the reproduction of modes of domination and the suppression of opposition (p.7). The social processes of bureaucracy maximize stability, predictability and control. Control is achieved through management of the self

and of others as well as management of the process, the language and the environment. The imposition of this control constitutes the political content of bureaucratic authority. Calling attention to this political content makes visible the fact that bureaucracy is not a neutral process designed simply to accomplish goals efficiently, but a political arena in which a struggle for control and domination is occurring.

Ferguson suggests that the grounds for a critique of bureaucracy and for the construction of an alternative vision of life may be derived from women's way of living in the world. She argues, as I do, that women have been left behind in a more gemeinschaft-like social structure that might provide a foundation for an alternative to bureaucracy. She sees this alternative possibility as related to women's roles as nurturers and caregivers, their sense of connection with others and even the subordination and oppression that has prevented them from entering the world of bureaucracy.

Surveying the history of bureaucracy, Ferguson quotes Henry Jacoby who notes that "the growth of bureaucracy in a period of economic liberalism was one of the great ironies of history" (p.31). Ferguson shows how the growth of liberal society with its individualistic, anti-communal ethos coincided with the development of the disciplining, regulating, and centralizing tendencies of bureaucracy. In applying this conceptualization to the analysis of working class neighborhoods in the United States, she demonstrates how the scientific, centrally administered reforms inspired by the Progressive movement superceded the

indigenous reform movements of the immigrant populations that were socialist, anarchist, and syndicalist in character.

Building on this analysis, Ferguson discusses the penetration of bureaucracy into various areas of modern society. She notes that educational institutions, for example, prepare students to be workers in or clients of bureaucratic institutions. Social service agencies scrutinize and regulate the lives of their clients in ways that minimize the possibility of resistance. The bureaucratic organization of work rewards conformity, technical proficiency and mastery of bureaucratic discourse. Ferguson contends that as bureaucratic discourse becomes the prevalent linguistic form, personal, critical or rigorous thinking becomes increasingly difficult to sustain. Thus the system renders its potential critics inarticulate.

Formal critical political theory becomes increasingly difficult to formulate. Critical discourse is then relegated to those marginal groups that are excluded from both the rewards and the regulations of participation in bureaucratic institutions. Ferguson notes that the particular history of women in industrial society places them in this position. I would add that this observation holds true for working class women to an even greater degree than for women in general.

Ferguson compares genuine political activity with bureaucratic processes.

In defining politics, she notes:

Genuine political activity, as opposed to bureaucratic manipulation, is ideally a creative process by which individuals order their collective lives. It requires an open public space in which common interests can be defined, alternatives debated, and policies chosen. It engages individuals in an active self creative process involving both

cooperation with and opposition to others Politics in this sense entails the empowerment of individuals and groups, so that they are able to do things collectively that they could not have done alone (p. 99).

It is precisely this creative process with its constitutive elements of open debate, choice, cooperation, and opposition that is rendered impossible through bureaucratic control. Bureaucracy and the rationalized approach to policy and administration that it engenders isolates individuals and renders them powerless through a complex system of accountability and rewards. Further, bureaucracy obfuscates the face of power by presenting only an image of impersonal rules and procedures implemented by workers who are themselves powerless.

Ferguson contends that women's experience constitutes "a submerged voice within the overall discourse of bureaucratic capitalism" (p. 154). Following Foucault, she notes that bureaucratic discourse makes a claim to universal validity based on standards of objective scientific reason. In contrast, resistance is often local and specific, based on the experience of a particular group, and connected to others only in a rough and informal way as part of a network of opposition. Ferguson comments:

The discourses of opposition, in other words, will not be discovered full blown and whole to be laid down in place of the established routines of thought; rather they will be articulated through an ongoing process of self discovery and self creation, an emergent process involving the crafting and recrafting of particular insights into the unfolding and ever shifting unities of explanation and action (p. 157).

In describing the ways in which feminist discourse begins to establish itself as an oppositional discourse, Ferguson notes:

Bureaucratic capitalism separates us from others without freeing us, resulting in isolation rather than autonomy; it ties us to roles and rules rather than to people, weighting us with connections that deny community. Feminist discourse and practice entail a struggle for individual autonomy that is with others and for community that embraces diversity -- that is, for an integration of the individual and the collective in an ongoing process of authentic individuation and genuine connectedness (p. 157).

Ferguson asks how can we create a feminist arena of discourse which is explicitly political. She notes that many of the arenas in which women's experiential critique of domination are based are specifically nonpolitical. These include women's role in the family as nurturer and caregiver. Ferguson refers to the way in which Gilligan uses this stance as the basis for the development of an alternative framework for understanding ethics and morality. However, she concludes that this stance by itself is not sufficient as the basis of a new and critical political theory. She also notes that since women live in a male dominated world, they often use their nurturant approach not from a position of power but from a position of weakness; that is, not to create new political structures grounded in a nurturant ethic, but to please individual men who can insure their survival. Thus, under conditions of subordination, the power inherent in women's concern for the lifeworld becomes weakness, as it is channeled into being pleasing and nonthreatening to men who are husbands, bosses and other authorities.

Ferguson suggests that modern liberal feminism includes two main aspects. One concerns the attainment of large scale legal changes in the status of women, that is the drive for liberal rights of persons, to be equal before the law and in



other formal ways to men. The other aspect involves opening up new opportunities, especially career opportunities for women, that is, allowing women to become incorporated into the bureaucracy rather than opposing it. Ferguson believes that both of these goals are limited. I would add that both grow out of a feminism that is specifically middle class in character. It is the feminism of middle class women who view the goals of feminism in terms of securing for themselves, the same rights and privileges as middle class men.

Ferguson contends that a feminist redefinition of political life would alter the relationship between self and other, between the individual and the collective and between public and private. Creating a collective public arena would change the nature of private life as well and make the boundaries between the two more flexible and permeable. I suggest that one approach to understanding this possibility is through an examination of the world of neighborhood community created by working class women. Here we find the creation of a public arena of discourse and action in which the nurturing approach of women does create the basis of a public realm that is based on an extension of personal human relations.

Taking these works as a whole, a number of theoretical themes clearly emerge which complement the themes that were noted in the more empirical works presented in Chapter II. The first theme is methodological. The lifeworld of working class women in communities has not emerged in the literature, because the systematic bias of sociological research meant that the tools needed to study it did not exist. In the few cases where women's lives in communities

were portrayed (Bott, for example), they are viewed only in the context of family and personal life and not seen as having any public or political significance at all.

A second theme is the importance of liberalism in setting the agenda of both public life and intellectual inquiry. The use of the independent individual as a central and even a controlling analytic concept is one consequence of this. The focus placed on the solitary individual acting as a moral agent in a universe of discrete choices has obscured the possibility of conceptualizing the collective morality of community life.

Liberal social thought evokes a world divided into two separate and unequal spheres -- the public and the private. By assigning women to the private sphere of the household, it becomes possible to deny the role that women have taken in the public world and to ignore the sphere of community which has been constructed and inhabited by women.

It is not only the presuppositions of liberal thought that have served to obfuscate the importance of women's role in community. Middle class feminism, accepting the liberal paradigm of the public and private spheres, has attempted to advance the cause of women by insisting on women's right to move out of the household and into the public world of work, political life, and personal rights. Their analysis has for the most part failed to include working class women's world of community and connection. Finally, much, though not all, left political thinking has focused mainly on the workplace as a site of oppression, consciousness, and resistance. These analyses have ignored local community as a sphere of resistance and political life.

The analyses reported in this chapter frame a possible approach to understanding the personal, intersubjective, and political life of communities. In so doing they complement the more empirical studies discussed in the previous chapter. They also have much in common with critical analyses such as those of Castells and others who focus on grassroots community actions as a way of understanding the dynamics of urban life. When understood within these contexts, working class neighborhood women and the lifeworld that they make and inhabit may be seen as central to the life of communities and of cities.

## Chapter IV

### Historical Origins of Working Class Feminism

Working class feminism as a social movement came into being as a consequence of the convergence of specific historical forces that existed during the 1970s. While its origins may be traced to this specific period, working class feminism also built on the enduring legacy of community activism that is part of the hidden history of working class women.

Our knowledge of the history of this activism remains fragmentary. The political and social actions of working class women were frequently local in scope, episodic in character and directed toward achieving specific and limited goals. For these reasons, little note has been taken of them in official accounts. Historians, even those historians whose work focuses on protest actions and social movements, have often formulated categories of analysis that have excluded women's activism. This activism has been investigated only recently by such feminist historians as Kaplan (1982), Gutman (1977), Smith and Valenze (1988) and others.

In the cases analyzed by these scholars, as Kaplan notes, women undertook specifically political activities when they believed that their ability to care for their families and neighborhoods was threatened by outside forces. In these instances, the socially constructed boundary between the public and private

spheres was quickly dissolved as working class women through their actions, claimed the public world as their own. While women did not and indeed could not, take part directly in the official public activities of the legislatures, courts or other formal decision making bodies; they were frequently the leading participants in the marches, protests, riots and other public actions through which people sought to influence decision making processes and historic events. In many cases they were responding to specific problems and abuses as the analyses of Kaplan (1982) and Gutman (1977) indicate. But as Smith and Valenze (1988) note, in some cases, their actions were also inspired by a vision of creating a social organization based on the mutual concern of the members of a group for one other.

Utilizing the material to be investigated in this chapter, I will indicate the particular circumstances which led to the development of a new and self conscious political activism among working class women in the middle 1970s. The term "working class feminism," which was adopted by some women in this movement, is in itself an indication of a degree of political consciousness. The women who applied this term to their own social movement used it to signify their relationship to other forms of feminism. On the one hand, they believed that their activities could be termed feminist in that they were acting within the context of their lives as women and in defense of a world that was important to them as women. On the other hand, they were aware that their ideas and activities differed from those of other individuals and groups who also termed

themselves feminists. In addition, they wished to clearly mark the difference between themselves and the image of feminism presented in the popular media.

In this respect, working class feminism may be compared to the feminism of black women. (Hooks, 1981) Implicit in the conceptualization of both black and working class feminism is a stance which is simultaneously critical and sympathetic toward mainstream feminism. These "hyphenated" forms of feminism share a common starting point. They grant the truth of many feminist contentions regarding the subordination of women and their disadvantaged position in terms of economic, social and political life. However these hyphenated feminists also view the world from a perspective that grows out of their own experience, their communities and their culture.

In part, that perspective was developed out of the life many of these women share with men, not just men as husbands and lovers, but also men as fathers, brothers, sons and members of the community. While these women are aware that some of the men of their group are oppressors, they also know that these men are--both individually and as a class-- themselves oppressed. Their refusal to relinquish their sympathy for and solidarity with the men of their class, race, ethnic group or neighborhood is more complex than it seems. It is quite different from the conservative critique which decries modern feminism as "manhating" and prescribes instead the continuation of traditional relations between men and women. Rather, it grows out of these women's concern for their families and communities and their sense of group allegiance, which serves as a counterweight to the more individualistic feminism of middle class women.

For these women to be able to define themselves as feminists requires a careful balancing of their individual goals, desires and wishes with their concern for the relationships, attachments and allegiances which constitute an equally important element of their definition of self.

Some analysts believed that political activism was dying out in the United States in the mid-1970s or that it had already done so. The 1970s have been called the "me decade" or been referred to in terms of the "culture of narcissism."

Many of the political movements which endured and developed throughout the period were viewed by political analysts as trivial, ephemeral or too specific and goal directed to have any larger meaning. Their goals seemed less radical, less broadly based and less interesting than such movements of the 1960s as the peace movement, the civil rights movement or the student movement.

I believe, in agreement with such analysts as Boyte (1980), Krauss (1989), and Castells (1983), that the political activism of the period was more significant than was apparent at the time. The social and political movements of the 1970s did not necessarily give voice to utopian visions of the future or to sweeping agendas for social reform and change; these movements were both more concrete and more local in orientation. Such movements as the environmental movement, the antinuclear movement and various local coalitions working against superhighways provided a focus for the organizing efforts of ordinary people. As Krauss (1989) has argued, such movements become vehicles for the politization of people who do not otherwise regard themselves as political actors. The struggles that ordinary citizens waged around these issues gave them a

window of understanding into the workings of power. In the process, they developed what Krauss has termed a critical consciousness which facilitated their transformation from passive subjects into citizen activists.

I believe that the possibility for working class feminism as well as for these other movements arose from a confluence of two broadly based and important historical trends. On one side, there was a threat to the urban neighborhood community and to the everyday life within them posed by the accelerating trend toward increased rationalization and capital accumulation in the postwar world. These broad based global and national shifts constituted a threat to the economic base, the political matrix and indeed the very existence of neighborhood life. (See, for example, Castells, 1977, or Logan and Molotch, 1987.) However, the period of the seventies presented the residents of urban working class neighborhoods with an opportunity as well as a threat. Viewed from this perspective, the possibility for progressive political action and social change was suggested by the example provided by the activism of the sixties.

Until this period, most working class people had assumed that they would continue to take care of their own needs or that the state would continue to provide the services that were necessary for the maintenance of community life. A series of sweeping changes undercut these assumptions and threatened the continuity of everyday life in inner city neighborhoods.

One of the most comprehensive changes that characterize the period following World War II is the enormous shift of people and resources from the inner cities to the newly built suburbs. The historical dynamic of this change and



its relationship to capital accumulation as well as to class oppression is traced by Castells in The Urban Question (1977). Castells locates this current trend within a long term historical process and traces its development over time, using a number of case studies. His work shows the relationship between suburbanization, the "fiscal crisis" of the cities, and long term capital accumulation in concrete terms. The case studies he employs show the impact of these changes on peoples' lives as well as the formation of various movements developed to resist the impact of these trends. The Marxist framework that Castells uses to formulate his analysis provides a theoretical and historical context for understanding the effects of these powerful changes on the lives of ordinary people.

The changes occurring in modern America continue and extend the transformation of American society which began in the period of intense industrialization following the Civil War and persisted through the beginning of the twentieth century. In this earlier period, many people moved out of the rural areas and into the large cities that had become the great industrial centers of the time. In a similar way, there was an exodus out of the cities and into the developing suburban communities following World War II.

This central tendency of the postwar period may be viewed from a number of different perspectives. The change was far more than a simple geographic shift. It represented a fundamental political, economic and demographic reorganization of the social structure. Modern suburban communities represent centers of power, influence and resources far removed

from center cities. The existence of these new suburban communities was part of a larger economic trend that included the reorganization of both the workforce and the means of distribution of goods and services. It led to the creation of new decentralized production facilities and administrative networks as well as new markets and such new types of distribution centers as the suburban mall. It also created a new suburban culture based on the values of mobility, individuality and success. It stood squarely in opposition to the older values of tradition, family, and community that grew out of the collective life of small towns and older urban neighborhoods. Using their economic advantages, suburban residents were able to create a political power base that overwhelmed the residents of the troubled inner cities.

It was not a random distribution of people leaving the city; the suburban exodus was demographically stratified. It was the comfortable middle classes and some upper level blue collar workers, the young, the affluent, and the relatively assimilated who moved into the new communities. The people left behind in the inner cities were often poorer and older, newcomers and members of minority groups. The privileged status of the new suburbanites provided a strong base from which to use political and economic leverage to secure resources from both governmental and private sources. Examining public policy decisions and events in a number of related areas clarifies how the suburbs were built at the expense of the cities. Further it becomes clear how this pattern emerged out of deliberate decisions by a network of cooperating public and private institutions.

Conducting World War II had absorbed the resources of the nation for the duration of the conflict. In the United States as elsewhere, domestic spending had been severely curtailed. When the war ended, a shift to the production of consumer goods became necessary. A new pattern of social expenditure was developed at this time. Once again it became possible to expend resources for such domestic needs as transportation, housing, education, health care, and economic development. The question was: how would these newly available resources be allocated?

The area of transportation provides an interesting example of how this process of allocation worked. A new transportation infrastructure was built to support the movement of new residents into the suburbs. A system of federally funded, state funded and local roads, expressways and highways was put into place. These new roads directly benefitted those individuals and companies who lived, worked, or did business in the suburbs. This new road system offered little advantage to center city residents.

At the same time that the roads were being built, insufficient attention was focused on the needs of the cities for improving and maintaining public transportation. Subways and bus and trolley lines had been neglected during the period of wartime austerity. However few attempts were made during the postwar period to assess or to meet growing needs for public transportation within urban areas. Improvements were needed to increase mobility and to clear congestion in the cities. Clearly, the emphasis was on providing roads for people traveling by car rather than on providing public transportation in either cities or

suburban areas. This of course rendered the suburbs inaccessible to those without private automobiles at their disposal. Through this process, the suburbs and suburban lifestyles became associated with greater mobility as well as with greater wealth and power.

Inner city residents were doubly penalized by the building of these new highways. In addition to losing transportation funds that might have been used to improve obsolete urban transport systems, the new highways themselves were slashed through inner city neighborhoods without regard to the impact of elevated highways on urban communities or their residents. In the 1950s, the heyday of highway building, roads were pushed in all directions through the neighborhoods of New York City as well as other cities around the country.

One such neighborhood is the Williamsburg-Greenpoint community in north Brooklyn where I did the fieldwork that led to this dissertation. This community was split in half by the building of the Brooklyn Queens Expressway during the 1950s. Homes were destroyed, as well as such neighborhood institutions as local churches. People in the community had organized strong and vehement protest actions, as well as utilizing the political process in their effort to have the highway rerouted away from the residential area and into a more industrial portion of the neighborhood. The protests were unheeded, as was the case in most urban areas. Public authorities used the power of eminent domain to condemn whatever properties they required for their project. Alternative routes more responsive to neighborhood priorities were not seriously considered. It was clear that the wishes of engineers and roadbuilders far outweighed those

of the neighborhood residents. The area surrounding the elevated expressway became a zone of permanent blight and deterioration. For neighborhood residents, it was the first intimation of the change and loss that would characterize events in urban working class areas during the post war period.

Local residents were shocked and troubled by their inability to influence the course of events which affected their lives so profoundly. The impact of such occurrences is difficult to describe. It goes far beyond the loss of a particular battle regarding a specific issue; in this case the building of a road in a way that brutalizes the community. Local residents had taken pride in their participation in World War II. The community had sent its sons off as willing and proud members of the armed forces. It had accepted its share of wartime casualties and deaths. In addition to the young men who had gone off to fight the war, many of the women and the older workers left behind had worked in the Brooklyn Navy Yard producing ships and armaments. To these immigrants and children of immigrants, their participation in this national epic marked their acceptance as real Americans. They had expected to participate fully in the benefits of the better future that they had helped to create. Being pushed aside by powerful forces shook their confidence in American society and turned them inward toward the local community just at the time when they were ready to turn outward to the larger society.

The role played by government in these struggles and its indifference to the needs of neighborhood residents was a further shock. The events which occurred and people's response to them set up a scenario which would be

repeated in many such confrontations in the future. Local residents blamed municipal government and the politicians for letting them down. They in turn were characterized by opponents and by the press as enemies of progress, people who valued their "selfish" interest in the quality of life in their own neighborhood above the general good represented by the building of the new road which was "for everybody." In the confrontations which were to occur over the following years, neighborhood people were often cast in the role of obstructionists, standing in the way of progress in order to defend "selfish" interests.

It was not only government policies which favored new development in the suburbs over the preservation of city neighborhoods. Banks and other financial institutions used their power of decision concerning mortgages, loans and the allocation of investment capital to build the suburbs at the expense of the inner cities. People in inner city neighborhoods deposited their savings in local banks and other financial institutions. These same banks systematically turned down their applications for mortgages, home improvement loans and business capital. The savings deposits of urban residents financed the homes and businesses being built in the suburbs. This practice was called redlining and it occurred in Williamsburg -Greenpoint as well as in other inner city neighborhoods all around the nation. Redlining was named for the red line that is drawn on a map around an area in which a bank is no longer interested in advancing credit to the residents. Since there was a great deal of mystification about the process by which a mortgage or other loan is granted, people who were turned down assumed that they as individuals, were not credit worthy. It took

a long time for local residents to piece together a large number of individual events and to realize that an important cause of the deterioration of their neighborhoods was the systematic refusal of banks to provide any type of local financing.

The economic bulwark of working class neighborhoods is work. The availability of jobs for members of working class households is the main economic resource available to people in these neighborhoods. Therefore the economic shifts that led to the loss of jobs were even more damaging than the loss of housing or transportation. though it is obvious that these losses interact to multiply the level of injury to working class neighborhoods. As jobs opportunities diminished, good transportation becomes more critical, since it enables people to travel to jobs that are further away. Inadequate transportation makes job hunting more difficult and cuts off possible sources of employment because of the difficulty of traveling to them. People who are having trouble finding or keeping jobs cannot purchase, maintain or rent houses.

Many older working class neighborhoods were mixed use areas. Residential housing was intermixed with light industry. Heavier industrial plants, warehouses and interstate and international shipping facilities were located close by on the outskirts of the neighborhood. Often large factories were built first and then housing was constructed in relationship to the location of the factory. Workers liked the convenience of the neighborhood and the proximity of home and work sites.

Williamsburg-Greenpoint typifies these older working class neighborhoods in many ways and provides an illustration of the course of events that challenged the continuation of neighborhood life. The location of this neighborhood had been especially favorable for mixed land use because of the proximity of the neighborhood to the waterfront. This provided convenient shipping facilities for other industries and was itself a source of jobs in the shipping industry -- jobs as longshoremen, merchant seamen and in the once thriving Brooklyn Navy yard. Huge factories such as Domino Sugar, Rheingold Beer, and Pfizer Chemicals provided work for large numbers of local residents. A large wholesale meat and produce market was also a good source of employment. The area was honeycombed with smaller businesses as well. These included smaller and medium sized manufacturers, wholesalers, trucking companies, and warehousing facilities. A network of retail establishments and service providers served the needs of local residents. The distinct ethnic enclaves in the area established a demand for ethnically identified goods and services. The plenitude of employment opportunities reached its height during World War II when the Brooklyn Navy Yard functioned at full capacity -- providing jobs for large numbers of the workers from the local neighborhood and beyond.

Following the end of World War II, the decline in job opportunities was rapid and permanent. (See Gorz, 1982; Aronowitz, 1973, 1983.) This economic shift was similar to events occurring in other older northeastern cities. The Navy Yard was the first to scale back its operations. Although it remained open until the early 1960s, the end of wartime demand led to immediate and drastic cuts in



its production schedule. No new ships was built there after the war ended. A few vessels were brought in for repair. Not only did the wartime demand for aircraft carriers, destroyers, and transport ships end, but the changing technology of weaponry made many of these types of ships obsolete. The once bustling, thriving waterfront facility became a ghost town, its buildings, docks and yards fell into disrepair. It was an omen of things to come for the rest of the waterfront as well.

The piers of New York harbor were the scene of On the Waterfront, the classic film about longshoremen. However, even while the film was being made, the way of life on which it was based was already declining. Once again technological shifts and larger economic forces created currents of change which affected urban neighborhoods in ways that local residents were unable to control.

Like many of the other older cities of the northeast and midwest, New York City rapidly declined as a manufacturing center. Since fewer goods were being manufactured, there was less to ship. In addition, other methods of transportation were replacing shipping. Other ports, such as Port Newark, with newly built containerized facilities competed successfully with the Brooklyn waterfront for an ever increasing share of the shipping business that remained.

Throughout the New York area, manufacturing jobs declined during the period following the war. Williamsburg Greenpoint was especially hard hit as it had contained the largest concentration of heavy industry in New York City. (see Susser, 1982, DiFazio, 1985)

Many of the largest industrial plants either shut down or moved out of the city. Some went out of business as the demand for their products declined. Others moved their plants to the suburbs, the southern states or overseas in their search for cheaper rent and electric power as well as a less costly and more docile non-union labor force. Citywide manufacturing industries declined as well as those located in the Williamsburg-Greenpoint area. The garment industry is a primary example of this trend. While maintaining their offices and showrooms on Seventh Avenue in Manhattan, hundreds of companies moved their manufacturing plants out of New York City, taking with them thousands of skilled, semi skilled and unskilled blue collar jobs. Small, medium sized and large garment shops had provided employment for men and women, full time and part time workers in neighborhoods all over the city. When these factories relocated, the new plants were designed to be less labor intensive.

Blue collar workers were hit hard by this massive decline in manufacturing industries which had provided the economic base of their families and neighborhoods. It was a bitter pill for people who been brought up to believe that anyone who was willing to work would always be able to make a living and support a family. Full employment during the war had raised workers' hopes and expectations of a prosperous future. The disillusionment they experienced in terms of their fading economic prospects mirrored the disillusionment they felt in terms of their declining importance in American society. From their point of view, their sons had fought the war and they had produced the materiel that kept the armed forces functioning. Yet there seemed

to be no reward for their efforts. One group of longshoremen, through their union, were able to negotiate an income guarantee for laid off workers.(DiFazio, 1985) Other workers however faced either unemployment or a much reduced livelihood working in a more marginal industry.

It was an additional irony of the times, that just when factories were moving from the north to the south, large numbers of rural southerners, especially blacks and people from the Caribbean basin were moving in the opposite direction, migrating from south to north. Leaving rural poverty for what they hoped was a region of greater opportunity in the northern cities, they arrived just in time for the great postwar decline in economic opportunity. These new migrants competed with established working class groups for both housing and jobs. Their strong desire for work coupled with the limited opportunities open to them made them available as a low cost labor force in many non-unionized shops. Thus white workers who had lost their jobs for the reasons discussed here, found that even lower level jobs were not necessarily available.

The new migrants, as desperate for housing as they were for jobs, moved into those working class areas which were already experiencing the greatest degree of decline and deterioration. Cynical landlords overcrowded and milked the already dilapidated buildings that they rented to these newly arrived immigrants. The appearance of blacks, Hispanics and other minority groups on the scene just at the time when economic opportunity and neighborhood life were entering a period of decline made these groups available as scapegoats for the frustrating dilemmas of the white working class. As we shall note in another

section of this chapter, the demands made by these groups in the civil rights and black nationalist movements exacerbated the already escalating tensions between the black and white working class.

The economic decline of blue collar neighborhoods constituted the root of their problems. Without the income necessary to support their families and their communities, neighborhood decline seemed inevitable. However this aspect is only half the story. The trends set in motion by economic forces were reinforced by the new political realities of neighborhood life. One basic element of a stable neighborhood is the income of its residents that provides them with the ability to purchase the goods and services they need for an adequate life style. Another element is the infrastructure of public services. Here beleaguered older urban neighborhoods were forced to compete with the newer, wealthier and more powerful suburban communities discussed in previous sections.

The state, the taxes it collects as well as the services it provides has long been a ground of struggle between classes and interest groups. What was added to this struggle in the period following the second war was the geographic base provided by the movement of more privileged groups to the suburbs and the need to expand government services to these growing populations as well as to create new services where none had previously existed. Obviously, in addition to the road construction referred to earlier in the chapter, the new communities needed hospitals, schools and other public facilities. Beyond the need to create the public sector, however, these communities competed aggressively in the political arena for the allocation of public resources to provide a high level of

public services in their communities. They sought and often got funding formulas which favored the suburbs over both urban and rural communities. The middle and upper middle class residents of the suburbs regarded a high level of public services as an entitlement. They expect adequate police protection, excellent education in their schools and high quality sophisticated medical care in their hospitals. Exercising the option of choice which higher income provides, many had left the cities because of what they viewed as the crime problem. Others moved to suburban communities to insure the high quality of their childrens' education.

The relative success of suburban communities in achieving the level of services that they demanded placed pressure on the state, making it more difficult to maintain the level of services needed to sustain the quality of life in inner city neighborhoods. So the postwar period has been marked by twin tendencies, the creation of booming and prosperous suburbs and the crumbling and decay of older inner city neighborhoods. The process of decline which is being described here is by no means the consequence of a natural aging process or of the operation of impersonal market forces. It is not inevitable that older working class neighborhoods should crumble into decaying slums. When it does happen, it is the consequence of choices that have been made within governmental and private institutions and that are subject to the political and economic influence of interested parties. The result is that resources are withdrawn from inner city neighborhoods at the point when they are most

needed to deal with the aging of the physical infrastructure and the adjustment problems of new arrivals.

The pattern of the withdrawal of public resources is similar in many older cities. Schools and hospitals are "consolidated" and closed. Police and firefighting services are reduced. Older public parks and playgrounds are not maintained and no new ones are built. Libraries close or remain open during fewer hours. When residents of these areas protest these actions to municipal agencies or elected representatives, they are told either that the services are no longer needed or that the municipality can no longer afford them. Administrators have worked out the mathematical formulae which "prove" that the services are no longer needed. They seldom venture out into these neighborhoods to note the effect of these service cuts on the quality of life.

The services which were being reduced were not only important in terms of the specific functions that were performed, they were also an integral part of the ongoing life of the community and as such had a number of practical and symbolic functions. The existence of stable health and education facilities, of adequate police and fire protection and other service were seen as an indication of stability and continuity in the community and became a part of the community tradition. In addition, community residents had ongoing relationships with particular teachers, doctors, and nurses, police officers, fire fighters and park attendants.

Schools were a particular source of neighborhood pride and tradition. In a neighborhood in which only a small number of people go to college, "old school

ties" may well refer to high schools or even elementary schools. The existence of health and protective services represent a continuing commitment on the part of the state to provide help and protection in emergency situations and times of special need. The loss or diminution of the services not only lowers the actual quality of life, but it also calls into question people's image of the neighborhood as a viable community and a good place to live. The loss of those institutions that people regarded as a part of the community was a shattering blow to the morale of people who had believed that their neighborhood was alright. It seemed as though communities was under attack by forces both inside and outside the neighborhood. Deserted, boarded up and decaying buildings which had once been schools, hospitals, fire stations and police precincts served as a visible reminder of the erosion of services and of the loss of these community defining institutions.

The way in which these events occurred made them even more difficult for neighborhood people to deal with. Occasionally, there was a clear dramatic incident in which the connection between the event and the lessening of the quality of life in a particular neighborhood was apparent. The building of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway through a residential portion of Williamsburg-Greenpoint was such an event. It stirred a strong response at the time and is recollected even today with bitterness.

Often urban neighborhoods lose facilities and institutions in a way which makes it difficult to pinpoint the event or to perceive it as a consequence of policy decisions. This type of occurrence is what Harvey Molotch has termed a

"creeping event." An event of this type occurs in gradual stages. The early phases are so subtle as to be hardly noticeable. When people do take note of them, it is already too late: a process has been set into motion which is impossible or at least very difficult to reverse. For example, if a school has been slated for closing, this action is not taken immediately because to do so would be to risk an outraged response from the surrounding neighborhood. Instead a five year process is put into motion. As teachers retire, they are not replaced. Funding for maintenance and supplies does not diminish, but neither does it keep pace with inflation. These are not actions, but rather meaningfully intended failures to act. Nobody has done anything, but over time these subtle but deliberate failures to act result in a school which has become dilapidated, understaffed and educationally inadequate. At this point, a zoning change may be used to transfer a substantial number of the students to another school or a study may "prove" that the school is not needed. Then the school is closed.

People from the neighborhood may protest this action, but it can be shown that the school was inadequate or unnecessary. It was not force that was used to accomplish this goal in spite of the wishes of neighborhood residents; it was the logic of administrative rationality. From this perspective, children and their teachers become interchangeable units to be manipulated by powerful administrators who look at the larger picture. Neighborhood residents who oppose these administrative designs are characterized as pursuing only their own selfish interests or as obstructing progress. Even after the school or other facility has been closed, people may feel badly about the loss, but they are still



not certain that the experts are not correct. Perhaps the school really was not" necessary." In this way, the implacable logic of bureaucratic rationality is unrelentingly brought to bear upon neighborhood life.

It is only after loss after loss has reduced the quality of neighborhood life dramatically that residents are forced to acknowledge that something has indeed happened. By the time this recognition occurs, a neighborhood may be too damaged for the possibility of recovery. In this way, many older working class neighborhoods in cities throughout the northeast and midwest went into a period of profound decline just when people's hopes and expectations for better times and postwar prosperity were high. These neighborhoods had survived the depression and the war, yet this postwar period brought not the good times and prosperity that people had hoped for, but the loss of jobs and the decline of many previously stable neighborhoods.

People who lived in these older working class neighborhoods faced an overwhelming challenge; if they wanted their neighborhoods and their way of life to survive, it was necessary for them to understand the forces arrayed against them and to change their approach to the world. For neighborhood women this experience is especially critical. The decline in neighborhood life which they experienced included all of the previously mentioned elements such as the attrition of the economic base, the loss of municipal services, the closing of local institutions, the deterioration both of an aging housing stock and of the physical infrastructure of the city. Working class women in urban neighborhoods directly experienced the consequences of the changes in the national economy and the

reallocation of resources from the cities to the suburbs. These changes called into question the continuation of a lifestyle rooted in cultural continuity, human relationships and local institutions.

In the past, working class women living in urban neighborhoods may have defined their roles in relatively narrow terms taking family, community and local institutions as their frame of reference. In the changing world described above, in order to maintain these aspects of their everyday life, they found it necessary to enlarge the focus of their attention. On the surface little had changed in such traditional urban working class neighborhoods as Williamsburg-Greenpoint. They appear to be much the same as they ever were. However beneath the appearance of cultural tradition and continuity lies a level of historical change. The challenge of the postwar period also contained a possibility-the possibility for women to use their strong traditional social ties to develop and build new political approaches to defend their way of life.

The potential for women to develop new avenues of political expression was exemplified by the new social and political movements of the 1960s. These movements represented a historical opportunity for working class women to learn how to answer the challenge of economic and other changes which threatened neighborhood life.

The decade of the 1960s opened with the black civil rights movement challenging the country to live up to the promises of the Constitution. The 1955 Supreme Court decision concerning school desegregation had swept aside the "separate but equal" rationale which had provided a legal basis of de jure

segregation in the south and defacto segregation in the north. In the late fifties, civil rights organizations were already organizing protests, marches, petition drives, boycotts and further legal action to press for the implementation of the Supreme Court decision on a nationwide basis. In the early stages of the movement, the action was pressed by the older civil rights organizations such as the NAACP and the Urban League. By the early sixties, a number of new groups with a more activist orientation had burst onto the national scene and made civil rights and an end to segregation a high priority on the nation's domestic agenda. In contrast to the older groups whose approach rested mainly on court cases, legislative initiatives, high level political negotiation and change from the top down, these new groups such as Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) and the Student Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC) favored direct action on a massive scale. The entire country was galvanized by such actions as the Montgomery bus boycott, the Woolworth lunch counter sitins and boycott and the forcible desegregation of public schools in Little Rock, Arkansas and elsewhere.

The civil rights movement set the stage for a decade of protest. The implications of this movement for American society are very important and do not only touch upon the issue of rights for a persecuted minority or the issue of equality under the protection of laws. The civil rights movement displayed the possibility of widespread grassroots struggle for fundamental change in social life.

Following the end of Reconstruction and the withdrawal of federal troops from the south, the country settled into a social pattern which could best be described as a color caste system. It was a system in which legal segregation, informal discrimination, local custom and usage as well as the denial of political rights and economic opportunity kept the vast majority of black citizens confined within a rigidly defined and stratified position in American society.

In the 1920s, strong nativist feelings reinforced negative stereotypes of black Americans. In the 1930s competition for scarce jobs intensified the hostile competition between black and white workers. Some white workers came to favor segregation as a way of protecting their jobs. World War II however was a different story. All groups were called upon to play a role in the national mobilization for the war. While black troops had much to complain about in terms of their unequal treatment in a segregated army, their contributions were needed. For the first time, they gained some small leverage on a national level and were in a position to make demands for more equitable treatments. It was on this basis and on the basis of accumulating Supreme Court decisions that the civil right movement took on real momentum during the late fifties and early sixties.

One aspect of the civil rights movement of the 1960s concerned "rights" in an abstract sense. These rights could be claimed on the basis of being a person and a citizen. The legitimacy of individuals' claim to these rights is grounded in law and particularly in the Constitution. They had been granted to all citizens in the Bill of Rights and to blacks in particular in the thirteenth,

fourteenth and fifteenth amendments, passed during the period following the civil war. The Constitution itself is grounded in the natural rights philosophy of the Enlightenment. From this perspective, all persons are equal in terms of their participation in civil society. All participate equally in the social contract which constitutes them as citizens and as subjects of the state. Although in theory, all were equal under the Constitution; various groups had struggled to achieve voting rights and other accoutrements of citizenship. The first group to claim rights under the Constitution were landless workers, who fought against property qualifications for voting and for universal manhood suffrage. Women too had struggled for the right to vote and had been successful only after the First World War opened up new possibilities for social change. Blacks had been granted citizenship rights in thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments, but local and state laws, custom, terror tactics and the tacit consent of the federal government had stripped them of the political, economic and social basis of citizenship.

The civil rights movement asserted the claim to full citizenship for blacks, including, and perhaps particularly the right to vote. This movement carried the banner of universality against the particularistic local customs and community based institutions of American society. Respect for local custom and states' rights had formed part of the traditional rationale for racial segregation and the denial of rights. Therefore in order for blacks to win their rights, it was necessary for the doctrine of universal rights of citizens to prevail against the claims of local custom. In this case it appeared that universalistic rights were

good and local particularism was bad. Blacks pressed their claims through the courts and in the streets. They insisted that their rights of citizenship had to be granted priority over the local customs of the south.

However, on the way to the millennium of complete racial equality, the civil rights movement which had been developed on the basis of principles of equal justice by "blacks and whites together" became transformed into a black identity movement which moved away from the goals of integration and toward a new and positive identification with black culture and black heritage. Before this change occurred, there was a brief period in which black and white civil rights workers were united into a cohesive group working together toward a shared vision of progressive social change. This was what Martin Luther King Jr. described with the term "beloved community." It was a community of people united by their shared dedication and their shared risk. Belonging to this community and struggling to achieve what has been termed "simple justice" for black Americans was a remarkable experience which changed the lives of many participants, both black and white, forever. Individuals who in this past had been passive, acquiescent and afraid drew new strength from their membership in this community of belief and action. For many, the civil rights movement provided an initiation into the possibilities for political action and social change.

The new laws and court decisions that were the direct consequence of the civil rights movement did not lead to the full equality that black Americans had hoped for. While new legislation and court decisions did indeed change the legal context of social relations, racism remained entrenched in social institutions and

in informal areas also. Black civil rights advocates and other blacks as well concluded that both the struggle for legal rights and their partnership with whites did not provide an adequate basis for the fundamental social change that many now believed was necessary.

Moving away from the struggle for equal rights, many blacks moved toward a position based on a claim of uniqueness and racially defined community. Such slogans as "black is beautiful," "black and proud" and "black power" expressed a growing sense that legal equality by itself was not sufficient. Blacks continued to demand equal rights as citizens and persons, but in addition, there was a new interest in the uniqueness of the black experience and its expression in history and literature. This new aspect of the black movement added an element of self-transformation through knowledge and changing lifestyles. American blacks began to identify their struggle as part of a larger anti-colonialist struggle of blacks and third world people around the world. The tension between universalistic and particularistic elements of citizenship and identity may be clearly seen in the advocacy of equality and full citizenship on the one hand and the insistence on uniqueness and community on the other. Black claims for civil and legal rights are clearly situated in a universalistic view of the concept of citizenship. All citizens are entitled to legal rights conferred on them by virtue of personhood and citizenship. This claim grows out of the doctrine of the "inalienable rights of man" and out of those specific rights granted under the constitution both to citizens in general and to blacks in particular in the Civil War amendments. The civil rights movement swept away the rationale

of local custom as a reason to deprive blacks of legal and civil rights, thereby signaling the triumph of legal universalism. The legal arguments and political tactics which were successfully employed to gain rights for blacks have subsequently been successfully employed to assert the rights of other groups as well. Notable among these have been women and the handicapped. In fact it was the addition of the term "sex" to the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 that provided one of the important legal bases for women's drive for equality.

In the United States, political and cultural elements of the black struggle for cultural uniqueness coalesced in a movement for the decentralization of decision making and local control of neighborhood communities by their residents. There was a general movement for local economic development and a specific drive for local control of public schools. In New York City, communities did achieve a degree of input into the decision making process concerning local development through community planning boards. The administrative organization of public education was also restructured to include local school boards. These concessions to local decision making and autonomy were a response to the increasing militancy of northern blacks.

These elements of the black struggle for equality, recognition and power set the tone for much of the political life of the nation during the period that followed. The black struggle continued throughout the sixties and early seventies and indeed is still continuing, since racial equality is still far from having been achieved. The progressive ferment set in motion by the civil rights movement found another field of expression in the peace movement and the student



movement. Indeed, from at least one perspective, we should not regard these as three separate movements since they were intertwined in terms of participants, tactics and goals. Many of the individuals who first became politically active in the civil rights movement continued and intensified their political participation in the peace movement. College students provided much of the energy and the participation in all three of these movements. Many of the organizers and participants in these movements came to constitute what has been termed "the New Left."

The relationship between the New Left and working class people in general and neighborhood women in particular is an interesting one. The conventional image of this relationship that emerged from the politically volatile 1960s and early 1970s is one of hostility and confrontation between these groups. Perhaps the classic image of the period is that of hardhatted construction workers attacking peace marchers. Another image is of radical students confronting (working class) police officers with chants of "Pigs, pigs, pigs." The students demonstrated for an agenda of social change which included greater equality, peace and disarmament as well as a generally less rigid and more permissive social order.

In comparison, working class groups were still attempting to understand how the social change that had already occurred had undercut their values and their way of life. The call for peace and disarmament was viewed as calling into question the patriotism which gave working class people, often the children and grandchildren of immigrants, a sense of being part of American society. The

demand for racial equality was seen as increasing the threats to their jobs and neighborhoods, already under siege as a result of the historical changes discussed above. The aspiration of the students for a freer society with more tolerance for unconventional life styles was seen as challenging the familial and religious anchors of working class people's lives. Attempts to reform the curriculum and administrative organization of higher education was seen as sheer ingratitude by those whose children had yet to be assimilated into such institutions.

The media emphasized scenes of confrontation and hostility in ways that made them a part of the national self image of the day. A well known New York Times Magazine article in the early 1970s focused on the conservative beliefs of the more prosperous workers, who were portrayed as being happy with what they had and grateful for the opportunities offered by American society.

However, in spite of this antipathy and hostility, there were also underlying currents of sympathy and identification at work between these two groups. One area in which this occurred centers on the value of community. An emphasis on this value, as opposed to the values of achievement, mobility and individuality characterized the New Left as well as the social organizing they engaged in. Civil rights organizing in the south had been energized by the strong sense of social integration which united its participants. People who had braved the water hoses and attack dogs, the hostile mobs and brutal beatings felt a strong bond with others who had shared their peril, as well as a deep commitment to this community of struggle. Students who had gone south to aid the movement developed a sense of unity with the members of the southern

black community who had initiated and were carrying out the work of organizing their own communities and colleges. In embracing the value of community, along with the closely related ideas of self help and mutual aid, civil rights workers were developing an institutional model based on the ideas and practices which had characterized the daily life of both black and white poor and working class groups for generations.

This ideal of community stood in sharp contrast to the more individualistic orientation of the middle class families from which many of the students had come. Many of the students who either joined or sympathized with the movement did so in direct opposition to the prediction of their own future as one of professional work, conformity, success and material comfort. This image of middle class life was depicted in the "Man in the Gray Flannel Suit," a popular novel of the 1950s which portrays the life of a man who learns that conformity and the sacrifice of personal life are the price of success in the corporate world. In the end, the protagonist rejects that success because of the high price it exacts. Unlike the students, he chooses personal life and family life as the alternative. A collective or community based alternative was inconceivable in the vision of the individual presupposed in the middle class culture of that time. However his refusal of corporate life, and the resonance that it found in popular culture, in some ways foreshadows the collective refusal of the students who became part of the oppositional culture of the 1960s.

The tension between particularistic and universalistic principles of organization described above in terms of the civil rights movement, continued to

be an important element of all of the movements of the 1960s. There are several perspectives from which to view this tension. On the one hand, the insistence on the validity of various particularistic principles advocated in opposition to a blandly universalistic view of American society was a driving force of the various movements. On the other hand, the inability of various organizations within the movement to resolve internal tensions focusing on the balance between universalistic and particularistic elements was one of the great weaknesses of the oppositional movements of the 1960s and perhaps even their fatal flaw.

Within the civil rights and black identity movement, the disagreement between those who wished to abolish the historical obstacles that blacks face in American culture and those who wish to articulate, build on and enhance the unique cultural heritage of black Americans continued. The force of this struggle was framed in the debate between the followers of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. Ironically, both these men transcended the understanding that others had of them and each contained within himself elements of both the universalistic and the particular.

It seems as though historians and social analysts are still working out the crisscrossing sympathies and tensions of the social movement of the sixties. Only a few people had begun to stipulate gender as a social category or to discuss women as an oppressed group. Women, especially younger, middle class and educated women, were eager participants in all of these movements. Many of these women found in the civil rights movement and the peace movement a

sense of power and purpose which had previously not been available to them. They responded to the challenge of creating social change by developing new capacities, new understandings and new courage. Black women of all social classes were full and equal participants in the sit-ins, the marches, the freedom schools and the voter registration campaigns. However, in most instances, they continued to be ignored at the highest levels of leadership in these campaigns. Responding to the particular persecution of black men in American society, the black movement continued to frame its rhetoric in terms of the rights of black men.

In the student movement as well, and perhaps to an even greater degree, women provided much of the work and energy but little of the leadership and voice of the movement. Many women who believed in the emancipatory platform of the movement wondered why their personal relationships and political roles remained untouched by these new ideas. The growing dissatisfaction of these women has been well documented in some of the early writings of the feminist movement. In the liberated future imagined by student activists, somehow the position of women remained unchanged. In the practices of these liberatory organizations, the sex class hierarchy continued to be reproduced. Evans (1979) as well as others have documented the movement of women out of such organizations as Students for a Democratic Society and into newly developed radical feminist groups of the period.

Class antagonism was an important but often unstated element of the struggles of the period. Pro and anti-Vietnam War sentiment seemed to break

down along lines of class and age, though this cleavage was somewhat overstated by the media. While there were other issues, it was their advocacy of the anti-war position that made college students a serious force in American politics. Students who were both politically active and progressive in their orientation had their differences, but their resolute stand against the war united them.

The New Left outlined a visionary utopia which swept away particularistic elements of difference in a grand design for the future.

Blacks alone had established their claim to uniqueness and this claim was reinforced by the authority of their still energetic social movement.

However the New Left's vision of the future did not seem to have a place for those others who saw themselves not merely as persons or citizens, but as members of a family, community, religion or ethnic group. An important source of strain within the New Left was between those who had worked directly with poor and working class people in grassroots community struggles and those had not had this type of experience. The latter maintained the radical purity of their vision, unsullied by any inclination to compromise its integrity in order to broaden its appeal. Those who had worked with neighborhood groups understood that everyday struggles to maintain neighborhood life captured people's energies and allegiance to a much greater degree than abstract visions of a future far removed from present day problems.

When the women's movement arrived on the scene, it presented its own mix of particularistic and universalistic elements. On the one hand, the women's movement was a civil rights movement, not unlike that of blacks. On this basis,

feminists demanded that women too be recognized as equal citizens and legal persons both in law and in practice. This universalistic philosophy was used to attack inequities within the legal system, discrimination within various institutional structures and diverse sexist assumptions which had come to form the time honored basis of civil society. As blacks had done in their civil rights movement, feminists pointed out how the range of life choices available to women was narrow and stereotyped, placing women in roles which were largely subordinate. Feminists also noted that women's socialization persuaded them to define themselves only in terms of this narrow range of possibilities and that the various media through which the culture defined itself and communicated with its members reinforced this very limited view of women's place in the social world.

The position of feminists who embraced this point of view, variously known as legalistic, liberal, mainstream etc may be summarized in terms of their strong and unanimous support for an equal rights amendment to the United States constitution and their belief that such an amendment would represent an important step forward for the cause of women. Their support for this position was based on the premise that an amendment which made the equality of women a part of the fundamental legal code of the nation would provide a legal and moral basis to fight against institutionalized discrimination and for equal access, equal opportunity and equal recompense for women.

On the other hand the women's movement also had strong particularistic elements. From this perspective, radical feminists stressed that women are

different, particularly in terms of their role in the reproductive process. Thus, aspects of women's role as child bearer plays a prominent part in this analysis. Early radical feminists such as Shulamith Firestone argue that it is women's bodies which are the site of the struggle between men, who wish to exercise power by controlling women's bodies and women who attempt to control their own lives and to break free of the biological imperatives of reproduction as well as the patriarchal family structure which has been constructed around them. In this analysis, the concept of patriarchy is explored and discovered to be a force as powerful as capitalism in perpetuating existing hierarchies.

Some of the arguments made from this point of view are couched in terms of anthropological questions concerning such concepts as women as property, the trade in women and the importance of the exchange of women in the founding of society. Radical feminists insist that it is women's reproductive capacity and the desire of men to control it which forms the basis of what they believe to be women's universal subjugation.

The relationship between the radical feminist approach referred to above and the socialist feminist approach is an interesting one. Socialist feminists build on the radical feminist analysis of patriarchy, though they defined the concept somewhat differently than the radical feminists. Socialist feminists take the intersection of patriarchy and capitalism as their starting point and assume the task of analyzing how these two forces intersect and reinforce each other. When they consider the social structure of the family for example, they focus on the relationship between modes of production and reproduction and male power and



dominance. They also note the appropriation of women's unpaid household labor in the process of capital accumulation and the existence of a dual labor market which segregates women into lower paying and generally less desirable jobs. Some socialist feminists have taken a somewhat different stance and investigated the possibility that women's economic contributions to family and community life give them more implicit power than an analysis of formal power relations would indicate.

Two broadly defined groups of women played an important role in this stage of the development of modern feminism. Many women who defined themselves as radicals left other social movements and began to articulate their own agenda for broad based social change. This group of militant women included both radical feminists and socialist feminists. In addition, a third subgroup of radical lesbians emerged, adding a third plank to the platform of militant feminists; namely freedom of sexual preference. This demand was added to the existing demands for reproductive freedom represented by the campaign for legal abortion and the demand for full legal equality, represented by the drive for the Equal Rights Amendment.

At the same time as the more militant branch of feminism was defining itself, particularly in juxtaposition to the New Left; middle class women were responding to Betty Friedan's passionate denunciation of the "feminine mystique" which confined women to a limited and gender defined role in society. These were women whose lives had been circumscribed by the wife--mother--housewife role. During the postwar period, many agencies of socialization had combined

to insist that women's place was in the home. This powerful propaganda, which ranged from Hollywood movies to Freudian analysis, warned women that any attempt to operate outside this sphere would result in dreadful unhappiness and perhaps personal tragedy.

Many women had accepted this limitation, but with a continuing sense of discomfort and unhappiness at the narrowness of the prescribed limits. Friedan's bombshell of a book gave this vague feeling of discomfort a name, as well as revealing the ways in which women had been persuaded to limit their lives. Equally important, by writing about the general phenomenon of the middle class housewife, Friedan demonstrated that women's responses to these limitations was a general one, rather than a personal idiosyncrasy. Without using the same conceptual approach as the radicals, these mainstream feminists also developed a framework which allowed them to understand the social forces which created male power and privilege in personal relations, in the family, in the economy and in public life in general. Women began to understand how by simply being women, they had been defined as being outside the male world of work, freedom and achievement.

The excitement and creativity of the early women's movement is undeniable, but the majority of women in the United States did not respond to it. Indeed, the far right succeeded in rallying large numbers of these women to an antifeminist banner. Poor and working class women, minority, third world and white ethnic women were largely absent from the women's movement. Within these groups, many women defined themselves in terms of their membership in

families, neighborhoods, ethnic, racial and religious groups. While they did not experience the problems and dilemmas of daily life to a lesser degree than the more privileged women of the middle classes; they experienced these difficulties within the framework provided by a network of social ties. They did not experience or express their problems in terms of their membership in an abstract category called women.

In fact the women's movement, as were the other social movements mentioned here, was perceived as challenging the beliefs and customs of working class people in urban neighborhoods. Each of these movements included proposals for sweeping social change and each in its own way challenged neighborhood values of tradition and continuity.

Each of these social movements seemed to contest some important idea about the rightful order of the social world. The civil rights and black identity movement for example, led to their fear that the gains of blacks would be made at the expense of the white working class. Living in a world of contracting opportunities for employment, housing and education, working class urban residents inferred that whatever was "given" to blacks in these areas would be taken from them. They concluded that blacks and other minority groups ought to work hard and wait their turn rather than making demands for immediate improvement.

Members of the student movement were viewed as both ungrateful for their opportunities and unnatural. The students showed little respect for their elders and for the established order and they were not thankful for the

educational opportunities which would allow them to have more choices and opportunities and to achieve a better, easier and more rewarding lives. The peace movement challenged a patriotism that had been honed in the battles of World War II and the Korean War. Veterans' groups were important social organizations in many working class communities and the wartime sacrifices of neighborhood families were remembered and respected.

The womens' movement was perceived as challenging the fabric of family continuity, the very institution upon which life itself depends. How could people be expected survive as individuals? The family is seen as the bulwark which protects the individual from all of the potential malevolence of the outside world and its inviolability is symbolized by the unity of the Holy Family.

While each of these movements challenged an established value of working class neighborhood residents, they also presented an opportunity for identification and positive change as well. Blacks for example, were demanding a more equitable share in the life of society, including legal equity, better education, expanded economic opportunities, greater recognition of their culture and heritage and more control of local resources and neighborhood institutions. Such an agenda could better the lives of other groups as well, particularly the working class and poor residents of urban neighborhoods. The black civil rights movement might be viewed as a challenge and a threat, but it could also be viewed as a model for action. While what was seen as the women's movement's challenge to the family and conventional morality continued to be evaluated in a highly negative way, other items in the feminist agenda received a more

sympathetic hearing. Shouldn't women be able to secure jobs, be paid a fair wage and be protected from rape and battery?

A second wave of social change organizations arose in the late sixties and early seventies. The end of the Vietnam War, combined with internal disputes about goals and tactics fragmented the student movement and the peace movement. Some former members grew up into a more conventional adult identities, but others continued to be social change activists in less global organizations. The unified civil rights movement of the early 1960s also split into a number of different groups. Many of these groups remained active, but chose more specific issues or a more local focus. Other ethnic identity groups based on the model of the black community, came into being. Often these groups were associated with a particular locally identified neighborhood. Groups which organized around particular specific concerns such as the environment or housing also expanded in importance during this period. Working class people in neighborhoods identified most strongly with those groups that had a local focus and addressed immediate issues.

Neighborhood women could feel some sense of identification with a number of these groups and organizations, but there was often some factor which prevented them from wholeheartedly embracing the organization as their own. The ethnic identity groups were often based on a male model of ethnic identification and emphasized masculine aspects of the particular culture. Neighborhood groups were also often male dominated. Women frequently participated in these groups, supplying much of the day to day labor that kept

them going, but the leaders and representatives of the groups were overwhelmingly male. Women did the clerical work, the local organizing and the cooking; but when they attempted to take a more prominent role, they found themselves shut out of the power structure. Some of these groups were completely male, others allowed women to join, but limited the roles available to them. None provided a forum in which working class women could present their agenda for both continuity and change.

Working class women were caught in a dilemma. The universalistic themes of those more global groups such as the women's movement felt uncomfortable because their lives were structured in terms of more particularistic concerns and patterns of association. At the same time, more particularistic groups such as neighborhood associations and ethnic identity groups were too male dominated and traditional to understand or welcome the concerns of working class women. Much of the mainstream sociological literature concentrating on working class women strongly suggests that they are narrowly focused on the concerns of their households and families. The more critical literature reviewed here indicates that this is not the case, but it is true that working class women do not join or participate in many conventional organizations that are organized in ways that do not take account of the particular blend of public and private concerns which constitutes the perspective of working class women.

Working class women were aware of the social change concepts being advocated by a number of groups with a progressive agenda. They were open

to considering these ideas because they understood that merely adhering to tradition would not provide any way of responding to the problems confronting their communities. These were women who valued their families, their neighborhoods, their cultures, and the traditional way of life represented by all of these. Ironically, in order to save these valued traditions, working class women needed to change. They needed to change in ways that would allow them to understand and confront the larger world and the destructive potential of the powerful forces that were being brought to bear on neighborhood life. Thus by the early 1970s, working class neighborhood women were faced with both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge they confronted was the destruction of their neighborhoods and of the economic basis and physical infrastructure that made their way of life possible. The opportunity that existed was to develop a new approach to these challenges which combined their own community traditions and the new political organizing tactics which had been developed in the 1960s and early 1970s.

As working class women themselves became more self conscious, other groups and organizations studying the threat to inner city neighborhoods developed an analysis which included a pivotal role for neighborhood women. Such private and governmental groups as the American Jewish Committee's Institute on Pluralism and Group Identity, the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs, HUD's Office of Neighborhood Development and the Pratt Urban Center played a part in developing this analysis. Nancy Seifer's Absent from the Majority (1974), the first work to present this new perspective, was published

under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee. The National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs, under the leadership of Gino Baroni, provided encouragement and funding for the first national convention of working class women who were interested in neighborhood life, held in Washington in 1974. It at this convention that the National Congress of Neighborhood Women (NCNW) was founded, providing a new forum for those women who wished to participate in the public sphere, but who found no place in either the women's movement or the various neighborhood and ethnic movements.

Another important element in the development of the working class women's movement was the resources that became available as a result of the federal government's response to the high rate of inner city unemployment discussed earlier in this chapter. The federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) proposed to create new jobs and training programs in inner city communities throughout the country. Local groups and organizations became the conduits for funneling these jobs and programs into various neighborhoods. These newly created job slots became the basis of a reinvigorated neighborhood activism throughout the country. People who had previously been part time unpaid volunteer community workers could now become full time paid staff members. Others could be trained to perform all kinds of functions that communities needed. Although women did not have equal access to this program, they did gain some access to resources which had not previously been available in local neighborhoods.



NCNW utilized the CETA program to create a staff and to begin to formulate programs and agendas around the themes of women and neighborhoods. They believed that by combining these concerns, they were creating a new perspective from which to understand the activities of both the women's movement and the neighborhood movement. This new perspective became the basis for a new philosophy, agenda, and program for action called working class feminism.

## Chapter V

### Working Class Women and Neighborhood Politics

The previous chapter describes the threat to neighborhood life that arose in the period following World War II. That threat was a consequence of capital accumulation, the creation of an international market and such related economic trends as suburbanization. These economic shifts also influenced the character of political life. Viewed from the perspective of urban neighborhood residents, these changes challenged them to formulate a political response with which they could protect and defend their communities.

Various possible approaches to neighborhood political organization are documented in works by Whyte (1981), Gans (1962), Kornblum (1974), and Katznelson (1981). Indeed, the ability of whole neighborhoods and of particular groups within neighborhoods to survive as communities may well be a function of a neighborhood's level of political organization. Political life plays a central role in urban neighborhoods.

It is the premise of this chapter that in many urban neighborhoods a new and important form of political organization emerged in the 1970s and early 1980s. This new approach to political organizing was grounded in the informal networks of association which had already been established by the working class women who were residents of these neighborhoods, and became connected with

ideas about organizing developed in the women's movement and in other progressive social movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. Boyte (1980) discusses this phenomenon in terms of what he calls the neighborhood movement, but I believe that this development cannot be adequately analyzed without an understanding of working class feminism. I argue that women traditionally have maintained networks of affiliation which gave them the capacity to organize as advocates for local concerns. Faced with the consequences of the threats to neighborhood life previously noted, in many neighborhoods the women in these networks of association responded by becoming more self aware and more self consciously political in their approach. (McCourt, 1977; Susser, 1982; Haywoode, 1983).

Since World War II, older urban working class neighborhoods have been challenged by many changes which have threatened their well-being and indeed their very existence. As discussed in the previous chapter, these challenges have included the attrition of economic bases through the loss of manufacturing plants and industries and the subsequent decline in the number of jobs, the redistribution of resources from the inner cities to the suburbs; the decline in municipal services; the aging of the housing stock; demographic changes; and gentrification and destructive forms of urban renewal (Fainstein and Fainstein, 1974; Gans, 1962). There are a number of possible outcomes in this process, which may be noted in various cities around the country.

Some neighborhoods, such as Boston's West End (Gans, 1962) and Detroit's Poletown (Wylie, 1989) have been totally leveled and no longer exist.

Others have declined from stable working class areas into slums. A substantial number of other neighborhoods have successfully staved off those negative outcomes, but have been gentrified instead, and no longer are affordable to their earlier residents. Some neighborhoods have fought hard to maintain their economic base, their housing stock, and their institutions (Haywoode, 1983; Boyte, 1981). The role that working class women have played in these struggles is a fascinating but largely untold story.

In this chapter, I present an overview of changing neighborhood politics. In the first part, I review early forms of political organization based on the central importance of the local political boss. In the second part, I examine three forms of what I term transitional neighborhood politics, and in the third part I develop the concept of the new politics of working class feminism.

To understand the importance of neighborhood women's roles in the new community politics, it is necessary to understand the earlier political institutions of working class neighborhoods. The descriptions of patterns of neighborhood politics that follow are general, and of necessity, ideal typical descriptions. They do not apply equally to all working class neighborhoods, and various studies report somewhat different results. Classical descriptions of the earlier politics of working class neighborhoods are provided by Whyte (1981) and Gans (1962). A somewhat dissenting and perhaps more up-to-date view is presented by Kornblum (1974).

### Part 1: Traditional Neighborhood Politics

The earliest type of political organization developed in urban working class neighborhoods developed out of the status of local residents as newly arrived immigrants without resources and with little or no knowledge of the society they were entering. These newly-arrived immigrants needed help to secure such basic necessities as jobs and housing. They turned first to the network of people from the old country, perhaps a relative, a friend, neighbor an individual from the same town or province. These personal ties were the only resource available to them. Often the individuals they contacted, barely able to survive themselves, referred the "greenhorns" to more powerful people, those able to use connections to do "favors," especially for newly-arrived and bewildered neighborhood residents. These "fixers" were able to provide a variety of services.

Through their relationships with landlords, shop owners and other business people, as well as with office holders and bureaucrats, they could assist in finding jobs and housing. They could lend small sums of money or direct the individual to someone who would lend larger amounts. People turned to these fixers both in life crises such as illness, unemployment, or eviction, and in everyday life. In return, the newcomers pledged their loyalty to the fixer's political organization. Their obligations included voting, party membership, and political work. The individual became a follower of the party boss.

Who were these powerful individuals who could negotiate the treacherous waters of the new society? First, they were of the same ethnic background as

their followers. Perhaps they were earlier arrivals who had been economically successful or who were outstanding in other ways. Their local political organizations built on the loyalty of their followers gave them the capacity to deliver blocks of votes to office seekers. This ability to deliver both votes and services gave them the ear of politicians, office holders, business people, and judges. As a result, they could request small favors for individual neighborhood residents, and perhaps larger concessions for local business people. The intercession of a fixer could influence an event as minor as a traffic ticket or as important as securing a job or avoiding a jail term.

Fixers derived power from a number of related aspects of their role. These included their reputations, the aura or mystique which surrounded them, their activities in the neighborhood and their ability to go outside of normal channels to solve a problem. The powerful individual could "fix" any number of situations, and this ability extended in two directions. On the one hand, as a representative of his neighborhood, his ethnic group or of an individual petitioner, he could fix a situation requiring the intervention of a member of the powerful classes including government officials. On the other hand, by using his power and influence in the neighborhood, he can fix election results and other aspects of the political process. The loyalty of his followers, the block-by-block organization of the district assures that everybody votes and votes the right way. Thus the power of the fixer rests on his ability to wield his neighborhood into a unified voting block that can be delivered to a particular candidate. This gives the fixer indirect influence as well, by providing entry into networks of power.

This network of influence includes illegal operations as well as politics and business.

The rackets, as Whyte (1981) calls them, were an important source of power, influence, and resources in many urban neighborhoods. These three worlds of power -- government, business, the rackets -- were intertwined. Using the informal contacts of the network, government policies favorable to business in general, and to the specific business interests within the network, may be formulated. Money flowed from businessmen eager for favors to government officials eager for payoffs. From one perspective, the rackets may be viewed as businesses as well. They were businesses in which the goods and services offered though illegal, are highly profitable.

Often, the rackets were well integrated into neighborhood life and provided important services within urban neighborhoods. Racketeers could expedite policies that are desired by business people and government officials, but difficult to carry out within the confines of the law. The rackets offered employment opportunities in high growth industries to neighborhood residents who might otherwise have had no jobs or only the most marginal employment. As Whyte and others have shown, the rackets are a component of the institutional structure of neighborhood life.

The existence of this tripartite structure enhanced the position of the fixer. He provided an important informal connection between the three, smoothing the way for contacts and deals to be made, and acting as a middleman for those who did not wish to deal directly with each other.

The power of the fixer was based on how he was viewed by others. The fixer was well known to neighborhood residents. His influence and ability were viewed as neighborhood assets. People turned to the fixer in emergencies and when they themselves were without resources. Outside the neighborhood there was a world of powerful people and institutions that impacted on neighborhood life. The fixer provided access to that world. While the institutions of power may be closed to ordinary people, the fixer entered them as their representative. He entered that mysterious world, not as a humble petitioner, but as a man of power himself.

The leadership style of the fixer could vary. He might have presented himself as a benevolent patron or as a ruthless tyrant. He might have been openly associated with the rackets or have presented a facade of polished respectability. In whatever manner he related to neighborhood residents, they often viewed his activities as their only chance to exercise any influence on the outcome of the events which shaped their lives.

## **Part 2: Changing Neighborhood Politics**

World War II marked a watershed in neighborhood politics, just as it did in other areas of American life. The classic patterns of power and politics began to change. These changes were responses both to changes in the populations within urban working class neighborhoods and to changing conditions in the world outside the neighborhood.



In the 1950s and the early 1960s, there was a challenge to the established order of political life in urban neighborhoods. New generations of ethnic working class residents, born and educated in the United States, felt more at home in American society. Although they were still far removed from the wellsprings of power, the processes by which goals were accomplished seemed less mysterious. The old style of political organizations with their bosses continued to exist, but their image became much more mixed. The fixer was now often viewed not as a benevolent patron, but as a corrupt and conniving deal maker exercising underhanded influence for his own enrichment. His connection to the rackets (now referred to as organized crime) was highlighted as a central element of his power. As all three areas of power -- government, business and the rackets -- became more bureaucratized, the fixer's personal influence became less important.

The middle class groups in favor of what was termed good government (the "goo-goos") frontally attacked the old bosses, establishing their own reform political clubs which challenged the old political order in electoral and other contexts. They urged neighborhood residents to make independent choices in elections, rather than being guided by local loyalties. They argued that if the processes of government were reformed, people would not need to seek the favors of the fixers. In New York as well as in other cities, epic battles were fought in various districts between the reformers and the regulars for control of the Democratic Party and of the structure of government itself. The old style politics persists even in the 1980s, but its practitioners have been greatly

weakened. New battle lines have been drawn and new alliances and coalitions have been formed, creating new lines of power and influence.

Some analysts, as far back as Riesman (1953), have argued that the advent of reform politics and the consequent decline of party bosses has not been helpful for people in working class neighborhoods. Riesman argues that although the fixers and ward bosses may have been corrupt and self serving, they did give neighborhood people some entry to power and some means of influencing events. With the weakening of these informal structures, this path of influence has been either weakened or eliminated. This development, Riesman contends, worked to the detriment of residents of urban working class neighborhoods, who were left powerless and isolated. The universalizing concept of fairness based on technical rationality advocated by the good government reformers leaves the residents of working class and poor neighborhoods on the outside of the governing process, since they lack both connections and knowledge of the workings of the bureaucracy.

The fixer did provide neighborhood people with some access to power, especially in relation to personal problems. But this access was purchased at great cost. The fixer emphasized the mysteriousness of the outside world and its social distance from the local neighborhood. The more mysterious and distant that world was perceived to be, the greater the fixer's power in being able to reach into it. Thus, by establishing a relationship to the fixer, the individual accedes to a concept of him/herself as weak and the fixer as powerful. In this world view, ordinary individuals cannot be powerful. They can have access to

power only through powerful others. Moreover, people approached the fixer to secure help in solving their individual or family problems. This individualized approach discouraged people from organizing either informally or formally to find collective solutions to common problems. The individual is ultimately infantilized in relationship to the fixer. The fixer helps people to accomplish their short term goals, but he ultimately reinforces their sense of powerlessness and thereby discourages the development of a cohesive community politics, and the possibility of collective power.

In the closing pages of The Urban Villagers (Gans, 1962), we see the tragic consequence of this approach, as people who need to organize to save their neighborhood cannot do so. Their habitual dependence on fixers has made them incapable of collective action. It is, of course, no coincidence that Gans's study was done in the 1950s when a general assault on urban neighborhoods was occurring. His description of events in the old West End of Boston is similar to occurrences in many other older cities. Fainstein and Fainstein (1974), for example, describe a similar course of events in New Haven.

The weakening of the role the fixer or party boss presents us with a question: If his clandestine activities cannot empower the residents of inner city neighborhoods, then how may they acquire the power to achieve the goal of preserving their neighborhoods, or is this just not possible in a world dominated by business interests and powerful others? Reform politics challenged the fixer as a source of power and influence for urban neighborhoods, but offered no

substitute. In addition to reform politics, two other new political approaches were developed in the postwar world.

In one case, the process of the transition away from fixer or boss-oriented politics is described in Kornblum's classic study of Chicago's Southside (1974). Kornblum describes and analyzes the growing complexity of the politics of urban working class politics and the emergence of coalition building as a political strategy among the various groups that occupy the Southside.

Kornblum's study suggests that the image of the fixer described here has become obsolete or perhaps even that it never existed in its classical form. Instead, Kornblum reveals a richly textured picture of working class life among the men who work in the local steel mills, frequent local taverns, and live in and raise their families in local neighborhoods. In the social world Kornblum describes, a central theme is the interconnection of work, ethnicity, and neighborhood life in the formation of political loyalties and alliances. Kornblum's account of the interrelationships of union politics, the politics of the mills, and local neighborhood politics, presents a picture of the growing political sophistication of urban working class people. The study portrays these urban workers as having the ability to make accurate political judgments and to act on them.

Kornblum displays the continuing importance of ethnic particularity as a factor in neighborhood life and politics, but he also shows how these groups attempt to overcome the suspicions and hostility that ethnic divisions provoke. The friendship and trust developed by members of different ethnic groups who

work together in the mills combined with the need to accommodate to the changing ethnic character of local neighborhoods lead to the development of working alliances and coalitions among members of different ethnic groups.

While not ignoring the limits of coalition building, especially the persistence of racial tension and blatant hostility toward blacks, Kornblum shows the possibility of a new working class politics based on an increased understanding of the political process, hard work in local organizing, and outreach among various groups. The desire to exercise citywide rather than strictly local power induces local leaders to work together to build broader coalitions. The politics portrayed in this work is a far cry from the boss-dominated image of local working class politics. It represents a politics of transition toward greater autonomy and self rule among residents of working class neighborhoods.

Kornblum points to the importance of work relationships and union politics in facilitating the development of a new form of organization not exclusively based on ethnic and/or local ties. He notes the dominance and centrality of the steel mills in neighborhood life and the importance of the mills as a source of employment. The unique character of the industry makes it possible for relationships developed at work to be carried over into the politics of the local community.

Many working class neighborhoods, especially on the east coast, lack such a dominant industry. Instead, people may be employed in a variety of industries, some local some a greater distance away, some large and some quite small. For example, Williamsburg-Greenpoint, a working class neighborhood in New York

City, has many small family-owned businesses each employing only a few individuals. In such neighborhoods, work based relationships play a much smaller role or none at all, in local political life. Do the forces that shape local politics in South Chicago also operate in working class neighborhoods in other cities? What other factors may allow individuals to venture beyond the boundaries of their own ethnic enclave or local neighborhood to form broader alliances which can be the basis of a new approach to politics?

The neighborhood world that Kornblum describes is almost exclusively a man's world -- a world of steel mills, unions, taverns, and local political clubs. Men come to know each other by working together, cement their relationships by drinking together, and develop political skills in union activities and politics. The description of the importance of local taverns as foci of the social life of various groups with their cross cutting loyalties and alliances provides insight into the social base of local political action. But by and large, the action described takes place in a world of men.

Kornblum does not ignore the role that women play in the political life of local communities. He notes that women do most of the behind-the-scenes and largely uncredited work of local fund raising, doorbell ringing, and clerical work. Although men take the visible and leadership roles, the day-to-day work done by women is necessary to sustain the political life of local neighborhoods.

A single intriguing example in the book foreshadows what I posit as the emerging political role of women. In one campaign a qualified and experienced Mexican candidate runs for office in an area that includes non-Mexican election

precincts. It is the Mexican women who go into these areas to canvass door to door for their candidate. Men do not participate in this activity. The candidate does not win, but the bold action taken by the women enables them to claim a more public role in the neighborhood political organization as well as the right to participate in its planning and tactical meetings. This description is consistent with my own observation that the role of women increases in importance when situations arise that cannot be handled by using traditional political approaches, especially situations that involve crossing racial and ethnic boundaries.

Good government reformers and political organizing that develops in work situations but extends into the neighborhood are two types of transitional politics in working class neighborhoods. Professional organizers from outside the neighborhood play a central role in a third approach. In the post-World War II period, these professional organizers, followers of Saul Alinsky and others, began to create a new vocabulary of power for people in urban neighborhoods. They developed a method of community organizing and proceeded to apply it in a number of cities around the country (Bailey, 1971).

In this approach, a team of professional organizers enters a neighborhood. They bring their own perspective on the issues, but they also attempt to understand the problems and points of view of people in the neighborhood. Combining the two, they construct an agenda, build an organizational base, and develop a strategy for achieving the goals of that agenda. Often they target a particular business firm or government office for special attention. These targets

are important, especially in the early stages, because they provide a specific enemy for people to organize against.

An important goal of these early organizing efforts is to encourage local residents to begin to take political action for themselves, with the help and encouragement of organizers. A weakness of these new Alinsky-style organizers is that they were often dissimilar in social class and educational background from neighborhood people, as well as being outsiders and therefore initially suspect. Their great strengths include their energy and their willingness to do the slow, often tedious work of day-to-day organizing. Unlike community residents, who also work and care for families, these organizers engage in political work on a full-time basis. Organizing is their work and, for many, the central passion of their lives. Unlike many local people, they have not been discouraged by past defeats nor have they become cynical about the political process. They do not believe that informal power and influence as exercised by the fixer are the only ways to accomplish a goal.

One technique that organizers use is to hold meetings which become vehicles for organizing such further political action as petition drives, letter writing campaigns, demonstrations, marches, speeches, rallies, picket lines, etc. At this stage it is particularly important that the organizers win allies who will act as their advocates among more skeptical neighborhood residents. Another approach to winning the confidence of local residents is through achieving an early victory, even on a minor issue. This demonstrates that change is possible and that organizing can be an effective way of achieving it.



Some of these outside organizers are members of national groups such as the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN). They pose a striking contrast to the fixer. The fixer mystifies; the organizer informs. The more people know about a situation, the more effectively they can organize around it. Whereas the fixer emphasizes the effectiveness of contacts, influence, and political loyalty, the organizers stress collective action, publicity, and direct confrontation. The outside organizers develop goals and then develop strategies to achieve them. Participation in this new politics can be exciting and empowering to people who have never believed that they could have any impact on the political process.

This type of organizing also helps people to penetrate the morass of bureaucratic structures and language. The bureaucrat presents a world view of a fixed and unchanging reality in which there are no options or possibilities for change. Effective organizing can cut through that world view, so that had been presented by government officials as unchangeable, indeed changes in response to an effective political campaign.

One example of this is the People's Firehouse in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, previously discussed in Chapter II. In this case, a firehouse was shut down by the city government, with the usual argument that it was both unnecessary and too expensive. Government officials presented the usual statistical argument "proving" that the response time would change by only a few seconds. The people of the neighborhood felt differently. They knew that the narrow streets of their old neighborhood were often clogged with trucks, since it was an

industrial as well as a residential area. They knew that their frame houses which were attached to one another could catch fire with relative ease. They had also witnessed a series of withdrawals of community facilities-- police and fire fighting services, schools and hospitals, such as that discussed in Chapter IV. When the fire fighters left the fire station, it was taken over and occupied by neighborhood residents and professional organizers for almost a year. One family moved into the firehouse and remained in residence during the entire campaign. Eventually the firehouse was reopened.

In cases such as this one, outside organizers help neighborhood people, who had previously regarded the particularism of neighborhood life as a weakness, view that particularism as a strength as well. This approach to neighborhood organizing helps people to present their particularistic vision of life forcefully as a response to the bureaucratic universalism of government or other officials.

Alinsky-style organizing can be effective, especially around specific issues, but there are problems connected with it. Often it does not lead to the long-range empowerment of neighborhood people. The professional organizers remain the leaders in important ways. Though a neighborhood resident is often elected president of the organization, the organizers remain the strategists and tacticians of the campaigns and political actions. It is they who design the campaigns and set the goals.

These organizers do not generally build on existing neighborhood organizations, but instead start new ones. Their organizations, therefore, often

do not have deep roots in the community. Many do not survive after the organizers move on to other neighborhoods. Those in power may make strategic concessions to well organized neighborhoods, but they are very patient. They can afford to make limited concessions and to wait. They know that the organizers will leave and that they will remain. New ideologies will be developed to reconsolidate their power. Unless a local activist group can sustain a high level of neighborhood political participation and maintain local coalitions, the old power structure will re-emerge and the brave new organization will fade, leaving disappointment and bitterness as a consequence of raised expectations.

These transitional forms of political organizing, including reform politics, ethnic coalition building, and outside organizers are each important because they demonstrate that it is possible for neighborhood people to achieve collective goals through unified action. However, in most cases they do not ultimately result in the institutionalization of power in structures created by local residents. They therefore remain partial solutions to specific problems, but they do not constitute a long range method for building organizations that empower neighborhood people as well as being both politically and personally liberating.

### **Part 3: Working Class Feminism and Neighborhood Politics**

Working class women have tended to be invisible in both the scholarly literature and in the popular images presented in the mass media. As discussed in Chapter I, scholars seldom study them and the media seldom portray them.

When they are shown, the image presented remains circumscribed within a narrow framework.

Edith Bunker of "All in the Family" was one of the best known and most durable presentations of a working class woman on a long-running television situation comedy. Edith was warm, human, and loving and not as "dumb" as her husband pretended he thought she was. She loved her family and was concerned with their well-being. She smoothed over their quarrels, celebrated their triumphs, and comforted them in times of sorrow. Her social world extended as far as her next door neighbors and an occasional relative. She never discussed politics or seemed aware of events in the outside world. The working class woman we meet in much of the earlier sociological literature does not seem very much different from Edith. She is dependent on her husband, close to her female relatives and friends, and is defined mainly by her role in the family and her concern for her children (Rainwater, 1959; Komarovsky, 1964; Rubin, 1976). She sees the world outside the household as her husband's concern; her sphere is strictly home and family. In this respect, she operates within the boundaries between the public world of men and the domestic sphere of women that was established in the nineteenth century.

Komarovsky and Rubin emphasize relationships within the nuclear family as the central theme of their studies. Because of this restricted emphasis, they capture only a narrow slice of the lives and concerns of working class women. Working class women live in a broader, richer world than the nuclear family.

Their world includes the extended family, the church, the neighborhood, and various local groups and organizations.

Working class women play many roles and have an important status in many local working class neighborhoods. However, only recently has the literature begun to report the depth and diversity of working class women's lives. Lofland's analysis (1975) points out that women tend to be unnoticed and ignored in community studies done by male researchers. Some of the more recent studies discussed in Chapter II provide a more multifaceted view of the lives of women in urban working class neighborhoods. Seifer (1973) presents a broad overview of the changing world of working class women, their strengths and limitations and the challenges they face. McCourt's survey (1977) of women in Chicago community organizations and Susser's (1982) field study of political activity in a working class community in Brooklyn, New York, show women as active, involved, and aware of the issues that affect their lives and communities. Haywoode's (1983) survey of women in community organizations presents the concerns and ideas of activist women across the country. Stack's (1974) study of the female based kin network in a poor black community shows the broader role of women in a different but related context. Working class women play important roles in their communities, but because their activities are locally focused, they tend to be invisible to outsiders, and specifically to many researchers.

The political role women have come to play in urban neighborhoods builds on women's traditional roles in these neighborhoods. Unlike middle-class

women who became feminists and who saw their political activism as a sharp break with their previous identities as wives and mothers, these working class women see their concern for the community as an extension of their concern for their homes and families, and their local culture. As one respondent remarked:

I was just a housewife. I didn't get involved in things . . . but if they're taking the police station away and the hospital away, how safe are your children? You have to try and do something.

I posit here that new political organizations are being built on the basis of existing informal networks, the networks which women have developed in their neighborhoods -- their community. The social construction of community is largely the work of women. The sense of community which I am discussing here includes a sense of place, but it also includes a meaning-giving and cohesion-building sense of belonging to and being grounded in a combined geographic and social unity. As I use the term here, community is a dense network of overlapping social and geographical connections that ground individuals in both a sense of place and in a sense of social solidarity.

Community is constantly in the process of being created by the social actions of its members. It is either being built, affirmed and strengthened by people's participation, or it is being weakened, torn down and negated by their indifference. Women build community through the activities of everyday life. As they make their daily rounds of errands, shopping, escorting children, they weave and reweave the dense tapestry of social interactions which constitutes neighborhood life. Women sitting on their front steps, looking out of their windows, chatting on the street corner or in the hallways of their apartment

buildings, women sharing afternoon coffee or a friendly game of cards are all engaged in activities which construct the social reality of community. One might put the question in Carol Gilligan's words, "what are the women doing when they are doing 'nothing?'"

What may appear to the casual observer as idle chatter, or time-wasting gossip, is really the process of building a network of social exchange, information sharing, informal contacts, and the creation and affirmation of social integration and cohesion. It has practical value and more than practical value, it may become a form of self consciousness for women. As Kaplan (1982) notes, "Gossip exchanged during shared work provides an opportunity for women to think out loud . . . it is also the means by which they explore their obligation to sustain life in the midst of difficult conditions." Kaplan goes on to point out how, under the right conditions this self consciousness can and has been transformed into political consciousness and into political action. She further notes how difficult it is to trace this process historically, since the women who engage in such activities leave no written record "in their own words."

In their thoughtful study of American cities, Logan and Molotch (1987) list what they term the "use values" of neighborhood life in juxtaposition to the "growth machine" of capital accumulation which treats places as commodities. They include in their list of these use values: a daily round which sustains and supports everyday life, informal support networks, security and trust, a sense of identity, the benefits of what they term agglomeration and ethnicity. They specifically reject that the kind of Marxist analysis that views neighborhoods as

homogeneous sites of reproduction and the type of ecological analyses that are based on a presocial concept of the structure of land use. They note that these use values are particularly important to women with families for whom such values have a special significance. They mention women's volunteer activities and special attachment to place. However, their analysis does not capture the full scope of women's community building activities. Further, they seem to suggest that women are the passive beneficiaries of these community use values, rather than their active creators.

In the type of urban neighborhood described here, community is created primarily through the activities of women. Viewed superficially, women in these "urban villages" seem to be the most traditional, the most tied to women's role in the home and the family. In terms of the analysis made by the women's movement, they have frequently been viewed as the most oppressed group and those who are most in need of liberation. However, when women's community-creating activities are made visible, their traditional role may be seen in a different and more powerful light. It is true that urban working class women continue to define their identity in terms of family life, in terms of affiliation, rather than in terms of individualization but this does not mean that they are subordinate or powerless. By making community visible, we make working class women's activities and power visible. This analysis calls into question some of the earlier portrayals of working class women as weak and ineffectual, especially in terms of relationships with their husbands (Rubin 1976, Komarovsky 1967).



Thus it becomes clear that the world of women in the neighborhood is defined not only by women's work in the home, but also by women's work as community builders. Women's everyday activities weave the fabric of community life with its threads of kinship, neighborliness and concern for the whole. This community life extends the boundaries of the household to include the neighborhood and defines a sphere which is public, yet closer to home. Women's activities dissolve the boundaries between public and private life, between household and civil society. Women's activities in neighborhoods, like women's activities as workers, in labor organizations and as social reformers challenge the concept of women's role as restricted to the household that was established in the nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth.

Women in neighborhoods perform many important functions, even when their activities seem casual and random. One of the remarkable aspects of how women live in traditional urban neighborhoods is that they are always organizing, although neither they themselves nor others view their activities in that light. Women engage in many informal activities which create and sustain community. They exchange useful information, barter goods and services, create informal social service networks to assist the ill, the aged, the shut-in. Extended families and friendship ties are important elements of community life. It is women who build and maintain these relationships; they become the human links in a chain of relationship, concern, and social life. Once the categories of neighborhood and community are opened up by taking the standpoint of working class neighborhood women as the starting point, then it becomes clear that

community is not simply a place or an attitude--a sense of belonging; community is a process, an ongoing process. This process is the work that women do.

Women can tell you who is the best teacher in the fourth grade at P.S. 93, which butcher has the freshest meat, that Mrs. Jones will make a fine hem for your skirt if you bake her a nice pie, that Joey outgrew last year's roller skates and maybe they would fit your Alice. On a different level, they can suggest where your out-of-work husband might go to get hired on a construction job and to say that Sal said you're okay. Women know which candidates for the school board are concerned about education, which members of the planning board are really working for the community and not for a special interest group. They analyze local organizations to distinguish those that are useful and those that are not.

The informal networks that women build serve a double purpose. On the one hand, they provide specific services to relatives, friends and neighbors. Just as Stack (1974) contended, the service providers feel confident that these services will be reciprocated when they are needed. These networks are available to provide assistance in such family crises as unemployment or serious illness. These services and the companionship that accompanies them is particularly important to certain members of the community. They may make it possible for elderly, ill or disabled residents to remain in the community.

On another level, the activities of these networks affirm the dignity and importance of all community residents. By helping people to remain in the community rather than entering custodial institutions, they help to ensure the

richness and diversity of community life. Helping older adults to remain independent is not only a service to these particular individuals, but also preserves the multigenerational character of the neighborhood and the cultural continuity that older people represent.

In addition to these informal networks, working class women have played more institutionalized roles in sustaining local churches, parents associations, scout groups, ethnic identity groups, fraternal organizations, and social groups and clubs. Women have done fund raising, clerical work, planning and execution of local events, celebrations, and parties. Women have supplied the day-to-day labor which kept these organizations going and in turn the organizations have sustained and enriched community life. While most visible leadership roles were taken by men, the experience that women acquired even in subordinate roles helped them to formulate a basis for the new politics of working class feminism. The feasts, processions, church socials and holiday celebrations that women organize may be viewed as merely traditional, but under certain conditions they can become a very political expression of neighborhood solidarity and resistance.

The changes of the post-World War II period meant that urban neighborhoods could not remain the same. If local residents did not organize to defend their neighborhoods, the many forces arrayed against them would lead to basic and negative changes in the quality of neighborhood life. The methods of political organization discussed in previous sections could not deal with these changes on the level required to maintain neighborhood social integration and

the quality of life. Each of the previously mentioned approaches had some strengths and some weaknesses.

The traditional political clubs did have strong roots in the social life of the neighborhood and were based on longstanding patterns of association. However, the ability of bosses and fixers to do favors for individuals is ineffectual in the face of massive social and political change originating in larger institutional settings outside of the neighborhood. This is graphically illustrated in the closing chapters of Urban Villagers (Gans, 1962). In this case, neighborhood people, habituated to seeking individual favors from powerful political patrons, are unable to organize to prevent the leveling of their neighborhood for urban renewal. What stands out clearly in this example is that local bosses had infantilized neighborhood residents and discouraged them from defining local issues in larger than personal terms.

Good government reformers, although often well meaning and perhaps less self interested than the old bosses, are mainly middle class and define the political process in terms of decision-making based on technical rationality. They know little about the personal ties and networks which are the essence of social life in working class neighborhoods. The reformers' approach has been to substitute the "fairness" of technical rationality and administrative decision-making for what they see as corrupt boss rule. Such an approach does not take into account the ongoing life of the neighborhood. It suggests that rule by experts leads to the most efficient and equitable distribution of scarce resources. It is precisely this kind of shortsighted technical rationality which has

caused the demoralization, decay, and deterioration of many urban neighborhoods

Kornblum's analysis demonstrates that ties created through workplace associations and union politics can break down the rigidity of parochial neighborhood politics. However, this analysis can best be applied in neighborhoods in which large industries bring many local residents together as workers. In many urban neighborhoods, residents have no such connections outside of neighborhood life itself. Additionally he presents a convincing argument for a new and more complex understanding of the politics of working class neighborhoods. This part of Kornblum's work informs much later work including my own.

Alinsky-style outside organizers have been effective at organizing local neighborhoods, especially around specific single issues. They have brought hope and optimism to many communities. Their work demonstrates that organizing can be effective. These professional organizers have helped local people to score some stunning victories against powerful opponents in neighborhoods around the country. However, the organizations they create lack deep roots in the community and therefore frequently do not empower community people.

In order to create an empowering and effective new approach to neighborhood politics, it is necessary to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the previously discussed approaches. Each of these approaches has a contribution to make to an effective style of neighborhood politics. Such a style would combine the informal networking ability of the old style boss with the coalition

building outreach of unions and work-oriented politics, the zeal and technical knowledge of the reformers and the energy, optimism and strategic planning abilities of the Alinsky-style organizers. I contend that the approach embodied in what I call working class feminism has the capacity to do that.

In various local communities all around the nation women have begun to organize to meet the challenges to urban neighborhoods (Bers and Mezey, 1981; Haywoode, 1983). Their organizations have ranged from as small and informal as a few neighbors meeting to solve a specific problem, to large scale and enduring organizations that have had a lasting impact on entire neighborhoods and cities.

In formulating this new political practice, women build on an approach that may be traced back to the nineteenth century. Then public spirited women, in attempting to overcome disapproval of their public role, presented their activities as public housekeeping (Berg, 1978), explaining that they were only protecting their homes and families by extending their activities from the home into the public arena. Women claimed the right to be guardians of the neighborhood, just as they were acknowledged to be guardians of the family.

Histories of women's organizing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries highlight the suffrage and women's rights movement. However, the range of issues that women addressed was much broader and more far reaching. Industrialization and the rapid social change resulting from it led to many social problems. Women and children were the most vulnerable to the impact of these changes. To address these problems, women formed many voluntary and

benevolent associations that campaigned for both specific changes in local neighborhoods and broader reforms in labor, education, health care, housing, municipal services, prisons, and the rights of children. In a similar manner today, working class women are creating a variety of neighborhood political organizations to respond to the problems created by contemporary economic changes.

The new principles of working class feminism take neighborhoods and women's roles in them as the starting point. Networks of neighbors are converted into political action networks. Information networks transmit new kinds of politically relevant information. The events that celebrate the culture or history of neighborhood people are transformed into political rallies, and the trust and friendship built in informal associations become a basis for political organizing. This is especially apparent in various types of tenant organizing.

Women are powerful community organizers because they see the relationships developed in organizing as a deep personal commitment and an important social relationship. One housing organizer explained that when one organized people in a building, you are asking them to expend time and energy and to take great risks. A person who agrees to participate in a rent strike could lose her home. Because you are asking a great deal from them, the relationship must be based on trust and reciprocity. Working class people who need to use their scarce resources for individual survival and for their families risk a great deal by placing those resources at the disposal of a collective goal, which may or may not be realized. Thus both the organizer and the members of a movement

or organization develop a strong personal bond of commitment to each other and to the organization. The female organizer uses her skill at network building and creating community to accomplish new goals of organizing for political purposes. In this way organization building becomes a personal and holistic process similar to community building. Lawson and Barton (1980) highlight the role of women as participants and organizers in the tenant movement in New York City. Their work shows how women's effectiveness is based on this type of personal commitment and they further indicate how the role of women is masked by the fact that men are the public representatives of these groups.

Because women are not traditional actors on the political scene, they are not bound by traditional constraints that might otherwise impede their efforts. Men are often more involved with the more conventional political approaches of the local political party or club; women are less involved with party politics and therefore more likely to develop an innovative approach. One respondent told me that the men in her area had their traditional organization, "the Neighborhood Civic Organization," which women were permitted to join, but in which they could not exercise power. "So we decided to form a block association, which they didn't mind, since they thought that was about one step above a coffee klatch." However, that "coffee klatch" group began to work with an energetic community organizer, secured outside funding from new federal programs that traditional groups were unaware of, initiated projects and brought jobs and new social services into the neighborhood, and soon became a center



of local development. Men soon began to join "the girls" in this now powerful group.

When new political needs arise in the community, it is women who are able to build on pre-existing networks of communication and organization. Women are also available during the day to do the work of organizing. It is women who are willing to look foolish, to risk losing a battle, and to "fight city hall." When the Greenpoint community in Brooklyn was fighting the expansion of a local factory into a residential area, it was a band of Polish grandmothers who sat down on a row of folding chairs, draped in an American flag and blocked traffic on the elevated highway. Women know a great deal about community life because it is the stuff of their every day experience. Women feel they have more to lose because the neighborhood is a more important element of their lives. In addition, men may feel that "making too much noise" politically may threaten their jobs.

Certain implications emerge when the concept of neighborhood and community are broadened to include the activities of women as community builders. These includes the possibility of making a new assessment of women's effectiveness as political organizers, women's emerging sense of themselves as having a role to play in public life and a new definition of women's issues which includes community concerns.

By acting in the public sphere, women not only have the opportunity to attempt to change the circumstances of their lives, but to change their own self image as well. The private values of family and community and the experience

of being involved in the public sphere have changed the self-perceptions of many women. The interplay of the private and public spheres in the women's lives enhances women's appreciation of their own value and abilities. As one respondent stated:

I've learned so many different things now. Even though you don't know big words, you don't have an education, which I don't, you shouldn't be afraid to talk. No matter who he is, what he is, or how big he is. If you want to say something, say it. Like going to City Hall to speak. God, are you kidding me? I'd die first. But you get up there. You're scared to death, but somehow or other, you get the courage. When you see the other people fighting for the same things, you say, "Hey, I've got to help," and you just go ahead and do it.

One factor which provides an impetus for women to view themselves and their communities in new ways has been contact with the ideas of the women's movement. Working class women do not agree with some of the ideas of the women's movement, particularly those concerning family and sexuality. However, they heartily embrace the concept of an increased public and employment role for women. In Williamsburg-Greenpoint in Brooklyn, New York, a neighborhood I investigated, the ideas of the women's movement were brought to neighborhood women by feminist activists who joined the neighborhood women in forming a number of organizations. I also investigated a similar alliance of feminist and local community organizers in the San Francisco Bay area. In these organizations and coalitions the particularistic networks of neighborhood women were united with the universalistic understandings of the feminists to form organizations that successfully combined the strengths of the various types of political approaches previously discussed.

These organizations provide a new definition of women's issues. Women's issues, as defined from this vantage point, are community issues. Communities find that they urgently require a new type of political organizing, one that is innovative, yet builds on the traditional strengths of local neighborhoods. Local crises create the sense of urgency that makes it possible for new political actors to emerge and for new coalitions to be built. It is community women who have taken a leading role in developing this new politics, making strategic alliances with other women and crossing class and racial barriers.

Crossing racial dividing lines is an especially important achievement. In many instances racial divisions prevented effective organizing (Susser, 1982; Kornblum, 1974). Women from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds have been effective in building coalitions to advocate for issues of common concern. The unifying concern of all women for their children's welfare has served as a way of overcoming the divisiveness of ethnic differences. We see this demonstrated in this respondent's comments:

We had a series of accidents involving young children because there was no traffic light . . . so the vehicles would just shoot down the street like it was a raceway and any kid that got in the way got maimed or killed and so about nine years ago we organized a picket with women and carriages. This was a very wholesome thing because not only were the black and Puerto Rican mothers from Cooper Park Houses out there, the Italians and Poles from the other side of the street came out too.

From the concept of working class feminism we can derive some principles of community politics which allow us both to unmask the largely

unacknowledged role of women and to outline a basis for a more effective pattern of community political participation. When the role of women is adequately conceptualized, then it becomes possible to begin to formulate approaches that encourage the participation of local residents and thereby enlarge of political effectiveness of local organizing. These approaches, listed below, combine community building, politics, and personal empowerment.

Working class feminism presents a particularly strong and effective approach to local organizing because organizations built on this model:

1. Value and maintain the existing cultural, institutional, and physical infrastructures that sustain local ties and community life.
2. Combine values based on continuity and tradition with values based on flexibility and openness to change.
3. Empower neighborhood residents through a participatory political process rather than just goal-oriented political action.
4. Acknowledge and utilize neighborhood women's expert understanding of the needs and strengths of their own neighborhoods.
5. Incorporate community-building activities into the political process.
6. Utilize existing informal networks of local women instead of creating new organizations.
7. Structure newly created advocacy and service organizations so that women who have been informally providing services may be hired to continue this work as paid staff members.

8. Build and create holistic neighborhood environments, rather than emphasizing such particular goals as "housing" or "education."
9. De-emphasize bureaucratic constraints that impede the participation of neighborhood residents in the political process.
10. Recognize and acknowledge local women's roles as community builders, political actors and bearers of local culture.
11. Build alliances between local women activists and feminist activists, alliances which would allow both groups to maintain their autonomy while recognizing their common interests.

There are two important points that may be derived from this analysis. The first extends feminist analysis to include the lives and concerns of working class neighborhood women. Feminism, in its broadest outlines, has served to deconstruct the sexist definitions and assumptions about women's nature and women's roles which have been built into the social order at every level. Liberal, radical and socialist feminists, in making their analyses, have emphasized women's self concepts, reproductive rights, work, family, education, and politics as broadly defined. They have tended to overlook local neighborhoods and the political arrangements of these neighborhoods. In so doing, they have neglected an area of importance to large numbers of neighborhood women, whose world view and area of operations are locally based. There is also a feminist analysis to be made of women's lives in local urban neighborhoods. In beginning to make this analysis, we highlight yet another aspect of women's largely unacknowledged contribution to social life. We call into question popular and

scholarly images of working class women as subordinate, passive, and uninvolved in the world beyond the household.

The second point has to do with the politics of local neighborhoods and the relationship of neighborhood political matters to the political arrangements of the broader society. The rationalizing, bureaucratizing trends of late capitalist society have masked a radical redistribution of resources, a redistribution that threatens the very existence of working class neighborhoods. The best chance urban neighborhoods have to meet these challenges is to build on their own existing strengths, the strength of community life itself. These strengths by and large are the result of women's work as community builders.

## Chapter VI

### An Illustration of Working Class Feminism

#### Neighborhood College Program for Working Class Women

In the early to mid-1970s, many groups began to consider the questions raised by the progressive movements of the 1960s. New constituencies took up the banner of social change, just as the more dramatic crusades of the 1960's were ending. Working class women, like members of other groups, repeated the themes of the social movements of the 1960's from their own perspective. These themes included social justice, equity, broader democratic participation, and community. Working class women had become important agents of change in societies undergoing complex and intensive transformations (such as China, Nicaragua, Chili, Cuba, and Nigeria), taking a prominent and active role in the development of their societies (Sen, 1987; Safa and Nash, 1986; Kamel, 1988). By way of contrast, working class women in the United States were involved in political and social development on a more modest scale, operating mainly within the sphere of their own neighborhood communities. This was the setting in which working class women focused their interest and succeeded in exercising some power. The local community remains the center of their interest and concern.

Changing conditions in working class communities presented a challenge to their inhabitants (see Chapter IV). What I have termed the new politics of working class feminism combined women's traditional neighborhood networks with the innovative politics of the sixties. The working class women learned political strategies from the civil rights movement, the peace movement, the student movement and, in particular, the women's movement, but used these approaches in their own way. In this chapter I wish to present an illustration of how a group of working class women employed strategies learned from others to establish a program reflecting their own needs, wishes, and world view. In the process, I will compare the strategies and approaches of the social change activists of the sixties with those of working class neighborhood women.

The concept of a new politics is pivotal to understanding the political activism of the 1960's. The politics of the 1960's was indeed the politics of youth, characterized by breaking with tradition and defying conventional norms. The activists opposed all "old politics," both mainstream and critical political approaches. Many wanted to transform the culture as well as to change political life. They censured mainstream society for its shallowness and materialism, its taken-for-granted racism and elitism, and its cold war aggression and militarism. They were angry at and frustrated by the repressive, bureaucratic, and dehumanizing institutional structures that defined social life. At the same time, the '60s activists also expressed their antipathy toward the Old Left, which they criticized for its rigidity and dogmatism, its factionalism, its overly intellectual analysis of issues and approach to social change, and its own kind of elitism. In



addition to political action, some elements of their critique of society were expressed through alternative lifestyles that emphasized spontaneity, creativity, and free choice. These lifestyles were based on a rejection of traditional family life, certain types of work, and conventional morality.

Working class feminists differ from the activists of the 1960s. They value and seek to preserve their traditional culture and lifestyle, and emphasize such elements as family, kinship, religion, and community life. Indeed, their entry into political life is often closely connected with their desire to maintain and enhance traditional ways of life. The political activities of working class women have been largely unnoticed because unlike the political activism of the '60s and early '70s, their activities have often been concealed beneath a facade of cultural continuity. Working class feminists appear similar to other working class women, as they continue to participate in and sustain families, kin networks, religious and community institutions. The difference is that as changing conditions prompt them to examine the taken for granted tenets of their own lives and culture, they increasingly have come to embrace the principles of equity, social justice, participatory democracy, and community inherited from the protestors of the 1960's.

A goal of this work is to clarify the ideas and practices of working class feminism so that they stand out against the background of historical change and community concerns with which they are closely interwoven. This is necessary because unlike members of many other social movements, working class feminists remain closely identified with their communities. They remain affiliated with the

social groups that they have always belonged to; they have not declared their independence from anyone or anything. They have issued neither manifestos nor statements of purpose. By and large, their organizations have been modest in size and goals and local in scope. Sometimes their organizations are identified publicly as community organizations rather than as women's organizations.

In order to present the ideas and practices of working class feminism, I examine in detail one working class women's organization, and one of its programs in particular as an illustration of the principles and practices of working class feminism. The organization is the National Congress of Neighborhood Women (NCNW). The particular program is the community-based college program for working class and poor neighborhood women.

The founding of NCNW in 1974 was only one of a number of events that signaled a renewed interest in working class people. The renewal of scholarly and popular interest in working class life expressed itself in a number of ways. One was the publication of books and anthologies that focused the lives and the culture of working class people (Howe, 1972; Sexton and Sexton, 1971; Levison, 1974; Kornblum, 1974; Shostak, 1969). A common thread running through these works was a challenge to the '60s stereotype of workers as ignorant, reactionary and racially prejudiced "hardhats." The writers wanted to present and support a more balanced view by investigating the complexity and diversity of working class life and showing how the realities differed from the stereotypes. Some of these studies also suggested the important and continuing role of labor unions in progressive politics.

Taken together, these works may be viewed as an attempt to reaffirm the liberal potential of the working class and its historic and continuing importance in progressive politics. By restoring these intellectual links, these authors hoped to reconstruct the alliance between workers and workers' organizations and those engaged in progressive political work. However even as they attempted to create this new synthesis of working class and progressive politics, they were also reifying older views of the working class. This was done by focusing on the lives and concerns of male workers and locating the principal site of working class life at the workplace, not the community. The omission of women, women's activities, and community life weakens their approach by omitting an important area in which a consensus between working class people and progressive activists was developing.

Other authors approached similar questions from a more centrist (Krickus, 1976) or conservative (Berger, 1973; Novak, 1971) stance, depicting workers as adhering to more traditional and therefore, "correct" values in the midst of a chaotic decade. Conservative authors also emphasized ethnicity as a focal point of working class life. They hypothesized that the student movement and the New Left constituted a Protestant, individualistic, and middle class assault on the more Catholic, family oriented, and conservative values and lifestyles of workers. Thus this group too built its case on an overwhelmingly male identified view of the working class.

This flurry of interest in the lives and issues of working class people provides a context in which to analyze the events surrounding the founding of

NCNW in 1974. NCNW may be viewed partly as a continuation of the social movements of the 1960s, partly as a critical response to those social movements by a group excluded from their concerns.

The decline of inner city neighborhoods was one focus of public discourse during the early 1970s. During the 1960s attention was focused mainly on areas occupied by minority groups. By the early 1970s, there was some recognition of the problems of urban neighborhoods in general. A few of the groups and individuals participating in the public discourse concerning cities and neighborhoods had begun to note the important and even central role of working class women in maintaining neighborhood life. One such group was the Catholic church, which was attempting to deal with vast social changes in the inner city neighborhoods that had been its earlier stronghold. Progressive members of the Catholic hierarchy developed a common agenda with other groups, including the American Jewish Committee, some urban development professionals and a few federal officials, who were concerned with neighborhood issues.

A number of events calling attention to the role of working class women occurred during 1974. One was the publication of Nancy Seifer's Absent from the Majority (written and published under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee). The second was a national convention of working class neighborhood women held in Washington D.C. with encouragement and funding from the Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs under the leadership of Monseigneur Geno Baroni, a leading progressive member of the Catholic hierarchy. This event marked the beginning of NCNW as an alternative women's movement.

The year 1974 was also the year in which the Congress of Labor Union Women (CLUW) was founded in Chicago. This was an organization geared to the workplace issues of working class women. Just as the central mission of NCNW was articulating the concerns of working class women in the community and supporting and training them for community leadership, CLUW defined its goals in terms of articulating the needs of women in the labor movement and supporting and training women for leadership roles in unions.

A substantial number of the women who attended the Washington convention had come from the Williamsburg-Greenpoint community in Brooklyn, New York. Many were veteran activists who had been involved in community struggles and who understood the issues described in Chapter IV in terms of their own experience. They returned home to found the "Brooklyn chapter" of NCNW. This was not only the Brooklyn chapter, it was the only active chapter in the organization. The term "National" in the group's name could be viewed as either wishful thinking or as a project for future development.

Many of the women in the Brooklyn chapter had experienced both the challenges and the triumphs of neighborhood organizing. On the one hand, in their own neighborhoods they had experienced many of the destructive events described in Chapter IV. On the other hand, they had had some success in organizing their neighbors to find solutions for these problems. During the previous decade, local activists and outside organizers in Williamsburg and neighboring communities had developed and sustained movements against the closing of a local fire house, the destruction of blocks of homes to facilitate the

expansion of a local factory, and the redlining of their community by banks and other financial institutions. Twenty years earlier, neighborhood activists had fought without success to modify the plans for building an elevated highway through the heart of the community (Susser, 1982). Each struggle had evoked a strong response in the neighborhood. Participating in and witnessing these struggles had given people a sense of the power and resources arrayed against them, as well as of their own strengths and possibilities.

It is significant from a number of perspectives that NCNW began functioning in a neighborhood already rich in organizational life. An important question concerning working class neighborhoods is why some remain viable and resilient in the face of many problems, while others with similar demographic and physical characteristics deteriorate into slums, which more prosperous residents flee. I hypothesize that the level of neighborhood organization constitutes an important element of this difference.

Neighborhoods with an underlying network of organizations have many advantages. On the simplest level, neighbors become acquainted with one another through organizational participation. These activities unite neighborhood residents, and break down the isolation and fragmentation of individuals and groups. As more people join local networks, the more effectively the networks function to keep members informed about local matters. Knowing one's neighbors becomes a way of responding to crime and other problems, as neighborhood residents enlarge their sense of responsibility to include the community rather than just their own household and family. Working together

toward common goals through local organizations strengthens community ties by breaking down ethnic and racial stereotypes, albeit the process may be lengthy and tedious. Participating in local political action empowers people through their experience of collective action. As Boyte, Krauss, Castells, and others have noted, there is a potential for passive citizens to be transformed into active participants in political life. Organizational participation contributes toward maintaining neighborhood viability.

The Williamsburg-Greenpoint neighborhood is a multiethnic community with a long history of local activism. The neighborhood was honeycombed with many types of local groups and organizations. At one time, Williamsburg was the most ethnically diverse congressional district in the United States. Williamsburg encompassed a traditional Italian community, an insular and growing hasidic Jewish community, a Hispanic area. On the edge of the neighborhood a large city housing development was home to a predominantly black population that had been shut out of the privately owned housing in the area. Greenpoint and the adjacent Northside contained a large and aging Polish population as well as Ukrainians and other Slavic groups. A remnant of its earlier Irish population also remained. A number of loft buildings near the Williamsburg bridge had recently been leased to a growing group of young artists fleeing the high rents of Manhattan for the peace and space of Brooklyn.

These diverse groups lived in fairly intact and separate ethnic and cultural enclaves. Grocery stores in Italian Williamsburg still sell fresh homemade mozzarella cheese and older men drink endless cups of espresso in local coffee

houses. There may be more pierogi sold on Manhattan Avenue than in all of Warsaw. People feel a strong sense of loyalty to the neighborhood and to local institutions. This loyalty was expressed in the existence of many and varied local groups. These included church affiliated groups, veterans' groups, societies of people who had come from the same town in Italy or Poland, and other ethnic identity groups, scout troops, union locals, civic groups, fraternal orders, merchants' associations, settlement houses, and tenants' associations. In addition to these more traditional groups, more recently formed and more straightforwardly activist groups included People's Fire House #1, the Saint Nicholas Housing Association, and a local credit union formed to preserve and reinvest the bank deposits of neighborhood residents in the local community. Several local newspapers were published that called attention to issues and events in the neighborhood.

Another and particularly interesting group is the Conselyea Street Block Association. Local neighborhood women in Italian Williamsburg founded the block association, with the assistance of Jane Johnston, a local social worker and community organizer. The block association was established as a women's group, with the goal of providing a forum for women's leadership in the local community. The community organizer who helped and encouraged local women to form this organization brought with her a history of social movement involvement and innovative community organizing.

Johnston had participated in the civil rights movement as a volunteer in Harlem CORE, and had worked as a professional organizer for Mobilization for



Youth, one of the leading community organizations of the 1960's and a part of the federally funded Model Cities program. She had been a founding member of Redstockings, a prominent radical feminist group. Johnston first came into Williamsburg-Greenpoint as a social worker in a traditional social service organization. A wish to expand the boundaries of what might be defined as social service soon brought her into conflict with the director of her organization. She has described the discomfort she felt about what she termed her daily "trip across the bridge." During the day she worked in Williamsburg, dealing with the problems and possibilities of the poor and working class people who visited the settlement house where she was employed. In the evening she drove across the Williamsburg Bridge to Manhattan where she lived and where she met with the other members of Redstockings to discuss the latest developments in the radical women's movement.

Increasingly, Johnston came to wonder about the social distance between these two important parts of her life. She knew that the women in Williamsburg and Greenpoint would not join the women's movement that was emerging from the activities of Redstockings. She became increasingly committed to the Williamsburg community and the women of Williamsburg. She helped to organize women in the Northside, an adjacent neighborhood, who were struggling to keep their homes from being torn down to expand a local factory. It was a productive alliance. The women of the Northside brought their dedication and commitment to the community while Johnston and other social change activists she introduced into the neighborhood brought their own knowledge of

community organizing, the resources of larger organizations, as well as their ability to deal with government agencies and the press. The campaign to save their homes, in conjunction with the struggle concerning a local fire house, encouraged local residents to believe that they could exercise some control over events in the neighborhood.

Johnston decided to commit her energies to the local community in Williamsburg. She purchased a house in the neighborhood and became a resident, thus eliminating her trips across the bridge. Her house became a point of contact for different groups. Feminist women, academics, and women's movement activists met with neighborhood women struggling for their communities. Thus the goals and tactics of the social movements and community organizing of the 1960's were brought into the community not as abstract ideas but through specific and concrete personal contacts.

The Conselyea Street Block Association rapidly became an important group in the neighborhood, developing and sponsoring two important local projects. One was a counselling and referral center called Education in Action (ENACT) and the other was a combined day care (Small World) and senior citizen's center (the Swinging Sixties). In many ways, ENACT was a precursor of the National Congress of Neighborhood Women (NCNW). ENACT developed similar themes of community outreach and education crossing class and ethnic lines. It was mainly, although not formally, a women's organization. The senior citizens' and day care programs were situated in a building constructed

specifically to house them, the first such social service facility to be erected in the neighborhood in over sixty years.

The construction of the new facility was an important landmark in the history of the neighborhood. It showed that change could be positive. This contrasted sharply with previous negative changes such as the elimination of various local institutions and the cutting back of municipal services. The controversy surrounding the building of the Swinging Sixties reflects some the issues that arise in working class neighborhoods such as Williamsburg.

Many people were in favor of the project because it would provide services and jobs in the community. The senior center would provide programs, social life, advocacy, and other needed services to an aging population. The day care center would assist hard pressed working mothers. However, some neighborhood residents opposed the construction of the facility because they insisted that families should provide whatever is needed by their members. This view expressed the fierce independence of working class people as well as their desire to see things remain as they have always been. Also included was an overtone of racial prejudice; local residents expressed fears about the kinds of people who would come into the neighborhood to use the public facilities.

Fear and distrust of outsiders are characteristic of many working class neighborhoods. The desire to preserve one's own culture shades off into antipathy toward the culture of others. People who are economically hard pressed or whose neighborhood is losing resources are easily convinced that another group is obtaining what rightfully belongs to them. Such divisions make

it difficult for the different groups to cooperate to fight for common goals. The divisions also make it easy for politicians and others who may benefit to play them against each other.

Overcoming divisiveness, or at least being able to form coalitions for common causes despite differences on other issues, is an important element of effective local politics. Kornblum (1974) addresses this issue by noting that coalition building in labor unions may spill over into neighborhood politics. The women of NCNW, as members of the various ethnic communities of Williamsburg, also faced the challenge of coalition building in a situation of ethnic diversity.

ENACT situated its operations in a storefront office, from which it offered various services to local residents. The programs brought new resources into the neighborhood, providing both jobs for local people and services that were useful to a changing community. Local women, with the help of a skilled organizer, succeeded in securing funding from the federal government and in using it to create programs that enhanced the quality of neighborhood life and provided a foundation for future organizational growth.

Many of the women who had formed the Conselyea Street Block Association became part of the group that organized NCNW. Other founding members of NCNW were veterans of various neighborhood campaigns. Some had been long-time tenant activists or members of one or more of the neighborhood's more traditional groups. The community organizer who had played such a prominent role in forming the Conselyea Street Block Association

also played a leading role in the founding of NCNW. The women who had founded the block association and had been involved in other community struggles formed the nucleus of the new NCNW organization. Only a few of the first NCNW members did not have an activist background, but were attracted to the idea of joining an organization that was for women. Others came to NCNW because they heard that jobs were available. A few simply came along with friends. The block association had not declared itself a women's group; NCNW identified itself as an organization that was neighborhood based, for women, and identified with working class women.

Local neighborhood women were not the only early recruits of NCNW. A small group of professional women -- mainly feminist activists and/or academics -- were part of the organization from its first days. These women were recruited largely through the personal and professional contacts of the professional organizer. As a group, they had in common an activist background and a working class heritage. The group included the daughters of a cab driver, a house painter and union organizer, factory workers, and the owner of a small grocery store. They had acquired middle class status through higher education. All brought with them a history of sustained political activism. Among them were individuals who had participated in the civil rights movement, the peace movement, the Catholic Left, the radical psychology movement, and most recently the women's movement. Two of these women had just graduated from college and identified strongly and personally with the aspirations of the neighborhood women.

The professional women were incorporated into the organization in a number of ways. A few became part of the staff, others were members of the board of directors. Some participated as volunteers and others became part-time teachers or consultants. One became the first executive director of NCNW and another the chairperson of the board of directors. NCNW as an organization identified itself as representing and speaking for neighborhood women, but from the beginning it was also a partnership between working class neighborhood women and their professional allies. This is a critical point from a number of perspectives. In the discussion of NCNW as combining community roots with organizing approaches learned from the movements of the 1960's, it is important to recognize that the themes of the '60s were not merely abstractions, but were represented within the organization by the concrete experiences of particular people.

The neighborhood women who became part of NCNW had strong ties in the community. Their strength was their firm grounding in the many strands of neighborhood culture, their experience as neighborhood activists, and their vision of the continuity of community life.

The women of NCNW came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Italians constituted the largest group in both the organization and the college program. Other members were Polish, Black, Hispanic, and Irish. Ages ranged from the twenties to the sixties. Most were in their thirties and forties. A more substantial number of Black and Hispanic students were recruited into later classes. They were also somewhat younger than the original group. Most

students were married and had children at home, although a few were single and others were widowed, divorced, or single parents. Most of the women were employed, a good number working at NCNW itself. Aside from those who worked at NCNW, occupations included office work, factory work, paraprofessionals, and restaurant and retailing work.

Some sketches of individual women may be helpful in understanding the group. Among the leading neighborhood women, Susan F. was an energetic and articulate Italian woman in her early thirties. The mother of four children, she was married to a construction worker. At the time that NCNW was starting, the death of a child had cast a pall over Susan's life. Susan had been born and brought up in Williamsburg and was very active in local church, civic, educational and ethnic identity organizations. Before NCNW, Susan had been employed as a community worker at the Italian American Civil Rights Organization. She had taken a conservative position in earlier neighborhood controversies. For example, she had opposed the construction of a daycare and senior citizens' building. As Susan's experience grew, her views broadened. Race relations played an important role in the college program and Susan was one of the few students willing to discuss her earlier fears about minority group members. Her leadership was important in the development of the college program.

Fran G. was another strong leader of both NCNW itself and the college program. Fran was an Italian woman in her thirties, married to a transit worker and the mother of one daughter. Fran's devotion to the college program was a strong force in getting it under way. Fran was very intelligent and interested in

many areas. However, economic hardship had forced her to leave high school before graduation. For Fran, the college program meant a second chance for an education. Like Susan, Fran had a long history of activism in local affairs. Her forthrightness and strong personality had sometimes provoked negative responses, especially from men who held traditional ideas about women's roles.

Mary J. was a black women who had come to Williamsburg from North Carolina. She resided in the Cooper Park Housing Development. Mary was in her fifties when NCNW was started. Mary had separated from her husband many years earlier and had raised her two daughters as a single mother. She had worked at a variety of occupations to support her family. These included factory and domestic work. She had been a tireless organizer and tenant activist in Cooper Park Houses for many years. Her daughters were grown when she joined NCNW and she was caring for her aging mother. She was an active church member as well as a community activist.

Dolores F. was a Mexican-American women who, since the end of her marriage was raising four children as a single mother. She chose to remain in Williamsburg, rather than returning to her family in Texas. She was employed as a paralegal at a local legal service office. She was glad to be able to help Spanish and Italian speaking clients, since she was fluent in both languages. She especially liked helping women who were having marital difficulties. Though Dolores had been shy and reserved when she first came to NCNW, she became a strong advocate for the program. She had a strong desire to learn in order to



better serve her legal clients. Later she left legal services to work in the NCNW office.

The professional women who joined them shared the vision of community, and added to it their own experience in large scale social change movements and their feminist and critical analysis of American life. Although these professional women had participated in various protest movements, they, like other feminist critics of the New Left, found its narrow and elitist roots problematic. They had come to the conclusion that neither the New Left nor the mainstream women's movement were movements that the people they had grown up with would join. All of the professional women had come from working class backgrounds

Jane P. was the main professional organizer of NCNW. Her vision of an organization for neighborhood women was a driving force in the founding of the organization. Jane was a divorced social worker in her early thirties. She had come to New York from a small town in the midwest to work in the Mobilization for Youth program on the lower east side of Manhattan. She was also active in the civil right movement and later, the women's movement. She had been a founding member of Redstockings, a leading radical feminist organization. Eventually she became uncomfortable about the gulf separating the women she met in her community work from the feminist groups developing in New York. Jane increasingly focused her attention on local political struggles in Williamsburg and Greenpoint. Jane was able to attract people from many backgrounds to participate in NCNW. She also knew how to acquire the resources needed for

its programs. Jan's vision, drive and skill were critical to the development of NCNW.

Carol N. was an unmarried Italian women in her late twenties. She had been born in Brooklyn and was the daughter of a local union leader. Her professional background was in psychology and women's studies. She had been a participant in the radical psychology movement and was becoming interested in film. She came to Williamsburg to shoot a film portraying the role of working class women in local community activism. She stayed to direct a local cultural festival and later to become the first director of NCNW. Carol's great energy, her dedication to NCNW and her Italian heritage helped to attract local women to NCNW. Her ideas about curriculum were critical in the development of the college program and her political thinking helped to shape the direction of the organization.

Kate S. was an Italian women in her early thirties. She had recently separated from her husband and was the mother of three young daughters. Kate had been a devout Catholic in her youth and had attended a Catholic college in upstate New York. Her earliest political experience was in the Catholic left. She was a professor of English at a local community college in Brooklyn. Combining her political activism, her experience in the women's movement and her experience as an educator, she had envisioned a college program for working class women. Her personal connection with Jane brought her to Williamsburg to translate that vision into reality. Her knowledge of the academic world and

her creative approach to developing curriculum were both critical in developing the college world.

Barbara Q. was an Irish woman in her late twenties. She came from a large and poor Boston Irish family. Barbara was a radical lesbian and deeply involved in the women's movement. Barbara's straightforward stance concerning her sexual preference and her work in the woman's movement presented a challenge and in some cases a threat to local NCNW women. They were particularly sensitive to the charge that NCNW was a hotbed of lesbian activities. However, Barbara's integrity, ability and devotion to NCNW won for her the admiration and friendship of local NCNW women and other community residents as well. Barbara became a key leader of NCNW and developed a whole program centered on community activism and employment training. These programs were not only for local women in Williamsburg and Greenpoint, but also extended to a citywide network of community groups.

Many other women played important roles at NCNW as well. These few portraits provide a brief glimpse at some of the leading individuals in the organization. Now I will return to the larger organization itself and its development in the community. It is within the context of the tension between social change movements and the lives of ordinary working class people that I wish to discuss the history of NCNW as an organization and its college program in particular.

NCNW was staffed through the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) of 1975 . Under the leadership of Johnston, NCNW's professional

organizer, a number of the community organizations in the neighborhood formed the Williamsburg-Greenpoint Coalition. The Coalition included both traditional and newer neighborhood groups of many types. The Coalition submitted a proposal for and received an allotment of CETA job slots. These job lines were distributed to the member groups. Although NCNW and its sister organizations, the Conselyea Street Block Association and ENACT had proposed and initiated the program, it was administered through one of the traditional neighborhood organizations, the Jackson Street Settlement House. NCNW itself obtained twenty-five job lines, a number sufficient to permit the new organization to staff an office in a storefront on Metropolitan Avenue, to begin to develop advocacy positions on issues effecting working class women, and to conduct programs in the community.

A number of meetings were held to determine the kind of programs women wanted the organization to develop. There was a general agreement that the programs of the organization should promote neighborhood life, viewing the neighborhood from a women's perspective. Eventually, the participants reached a consensus. They decided they could best advance their community development agenda through a higher education program.

The idea of a college program for themselves was one that the women reached after a period of wide ranging discussion. From the beginning, the women expressed the desire for some kind of educational program. The initial goals were modest: they talked about classes or lessons, such as driving lessons. The idea of a full fledged and degree-granting program seemed beyond the scope

of possibility at first. Nonetheless, the idea of a college program developed as a possible approach to their need to defend their community. Many women mentioned feeling they were unevenly matched in conflicts with such groups as government officials, corporate executives, bankers, lobbyists, and other educated individuals who exercised power in deciding the fate of cities and neighborhoods. Although confident that their understanding of the needs of the neighborhood was correct, the women were frustrated by their inability to match the arguments and tactics of professionals. They were unable to evaluate facts or statistics used to support the contentions of government and corporate officials or to respond to sophisticated arguments concerning the allocation of resources.

Despite these limitations, the women had been relatively successful in their past battles in defense of the neighborhood. In sharp contrast to adjacent and similar areas, despite its losses, Williamsburg and Greenpoint had remained largely intact. However, the women believed they had been stretched to the limit in past struggles and that to continue to be successful, they needed to develop new abilities and new approaches to their struggle for the neighborhood.

Defining higher education as a way to help the women become more effective neighborhood organizers made it possible for NCNW to consider offering a college program. Once the this subject was introduced, however, it touched a very deep chord within the women themselves.

Some began to recollect long forgotten dreams and a number confessed that they had indeed hoped to attend college when they were younger. Various circumstances had made it impossible then but they welcomed the prospect now.

For some, family economics had been the problem, they had begun to work immediately following high school graduation. A few had not even been able to complete high school. Others had been told that girls did not need to go to college, as they would soon marry and waste their education. Still others had been thwarted by a lack of self confidence, or simply by growing up in an environment in which college attendance is not the norm and therefore an individual must demonstrate her right to it. Most of the women had married young and had merged their own youthful dreams into the wish that their children have more opportunities and a better life. Discussions of the possibility of a neighborhood college reawakened aspirations that the women themselves had long forgotten.

I hypothesize here that an even deeper process was occurring in this dialogue of possibility that was taking place in a storefront on Metropolitan Avenue. On one level, the desire for higher education was grounded in the practical wish to become more effective community organizers. On another level, it grew out of a deeper and long suppressed wish to define themselves as more fully human. It was not the women themselves who had decided when they had had "enough" education. It had been decided for them by others. This termination of their education suggested that they had not needed to know much because their social role would be limited and their connection to the larger world only fragmentary.

In voicing a desire for higher education, the NCNW women were expressing a deeper wish -- the wish to be made whole through knowledge. This

was a wish for themselves as individuals, but it was also connected to their role as informal community organizers and the bearers of neighborhood culture. Both of these aspects of the social world they were creating enlarged their view of themselves as complete human beings. They challenged definitions of themselves as being "only housewives," that is, as being defined only by their function. Their connection to society as housewives was instrumental, they performed a particular function, one that had been culturally defined as requiring no particular knowledge or understanding.

Even the slogans that had been used to exhort students like them to remain in school expressed their instrumental character: "Stay in school, get a better job." This defines the goal of education only in terms of its completion. The diploma is what one wants; attending school is the means through which one receives it. Now the NCNW women wished to redefine themselves through education in a new and fuller way.

Further, in most cases, their previous experiences in the educational system had confirmed this instrumental definition of self. Many had attended Catholic parochial schools and even those who had not, had attended public schools of a similar character. Their schools had emphasized strong discipline and basic skills, and were bureaucratic and authoritarian in structure. Women expressed vivid recollections of the fear and self-doubt the schools had inspired. In such schools, education had not been conceptualized as a bridge between the individual and the wider world.

As they discussed the possibility of a college program, the women approached higher education as something which was serious and important, though difficult. As they spoke, they compared their previous experience of education with their vision of the possibilities it held for them now. Education for most had been dull, dry, and dead. What occurred in the classroom had not been connected with real life. It was merely, as Giroux (1983) notes "teacher talk," something to be memorized for the test and then forgotten. The kind of education they envisioned for themselves would be based on their aspirations for understanding, a kind of understanding that would allow them to see the connections between their own experiences and the events of the larger world. They wanted a classroom that would provide a free space in which they could analyze, question and debate. They hoped to learn a new language in which they could speak to each other about their deepest concerns. They wanted to be able to find some order in the randomness of experience.

The women's vision of the college program branched out in two directions. On the one hand, they wanted to learn new facts and ideas which would help them penetrate the opacity of their experience in the world. They hoped that this type of education would both build on and challenge their common sense views of the world. Education viewed in this way deepens the individual's connectedness to the world by enhancing her understanding of it. It may be considered from the perspective of Schutz' analysis of the relationship between what he terms common sense and scientific understanding. Science does not contradict common sense, Schutz maintains. Rather, it takes common sense as



its starting point and then both challenges and elaborates the categories people have constructed to explain their shared experience of the world.

On the other hand, the concept of the college program discussed by the women in NCNW included a more utopian project as well. The college, as they envisioned it, would create an arena, a universe of discourse in which they could express their dreams and hopes for a better world. Perhaps by disclosing their own ideas, they would learn that fellow students shared their views or that their ideas were echoed in a scholarly theory. As Mannheim delineated the utopian enterprise, its vision of alternative possibilities provides a critical gauge for the examination of existing reality. This more critical and idealistic approach reflected the women's desire that the college program should be closely tied to social activism. The college program was both an end in itself and a means to the further end of becoming more effective participants in community organizing.

From the earliest discussions of the college program, the women were clear and quite unanimous in their desire for a liberal arts curriculum. It is somewhat ironic that after all the discussion of relevance and the criticisms of traditional liberal arts formulated by the college students of the 1960's, there was a clear desire among these future students for a curriculum strongly defined by the legacy of liberal arts. One factor in this desire arose as a result of the organization's assertion of equality for working class women.

Women of their class background often either had chosen or been persuaded to pursue a commercial or vocational curriculum in high school. These courses trained them in concrete low level skills, preparing them for

specific and limited types of employment. This choice cut them off from any larger vision of education as a way of deepening one's understanding of experience and thereby enhancing one's sense of connection to the world. Instead they had been trained to perform a specific and limited function. An implicit assumption had been made about the course their lives would follow. They would work for a few years, then marry and raise a family. Perhaps when their children were older, they would return to work in order to supplement the family income. Since they would perform and be defined only by these limited functions, they did not need to be educated to perform any important role in society as a whole or to do any serious type of work.

The demand for a liberal arts education meant breaking through these assumptions about who they were and the lives they might lead. To study bookkeeping, stenography, dressmaking, and record keeping as many had in high school, signified consenting to a view of themselves as unimportant, limited and not very intelligent. To learn sociology and psychology, history, philosophy and literature was a way of fighting back against this limiting definition of their identity. These were serious subjects; studying them asserted one's identity as a serious person. Both as women and as members of the working class, they had been pushed aside, their education had been seen as unimportant and trivial. Having the opportunity to develop a curriculum of important subjects provided an occasion to take one's self seriously and to insist that others do so as well. "What are they studying at Yale?" they said when discussing curriculum. "That's what we need to learn."

Subjects were chosen not only for symbolical meaning, but because they could be used as building blocks of a curriculum which would provide the basis of a broader and deeper understanding of the world. Further, the women hoped that by studying these subjects, they could begin to reknit the broken connections between themselves and others, between themselves and the larger world, and finally between their functional everyday selves and the deeper selves they had concealed in order to fit into a limited definition of their human identity. The very subjects that in the 1960s middle class students had rejected as narrow, dogmatic, rigid, traditional, boring, and irrelevant were perceived by these newcomers to the academic world as vital and important elements of their design to reeducate, humanize and empower themselves.

The students asserted the view of themselves as serious people and community organizers in opposition to the demeaning image of them as just housewives. As housewives, they played an important though devalued role in family life. They saw themselves as the center of the family, but recognized that the price they paid for this central role in the household was to be cut off from the larger world. Although the women were intensely attached to their families and even asserted that they "liked" housework, they recognized the limitation imposed by this role that they ignore those aspects of their character that do not fit into it. Very few would have considered relinquishing or changing their role in the family, but they saw the college program as a way of expanding their sense of self and getting in touch with the world. Being in the program meant being outside of the household.

In some ways these early discussions women held concerning the possibilities of the college program and how it would be structured elaborate some of the elements of the academic debate on the nature of the public and private spheres. Most of the women in the program saw themselves as "housewives," whether or not they had paid employment outside the household. However, their everyday life in the neighborhood and their community activities constantly pulled them into the public arena outside the household where they engaged in a discourse of larger concerns. In a sense they viewed their participation in the college program as a way to build on their fragmentary and elusive sense of themselves as public persons.

By developing the college program, the women affirmed a view of themselves as fully human, in opposition to the view presented in other aspects of their lives, that their possibilities were limited. In so doing, I contend, they were attempting to develop a view of themselves similar to Marx' concept of the fully human person. They tried to transcend the limitations imposed by an alienating definition of their role in society, imposed by outside circumstances that were controlled by powerful others. Rather, they attempted to redefine their reality so that they are not merely an instrument, to create a reality that they can actively understand and shape. In working to establish the college program as a institution based on their needs and world view, they were creating a reality illuminated by their own humanity. The program is the product of their living creativity, rather than of their dead and alienated labor.

Those participating in planning the college program shared a vision that it would dignify the humanity of all participants. Teachers were not to be authority figures, nor were students to be submissive and quiescent learners. Rather, like other liberatory education programs, the NCNW college was designed to be a community of people learning together. Learning and acquiring knowledge were the core of the program, but visions, dreams and fantasies were not beyond its scope. It was even possible that facts, ideas and visions might prove mutually illuminating. The origin of the program in social activism was also an important and continuing theme. The participants started by creating their own educational agenda, and aspired to learn how to change society as well.

In modern society, education has been viewed as a means of social mobility. The participants in the NCNW Program attempted to formulate different educational goals for the program. They questioned the view that education was simply an activity one pursued for material gain: that the better educated an individual is, the higher level of achievement and reward that individual may look forward to. This view of education has been subscribed to both by ordinary people who believe that effort and achievement is and should be rewarded and by mainstream social analysts who assert that differential reward are required to encourage talented individuals to perform socially necessary work. Even critical social analysts concur with the overall concept, though they evaluate it negatively, noting that those who are privileged are able to maintain and pass on their advantaged status and that the children from well

placed families may be pushed up the educational ladder by their parents' resources and social connections.

In order to decide which model of education they wanted to adopt, the NCNW program planners found it necessary to consider the role of education in society. In traditional views, schools is seen as preparing children and youth for adult life. Education is alleged to do this in two ways. On one level, students are taught specific information and skills that are defined as preparing them to perform certain roles in the adult world. On another level, the school experience in general teaches attitudes and values, conformity to institutional requirements and acceptable ways of relating to other people. From this perspective, the school is seen as having its own culture, one that reflects the culture of the larger society. Thus by participating in the social life of the school, it is alleged that students are learning to be citizens of their society.

This second type of learning has been termed the hidden curriculum. According to this analysis, students ostensibly in the classroom to learn a particular subject such as algebra are also learning a wide range of behavioral norms. For example, they are being taught to come to the classroom promptly and on a regular and continuing basis, to sit quietly in their seats, to speak only when formally called upon to do so, to accede to the authority of a designated official, and to obey the general rules of the institution. Thus, there is both an open curriculum of subject matter and a hidden curriculum of behavioral norms.

A third and unofficial part of school culture observed by researchers (e.g., Larkin, 1979) is student peer culture. This may be either conformist or

oppositional or some combination of the two. Peer culture presents its own model of appropriate behavior which often includes techniques for manipulating the official school culture or for subverting the official requirements of the school. Students view the official culture of the school as imposing formal requirements while their own peer culture is an attempt to circumvent these rules and to retain some arena of freedom and personal expression. It is true that most schools are not the total institutions delineated by Goffman. But it is possible to recognize in the peer culture of students an echo of Goffman's description of how mental patients preserve a sphere of autonomy within the framework of institutional regulations.

As they discussed how they wanted their college program to function, NCNW students expressed opposition to this customary structure of educational institutions. As adults, they frequently and forcefully stated that they did not want to be treated like children. In this way they expressed their resistance to the behavioral objectives of the hidden curriculum. They emphasized their own goal of empowerment in contrast to the institutional objective of behavioral conformity. Their view of education for citizenship meant education for an active and critical role, rather than education for compliance and conformity. In their discussions they linked their own educational goals to their struggles to preserve neighborhood life. They wanted their peer culture to impact openly and directly on the structure of the institution rather than existing furtively in its interstices.

In their discussions of the future college program, the women of NCNW not only rejected conventional and mainstream views of education, but went beyond many Marxist and critical approaches as well. While mainstream analysts view the educational system as a mobility elevator, depositing its passengers at various levels of life chances according to their degree of educational achievement, radical analysts note that education prepares students to live in a class stratified society. Mainstream analysts envision equality of opportunity, emphasizing that the opportunity for educational achievement provides each generation with a fresh opening for more extensive success in life. Critical analysts consider this meritocratic approach a rationalization for a stratified class society characterized by elite domination, class hegemony, unequal power, and unequal access to the rewards of society.

Radical analysts note that schools introduce the concept of inequality early in life, habituating children to being judged and evaluated according to a standard outside of their own experience. This alleged evaluation of the child's ability is, critical analysts contend, in reality a measure of their class position and/or racial and ethnic culture. These analysts note that middle and upper class children are more successful in school at both the overt and hidden elements of the curriculum because the language and culture of the school is a continuation of the language and culture of their class (Bernstein, 1971). The culture of the school is comfortable and familiar to middle and upper class students, but to working class and poor students, it is an alien environment that must be painfully



learned. The NCNW women confirmed this in terms of their own earlier experience.

Critical analysts also recognize that there is no one unified educational system, but rather several different and class stratified systems. Upper class students attend elite private schools in this country and abroad. These institutions are not only inaccessible to the vast majority of people, their existence is virtually unknown to them. Middle class children attend superior public schools in prosperous suburbs or elite public and less exclusive private schools in urban areas. Working class students attend mediocre public schools where conformity and skill training rather than academic preparation are emphasized. Although many working class parents expend great efforts to improve their children's educational opportunities, by and large their schools remain at this level. Poor children most frequently attend overcrowded and dilapidated schools in the inner cities or equally hard pressed rural schools. Racial and ethnic discrimination reinforces the low level of schooling in areas in which students are not only poor, but also black, Hispanic, or native American. The unequal distribution of political power, discussed in Chapter V, assures that middle class schools receive the resources they need, leaving schools of the poor and working class to get along as best they can.

The results of this educational process which reinforces other experiences, are quite predictable. Upper class children learn that they have the right to receive the greatest share of the rewards that society has to offer. Poor and working class children are taught the obedience and conformity which is directed

toward making them docile workers. In what has been termed a credential society, most working and lower class children are denied the credentials that would make them eligible for a higher level of jobs and opportunities.

Beyond merely providing better opportunities for the better off, the educational system also supplies an ideology for structured inequality by disguising it as a meritocracy, in which people receive what they deserve. From this ideological perspective, greater levels of education lead to higher levels of opportunity and people are rewarded according to their ability and efforts.

The educational system is more complex than it pictured by either its functionalist defenders or its radical critics. In addition to its function as a system of stratification based either on merit or inequality, depending on which view one accepts, it has a contradictory function as well. In a society with few unifying institutions, education has been assigned the function of promoting social integration. That is to say, schools endeavor to make students feel they are part of a larger whole at the same time as they are being separated into unequal categories. Obviously these two functions contradict each other and the school system cannot succeed equally well at both.

Social integration in schools is officially promoted through ceremonial occasions, sports, and school wide events. Unofficially, patterns of peer solidarity may lead to associations that cross class boundaries. To the degree that social integration is achieved, it contradicts patterns of hierarchy and domination. Thus educational institutions tend to include the opposing themes of hierarchy and

class stratification on the one hand and solidarity and social integration on the other.

Not only are there inherent tensions between the theme of hierarchy and the theme of solidarity, but the corresponding theme of instrumental learning and credentialism is contradicted by the possibility of substantive education that may lead to a genuine understanding of the social world. As presently structured, schools are part of the social apparatus of domination, but these opposing tendencies make them a very imperfect instrument of that purpose. In their manifest form, they provide a sorting mechanism and an ideology for domination, but their latent substance includes the potential for the development of an oppositional culture. Indeed, this potential expressed itself forcefully in the student movement of the 1960's. During that period, the contradictions between hierarchy and solidarity and between credentialism and substantive learning built into the educational system provided a basis for a widespread protest against the established order of school and society.

The protests of the 1960's may be viewed as a flawed but significant attempt to create a link between middle class college students and various subordinate groups in society. Students responded strongly to the moral claims of the civil rights movement that dramatically revealed the contradiction between the themes of domination and solidarity in the larger society. Thousands of black and white students answered the appeals of such national leaders as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X by joining marches, protests, campus actions, sit-ins, freedom schools and voter registration campaigns. Their participation in these

protest actions led to both a greater sense of empowerment and a deeper questioning of the social order.

Paying heed to the condition of American blacks in a segregated and unequal society focused attention on injustice and inequality in general. Indeed the civil rights movement had begun to evolve toward a more inclusive definition of injustice. Martin Luther King Jr. himself had begun to address the issue of economic inequality and to redefine the movement he was leading as a poor people's movement. Student radicals branching out from the civil rights movement, formed new groups including Students for a Democratic Society and initiated what was to become a massive protest against the Vietnam War. Cultural radicals became Hippies, providing an iconoclastic model of an alternative lifestyle based on a radical vision of community. Students brought the movement home to many American campuses by advocating and campaigning for various types of educational change including administrative reform, curricular change and other innovations. In each of the above instances, the theme of solidarity was advanced against the institutional design for domination.

Participation in these events led students to believe that they could play a role in initiating social change and that educational institutions could become a base for generating models of social alternatives. The NCNW program as it developed in the mid-1970s was envisioned and constructed on the foundation of the educational innovations developed by the social movements of the 1960s (Fischer, 1974). The founders of the NCNW program aspired to build on the themes of solidarity and education for social change.

The late sixties and the early seventies were a period of optimism and expansion in American higher education in general. The momentum provided by the student movement led to a groundswell of experimental programs in higher education both on and off campuses around the country (Fischer, 1974). There was a renewed sense of purpose and possibility in higher education. Some students and educators had begun to develop ways to open up higher education to new groups of learners, new subjects of study and new and freer social relationships. For them, the vision of a more open and more democratic society was complemented by the vision of a more democratic and inclusive university. Not everyone shared this vision and those who opposed it contended that student activists and their faculty collaborators had a negative impact on higher education.

The founders of the NCNW college program believed it was necessary to address a number of questions raised by the existing condition of higher education in both its conventional and its more radical aspects. First among these was the issue of why, though few working class women attended college, this group had not been regarded as an underrepresented population by educational reformers.

The exclusion of working class women was not viewed as an important concern by the groups addressing issues in higher education. The exclusion of poor and minority group individuals was being raised at this time, and many colleges were developing program to attract and assist students from these groups. The paucity of working class women was barely noticed. This was

particularly interesting since there was the beginning of an effort to attract older women to the campuses. Working class women had very low rates of college attendance, but few colleges were targeting them for any special measures that might increase their numbers.

This national shortage of working class women in higher education made it necessary for the founders of the NCNW program to examine the existing structure of higher education in order to understand why working class women did not attend college. Their analysis of this issue formed the basis for designing their new college program in a way that addressed these concerns.

A second area of consideration centered on the claims on higher education made by the student radicals of the sixties and early seventies. Working class women, most of whom consider themselves traditionalists, were rather surprised to find themselves in the same camp as long haired Hippies and other young radicals. They needed to understand the reforms advocated by the students in order to see which they would feel comfortable with and which applied to their own situation. The student activists had claimed the right to have a voice in college governance, curriculum design and the allocation of resources. NCNW women attempted to understand these claims in order to develop their own agenda for higher education.

A third area of interest was one with which the neighborhood women's academic collaborators were particularly concerned. How was it possible to present a positive model of intellectual life and serious scholarship while challenging the institutional structure of higher education? As participants in the

social change movements of the sixties, these scholar/activists had developed a critical perspective on higher education. Their participation in the formation of the NCNW program in partnership with neighborhood women constituted an aspect of their critique. Nonetheless, they believed that the kind of learning, analysis and critical thinking that can occur in a college classroom would empower the neighborhood women to continue and enlarge their activism in defense of the neighborhood. Like the radical students of the sixties and seventies, these educators believed that education always has political content and they wanted to emphasize the empowering, rather than the conformist aspect of scholarship.

In order to develop an empowering curriculum and an institutional strategy, it was necessary to bridge the gap between academic learning and the practical goals of the women in the program. The women who were the program's future students wanted to learn how to be more effective community organizers. While participants agreed that the educational program would be directed toward this goal, concrete links remained to be forged.

The process of deciding how they wanted to structure their new educational institution necessitated examining the positive and negative elements of higher education as it currently exists. It was particularly important to understand those elements of academic life that were most unattractive to working class women. The academy presents itself as and has been presumed to be a repository of universal scholarship and culture. However, various inquiries in the last quarter century have revealed its predilections and biases. Certain

quite specific kinds of knowledge are emphasized while other kinds are ignored. Indeed today's bitter disputes about what should be included in the college curriculum reflect this conflict.

In the middle 1970s, when the matter was discussed at NCNW, the issue of cultural homogeneity in the college curriculum was just beginning to be considered. Existing curricula seemed to emphasize the world view and experience of a middle to upper class, white Anglo-American male dominated society. Many new groups had entered the academy, but the subject matter had remained consonant with the student body and outlook of the late nineteenth century. Working class women were only one of many groups invisible in the standard curriculum. Their story had yet to be told; their issues were yet to be addressed. If there was a history, a literature, a social or political life to which they could lay claim, this was not apparent in any college curriculum. While some of the more recent scholarship in a number of fields had attempted to address this imbalance, little of the new thinking had yet reached most college classrooms.

Working class women felt excluded from the academy, not only in terms of its substance, but in terms of its style as well. The formal bureaucratic design and the informal arrangement of power within the university represent a distinctive structuring of human relations. In part, this design exhibits the classic form of the bureaucratic organization with its formal divisions, chain of command, hierarchy of offices and narrowly defined division of labor. In part it reflects an informal political structure of deals, negotiations and power



tradeoffs. Both these styles are quite different from the personal, informal and durable networks that working class women understand and function within. The formality and narrowness of bureaucratic operations may easily be interpreted by them as coldness or indifference. Negotiating a difficult or even hostile bureaucracy may make achieving a simple goal like registering for courses or applying for financial aid seem overwhelmingly difficult for many students. Working class women who question their right to be in college in the first place may easily be led to conclude that if they find it impossible to register for a course, they certainly will not be able to master it. They may compare this difficulty with the bureaucracy to their earlier experiences in an educational setting, blame what they believe to be their own ineptitude and conclude once again that education is not for them.

Even if successful in negotiating the obstacle course of bureaucratic arrangements, there continues to be gap in language and communication between working class women and the professors and administrators of a college. Working class women have had little or no previous contact with such people. The perceived social distance between them is very great. Just as formal channels of communication present a formidable challenge, informal communication can also be very difficult. The kind of routine communication that occurs between a teacher and students may be complicated by the women's fears and doubts. Working class women may hesitate to respond in class for fear of being wrong or of being seen as stupid. Similar fears may prevent them from asking for a clarification or explanation of a concept they do not understand. A

routine meeting with an instructor to discuss a paper or project may be an occasion fraught with apprehension. Informal channels of communication which other students use routinely may present such obstacles to working class women that they will be severely disadvantaged.

The style of communication employed by working class women in their everyday life is markedly different from that used in large structured institutions such as the university. This difference in styles of communication symbolizes a broader difference in the general culture. There is a tension between the culture of the neighborhood community, concrete, personal and communal, and that of the university, abstract, bureaucratic, and individualistic. In the past the women had felt helpless and incompetent as a result of this disparity. In order for the NCNW women to create a compatible educational environment, it was necessary that the process of education, learning itself, be separated from the bureaucratic structure of the university in which it has traditionally been embedded. This goal of creating an environment for learning which was not shaped by the bureaucratic culture of the university became an important component of the task of creating the college program.

In the ordinary course of events, going to college has also come to mean going away, both in real life and in symbol. Specifically, it means leaving the neighborhood of one's youth, with its particularistic definition of social reality and its familiar scenes and people to go elsewhere, into a different and unknown environment. In the new place, the people are for the most part strangers and the challenges and resources of the situation are unknown. This is true, though to

a lesser degree, even for those who continue to live at home and commute to college.

In this way, the acts of maturing and becoming educated have become connected with leaving, separating, going away from, and breaking the particularistic social connections of the past. Specifically, the college student leaves friends, relatives, and familiar places. The student enters the college, a new place, as an isolated individual. The institution presents the individual with role of student as the integrating social role for that period of life. New relationships and attachments formed among intellectual and social peers who share this new environment are supposed to replace older attachments based on shared experiences and a shared sense of place. This theme of separation has a strong class based subtext.

In a sense, college is already a familiar place to students raised in an upper middle class environment. While they too may have to relinquish old attachments in leaving their high schools, families and friends, the new environment of the campus will not be that different from the one they have left. When working class and poor people attend college, they are expected to shed the particularistic identity that links them to the families and communities of their youth and to develop the universalistic frame of reference provided by middle class culture. A working class individual who goes to college has a subtly different experience from that of his/her middle class fellow student. Like middle class students, working class students learn (or do not learn) what is taught in their classes, but in addition, they are learning how to be middle class.

Working class social identities are increasingly disguised as student come to understand the price of admission to the great American success sweepstakes. Not only is it necessary to understand why John Donne is superior to Harold Robbins, but it is also important to understand that clothing made of one hundred percent cotton fabric is superior to clothing made of a polyester blend. The result for many working class students is a painful internal split between the sweet memories of an unselfconscious youth and the current reality of a carefully wrought "dressed for success" external persona.

There is no doubt that one function of higher education for all students is to encourage them to view their everyday life in a more reflective way. Indeed, higher education should provide students with a framework, a viewpoint, a perspective that allows them to see the world in new ways. However, for working class students, the values learned in colleges and universities do not merely call into question the culture and values with which they grew up. Working class students learn that they can embrace the new values of higher learning, intellectual life, high culture or professional achievement only by rejecting their own past experience in the familiar and friendly world of the local neighborhood community. There is little question that this cultural strain is one of the important reasons for a lower rate of success in higher education among poor and working class youth.

To overcome this stumbling block, the founders of the NCNW college program wanted to create a type of higher education that would not force students to make a painful choice between their own neighborhood culture and

the culture of the university. Instead they wanted to build on the existing continuities between community and higher education and to create new links between the two cultures. In the process of creating the college program, they had to consider these issues in a number of concrete ways. It was important not only to eliminate the contradictions and tensions between community life and higher education, but to develop a curriculum and a social structure that affirmed and enhanced the value of community. Further, they wanted the life and concerns of their particular community to be incorporated into the structure of the college program.

To realize their goals, the students and other participants in the college program had to make demands upon the existing structure of the university. They approached the co-sponsoring college with a program they had formulated to address the issues discussed here. They challenged an existing college to make their program available to an underserved population by allowing that group to develop its own model of higher education. In this respect it is possible to compare the NCNW students with the militant students of the 1960s and early 1970s. Both developed a critical analysis of existing higher education, a new educational model and the demand that higher education be changed to meet their specific needs. The militant students, despite their slogans, demonstrations, and confrontational approach, made relatively modest demands and had only a nominal impact on the social structure of the university. The radical groups became "clubs" or student activities on a number of campuses.

They demanded and most often received recognition and legitimation for their own groups and activities. Recognition gave them access to the resources controlled by student government organizations. This made them equal to other student groups on campus and made it possible for their activities to be funded by student controlled revenues. Much of their energies were absorbed in fighting for goals not specifically connected with college life. Their participation in the civil rights movement, the peace movement, and in specific political campaigns constituted an important component of each of these campaigns and won recognition for students as a political force, but did not affect the social structure of institutions of higher education.

Student demands for change on campus included demands for curricular modification such as the creation of new areas of study and scholarly inquiry as black studies, the hiring and tenuring of a small number of junior faculty who were sympathetic to the goals of students, and the inclusion of students in the decision making procedures and governance of the college. At some colleges, strong and well organized student groups did achieve some of these objectives, either by demonstrations or by negotiation with the college administration. Although it seemed to many people during that period that student demands were tearing apart the very fabric of higher education, in fact, the demands were really quite modest. Adding a few new courses in subjects such as black studies, for example, left the rest of the traditional curriculum in place as white, male, middle class studies. Including one or two students on committees overwhelmingly composed of faculty members had symbolic importance and

reminded administrators that students were also a part of the university, but the students had little real power to influence the decision making process. On many committees, students were only observers or nonvoting members and many of the most important committees remained closed to student participation.

Radical students in the 1960s and 1970s did succeed in having some new courses included in the curriculum and in having some course requirements loosened. However, the basic process was one of adding courses to existing curricula, rather than examining the structure of the whole curriculum or the process that brought it into being. New departments created in response to student protests often remained isolated and marginal. The faculty recruited to teach these courses were unable to establish a secure base, remaining in a tenuous relationship to their more established colleagues. Thus the changes had the greatest impact on the most marginal aspects of university life. The central core of practice, governance and curriculum remained largely unchanged in most colleges and universities.

In addition to curriculum, an area of central importance in the structure of colleges and universities is faculty selection and evaluation. Student movement participants in the 1960s raised the issue of student participation in this process. In some schools they succeeded in opening up the faculty selection process to a modest degree of critical examination. Their victories in this particular arena were meager. In some colleges, nonvoting student members were included on faculty committees. In others, the concerted actions of militant students influenced particular personnel decisions. For the most part, however,

students did not penetrate this critical area of decision making in the university. In some cases, previously won rights have been gradually cut back by later restructurings of the decision making process. When students have achieved power, it has been at the expense of the faculty, thereby indirectly strengthening the position of the administration.

In contrast to this rather limited series of outcomes to the attempt of students to increase their participation in the decision making processes of existing colleges and universities, NCNW students made broader and deeper demands on the system. The women attempted to structure their program in a way that placed them at the center of the processes of curriculum development, course selection, faculty hiring and evaluation and formation of the institutional structure of the college itself. The process of curriculum development, for example, began by students discussing what they wanted to learn. These discussions and other input from students, community people and educators became the raw materials that a faculty-student committee used to develop the basic framework of the curriculum.

The events at NCNW may be viewed as expanding the concept of student activities to include all aspects of the institution of higher education. In traditional institutions, student activities are largely confined to peripheral areas of university life such as sports, social groups and other extra curricular activities. The central activities of the university remains the province of faculty and administration. Student activists challenged this division that relegated students to marginal areas of university life. However, both their demands and the results



they achieved remained at the periphery of power and decision making. The women of NCNW went much further. Since they were the initiators of the college program, they viewed their activities as constituting the core of the college program.

The possibility of broadening student input into the central areas of university life rests on the concept of membership. In a traditional college, students are not considered full members of the institution. In part, this is due to their temporary status within the institution. They are there for a limited amount of time, then they are graduated and replaced by others. Indeed, the distinction between permanent and temporary status is central to one's position within the university. A sharp distinction is made between permanent, tenured faculty and temporary, visiting, adjunct, and other nonpermanent faculty who are excluded from the governance and decision making process.

Student membership is at the core of the NCNW college program. It was students, with their professional collaborators, who developed and designed the institutional structure of the program. The group sought and made a connection with an established college only after they had already conceptualized the basic design of the program and secured the resources necessary to establish it. Students were full members of this program; they had collaborated in all aspects of its development from the beginning. Both the claims that they made on the institution and the role that they played were more radical and more complete than those of the 1960s students. Their sense of ownership of the program made it a uniquely student centered institution.

The participants in the NCNW college program differed from the radical students of the 1960s in another interesting way. Although like the participants in the student movement they challenged many of the formal and institutionalized elements of the university, the NCNW women placed a positive value on intellectual life in general and on such constitutive elements of it as learning, discovering, theorizing, investigating, research, and associated activities. This difference between the NCNW women and the radical students may be seen in the women's desire to maintain a strong liberal arts focus in their curriculum. They attempted to separate intellectual activities from the bureaucratic structure of the university. In their past experience, the bureaucracy had been an impediment to their participation in higher education. They wanted to structure their program in a way that would eliminate the bureaucracy to the greatest degree possible, while retaining the intellectual project they viewed as the heart of the program.

The concept of curricular relevance held by the NCNW women also differed from that of the radical students. It is important to recollect that it was a specific political issue, namely the crisis of neighborhoods, that led to the founding of NCNW itself and to the decision to develop a college program. It therefore became a goal of the program to create a curricular framework in which it was possible to reconcile the political mission of the organization with an educational philosophy that stressed the liberal arts. The NCNW women wanted education that was both politically relevant to their lives in their community and grounded in the liberal arts.

What was particularly interesting in the process of developing the program was that these two goals turned out to be less contradictory than they might seem. One aspect of liberal arts education that is relevant for political activism was understanding theory and participating in the process of theory building. Theory is both a basic element of a classical liberal arts approach and a tool for understanding such political questions as how institutions work, how seemingly disparate events may be connected and how to analyze and comprehend complex bodies of data. This theoretical approach is exactly what had been omitted in the limited and class defined type of education that the women had received in the past.

Out of this discussion of the relationship between liberal arts education and political relevance and usefulness grew certain principles that the NCNW women agreed would serve as a basis of development for the program. They came to regard these concepts as the principles of working class feminism. Some of these principles were similar to concepts being developed within feminist education in general. Indeed some were similar to the ideas of various other innovative educational programs that did not have any feminist base, particularly those being developed by followers of Paolo Freire. Some however were unique to working class feminism. These principles were:

1. Education begins with the students' own experience and ideas as stated by students themselves.
2. Students, teachers and other interested individuals collaborate in the development of the structure, process and content of the program.

3. Mutual help and support should be built into the college program, just as they are incorporated into the informal life of the community.
4. The program should be structured as a bridge between the culture of the community and community people and the culture of the university. Participants should create a frame of reference within which it is possible to integrate community women's educational goals with traditional liberal arts.
5. The program should empower women to make explicit for themselves the unstated but tacitly understood ethos of women's neighborhood culture.
6. The program should include a forum in which women may recreate history starting from their understanding of their own past and from the vantage point of women's role in the struggle for community.
7. Participating in the program should reverse the process through which such powerless groups as women and working class people lost their identity and help people to maintain the continuity of their lives, their communities, and their culture.

The designers of the NCNW program tried to implement these goals in a number of ways. One approach rested on emphasizing the importance of a strong grounding in theory and theoretical analysis. This strategy contradicts the approach of the women's previous educational experiences which defined education as practical training. While this narrowly practical approach to education is particularly strong in working class schools, it also reflects the prevailing philosophy of education in the larger society. American education has

often been termed pragmatic. The concept is used here not in the broader, philosophical meaning developed by James and Dewey, but rather in its narrower and more everyday sense of practical, or to put it in the terms of my analysis -- instrumental and governed by technical rationality. This practical approach offers the student concrete facts and techniques, but does not teach the critical stance that enables students to analyze the social, political and economic structures of the world they live in. Wilson, quoted in Giroux (1983), elaborates this analysis of American education by noting that it is anti-reflexive and anti-theoretical, concerned with the accumulation of objective knowledge, based on an unreflexive view of value neutrality and procedural legitimacy.

Theory and theory building were given a central position in the NCNW college program. Theory constitutes the central core of a liberal arts curriculum, a politically relevant curriculum and an empowering and liberating curriculum. The impractical tool of theory turned out to be the first component of practical political knowledge. Students learned to use theory as a way of comprehending events and their own experience.

Community itself became a second element of the college program. The concept of community provides the underlying framework for many of the program's most important features. The first of these is the creation of an intellectual community. Building theory collectively is an intellectually empowering experience and participating in this process is a step toward political empowerment as well. Becoming part of a group of students working together breaks down the solitary individual's isolation and sense of powerlessness. The

college program was designed to be a model of empowerment through collective theorizing, decision making and action. The participants created the program through their collective action and sustained it through continuing participation in the process they themselves had developed. Of course, the program had an institutional component as well; it could not have been legitimized without a connection to a recognized institution. But it was the neighborhood women who had taken the initiative in creating it and whose activities continued to sustain its existence.

Another aspect of community emphasized by the participants in the college program was the ideal of the program itself as a community, rather than as a hierarchical institution. While this ideal was not perfectly realized, within this group it did become possible to respond to other participants as human beings, rather than only in terms of their social role. People developed strong ties with others regardless of their role or standing in the hierarchy, based on their mutual participation in the process of developing the program. Community in this sense provided a way of confronting the problems that working class and poor people experience in the middle and upper class milieu of the university. In the NCNW program, administrators and teachers had worked as colleagues with their students in creating the program. As a consequence of this interaction, both groups were able to approach each other more easily and to develop a common language. This sense of ease and familiarity opened up channels of communications. Under these conditions, students would not fear that teachers

would think they were stupid for asking questions or that administrators would be unbending in the face of practical problems.

Closely related to the issue of hierarchy is the issue of expertise. Some program participants were professionals, other were neighborhood women. Does this not imply hierarchy, no matter how much participants try to deny its existence? On the one hand, experts may be viewed as both good and necessary. In the college program, experts possessed knowledge of specific subject areas, for example: sociology, psychology, language, literature, mathematics. They were knowledgeable in the substantive areas needed to create the college program, including community organizing, administration, curriculum development, and negotiating with the bureaucracy. On the other hand, experts present a problem. Their presence disrupts the group, makes non-experts feel inferior and implies hierarchy. How can the skills of the expert be used without damaging group ties and the sense of community? The NCNW vision of alternative higher education includes both a strong community bond and a serious educational curriculum.

We can view the concept of expertise from a double perspective. On the one hand, an expert is an individual who possesses a substantive body of knowledge or area of expertise. On the other hand, an expert is an individual who occupies the social status and performs the role of expert.

From this second perspective it is necessary for the role of expert to be complemented by the layperson's role. That is to say the special knowledge of the expert must be acknowledged and validated by others. The way in which

experts were integrated into the NCNW program is an indication of the way in which the concept of community structured the entire program.

Experts played their role, affirming what they knew and that their knowledge was valuable and important. Additionally, for women who were accustomed to deferring to the expertise of men, it was valuable to recognize the expert knowledge of other women. However, the experts also affirmed their ties to the group by reaching out to acknowledge the expertise of those who did not necessarily view themselves as experts. By helping these non-experts recognize and give voice to their own ideas and knowledge, the women of NCNW were able to transcend this separation by acknowledging that they were all experts. This freed them to recognize and utilize the expertise of all members of the group.

What does it mean to speak of reaching out to the expertise of others who do not necessarily see their knowledge as expert or important? I would like to provide an example. An older black student in the program worked as a receptionist in the NCNW office. One day she requested my assistance in preparing a description of her job for inclusion in a grant proposal. In answer to my general inquiry about what she did, she replied " Oh, nothing much, I answer the phone and take messages. Sometimes I do some xeroxing or help the secretaries if there is a lot of typing. But I'm not really very good at that." I reminded her that when young women come into the office to be interviewed for one of the job training programs or the college program, they are often frightened and insecure. It is she who reassures and encourages them, telling



them about the programs and describing her own experiences and how much she enjoys learning. I mentioned how the younger women in the program respect her and see her as a role model and that she has advised and assisted them with their problems. I reminded her of her daily task of keeping track of the activities of staff members and of the organization's various ongoing projects and how people rely on her to keep their schedules and to find out what is going on in areas of the organization in which they do not directly participate. Like many women, she had conceptualized her job only in terms of its formal requirements -- answering the phone, taking messages, assisting the secretaries -- thereby overlooking the critical informal areas in which she was truly an expert. As we wrote the job description together, the many areas of her expertise become obvious. "Do I do all that?" she asked, but she already knew the answer.

In the process of creating a community, the participants in the NCNW program had to deal not only with the chilling impact of hierarchy on educational possibilities, but also with suspiciousness and hostility among the students themselves. Resources are frequently in short supply among working class and poor people. Members of these groups often compete among themselves for such scarce goods as jobs, housing, and educational opportunities. This competition may be further exacerbated by racial or ethnic overtones. Because experience had taught them that there are only a limited amount of resources to go around, working class and poor people may view the good fortune of others as being at their expense. In contrast to this, the ideal of community developed by the founders of the program was of a community of mutual support. These

two views of collective life exist in tension with each other in many working class communities. For the NCNW students to give and receive the support they needed, they had to overcome the jealousy and pessimism that often restricts the activities of working class and poor people, particularly their willingness to participate in groups.

In the past, group participation had been a two-sided coin for working class and poor women. On the one hand, as previously noted, their memberships and group affiliations demarcate and structure their lives. It is as members of families, kinship networks and local groups that neighborhood women define themselves. In the family, women feel needed and connected to other members. They believe that their role is central to family life. In the community they participate in an informal network of women who help and assist each other, while looking out for vulnerable neighborhood residents. On the other hand, these affiliations may also be repressive, draining and devaluing to them. Although these women valued education, many had found schools to be repressive institutions. The family, the institution that working class and poor women value most highly, is often draining because it is a setting in which women give rather than receive support. Women belong to and value community organizations, but often the work of women in these groups is devalued -- ignored, overlooked or belittled.

Creating the college program as an institution meant creating a new community by building on and strengthening the positive elements of community life and overcoming or at least diminishing its negative aspects. It was necessary

to establish that one individual's success did not devalue the work of her peers. It was important to help students analyze how they could help each other, without sacrificing their own goals. In the traditional family, it is often the mother who sacrifices her own goals for the sake of other family members. In the college setting, mutual mothering was needed, as a mechanism through which students and other participants could both give and receive support.

Community was also incorporated into the program in a more concrete and specific way. The program was geographically located in the neighborhood where it was easily accessible to students. Community in this sense does not refer to the concept of community, but rather to the specific neighborhood in which the program was situated. The program's neighborhood location helped to make it possible for local women to attend. Most women had both families and jobs; physical and time difficulties of daily travel probably would have prevented most of them from traveling to any of the local colleges. The location also eased the cultural barriers previously discussed: a college situated in the neighborhood was less forbidding than a campus in another location.

Physical location was not the whole picture. The program was also designed to include specific ties to the community. In planning the program, people often remarked that they hoped "the college would be a resource for the neighborhood and the neighborhood would be a resource for the college." They wanted the college to be a resource to the community in a number of ways. First they hoped that students in the college would investigate various aspects of community life and develop new understandings and perspectives on the

neighborhood, from both a cultural and a political point of view. Areas to be studied included neighborhood history, culture, social structure and social problems. The program planners often noted that there was probably a good deal of material being produced in universities that would be useful and important to them, but that from their perspective, it might as well not exist at all since they had no access to it. There were few lines of communication between university trained professionals and neighborhood women.

Secondly, they wanted the college program to produce organizers and leaders. These leaders would defend the neighborhood when it was challenged by unsympathetic outside agencies. They would also develop affirmative plans and visions of the social development of neighborhood life, building on the neighborhood's treasured institutions, but at the same time opening up some of the closed avenues of social relationships. NCNW college program planners noted that higher education, as currently structured, constitutes a brain drain on working class neighborhoods. The best and the brightest of the younger generation who do go to college are encouraged to demonstrate their success and social mobility by leaving the neighborhood and entering the middle class world of corporate life and suburbia. The NCNW college program was planned as higher education for those who would remain and supply the neighborhood with much needed leadership and vision.

The community was envisioned as a resource for the college in the sense of supplying a rich field for research, field work and investigation. The program planners envisioned a situation in which problems or questions that students and

other neighborhood residents faced in real life would become starting points for various studies and research projects performed by students as a part of their course work.

The people designing the program understood the need to build supportive mechanisms into the program. The dropout rate among students with the same socio-economic background as the NCNW students is very high in colleges around the nation. To provide the needed support a number of approaches were built into the program. The ratio of counselors to students was quite high. Two of the three counselors in the program were working class women who only recently had completed college themselves. One had grown up in the neighborhood. They utilized a method termed advocacy counselling, employing a more proactive approach to the counselling process than is usual. Students who did not seek out their counselors would be contacted by them. The counselors were advocates of remaining in the program, in contrast to the more neutral approach is usual. Faculty and counselling staff were closely linked so that they could share information and suggestions. Students participated in precollege classes and discussion groups in which they could review their fears and problems, encourage each other and suggest practical strategies for coping with the strain of combining academic work with family life and paid employment.

The most important supportive mechanism, however, was not planned but arose spontaneously among the students: it was the help and support students gave each other. The students felt a strong responsibility to remain in the program because each one felt that her defection would weaken the group.

"There were so many times I felt I could not go on. I just couldn't do it any more," one student remarked, "but then I thought about the others and I had to stay in. How could I let them down?" Students helped each other remain in the program through crises such as job loss, family difficulties, serious illness and accidents. They encouraged each other through positive but complicating events such as new babies and new businesses. They even found ways to deal with such impossible situations as major surgery. In the middle of a term, one student in her sixties required major surgery with its aftermath of hospitalization and convalescence. She had been an excellent student and was desolated by the thought of losing a term's work and falling behind her classmates. The students responded to her dilemma by formulating a plan to help her keep up with her school work. They tape recorded all her classes and took turns going to the hospital to bring her the material and to discuss the work with her. They even accompanied her in practicing the musical instrument she was learning in her music class. Her instructors also kept in touch with her to clarify any difficulties and answer questions about the assignments. Not only did this student succeed in remaining with her class and graduating, she was the class valedictorian.

Building a bridge between the culture of the community and the culture of the college was an essential component of the program. The program could not exist, grant credit for its courses or grant degrees, without a legitimizing relationship to an existing college. It could neither function nor work toward its own goals without some mutual understanding between the community organization and its members and the staff and faculty of the college.

The initiative for the college program came from NCNW, not from any existing institution of higher education. In this respect the NCNW college program differed from extension programs in which an institution of higher education offers courses or programs at an off-campus site. The members of NCNW had already formulated the basic philosophy and approach of the program and at least an outline of its curriculum. These ideas were written into proposals to colleges that might consider cosponsoring the program and as proposals for funding to foundations and other funding agencies.

In the wake of the critical reevaluation of higher education in the late 1960s, there was a positive response to suggestions for opening up higher education to previously excluded groups such as working class women. There was also an affirmative reaction to the idea of bringing community and academic concerns closer together. In other parts of New York City and around the country as well, programs of higher education with similar goals were being developed. NCNW could offer a number of resources that were already in place. The organization had places to hold classes as well as a staff to perform administrative and supportive functions. The staff included qualified counselors and researchers. In addition, the feminist academics and activists who had joined the neighborhood women possessed suitable academic credentials. The organization was successful in securing two modest grants as seed money for the program. One of the grants was from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and it carried with it the imprimatur of that prestigious organization.

After exploring the possibility of cosponsorship with a number of colleges, an agreement was reached with LaGuardia Community College of the City University of New York. This choice was appropriate for a number of reasons. First, as a part of City University, LaGuardia was at that time tuition free. This eliminated an important obstacle for many potential students in the program. Secondly, LaGuardia College had defined its particular mission as making higher education available to groups that previously had little access to such opportunities. In this respect, its educational goal was congruent to that of NCNW. Thirdly, it had demonstrated a unique flexibility and openness to innovative programs and a willingness to make adjustments to the needs of various populations. It already offered a pioneering program for deaf students, as well as programs for prisoners and other disadvantaged groups. Joseph Shenker, then president of LaGuardia College, was recognized for his support of innovative programs. The NCNW program was to be administered through the Department of Special Programs, which housed LaGuardia's other outreach programs as well.

In spite of its openness and sympathy to the goals of the NCNW program, LaGuardia College remained a formal institution with bureaucratic structures and procedures. It was necessary to translate a general feeling of connection between NCNW and the college into a working relationship. Further, the goals developed by the NCNW planners needed to be adapted to the degree requirements of LaGuardia College. NCNW students had to meet the same standards as other LaGuardia students in order to receive their Associate of Arts degrees.



The NCNW women discovered that negotiations about broad general principles with high level administrators might be interpreted in a variety of ways by department chairpersons and other academic personnel. LaGuardia teachers had worked hard to develop course offerings they believed were appropriate for academically underprepared students. Some were willing to engage in open discussion with the NCNW program planners but many were convinced that their own approach was the correct one.

Comparable questions were raised in terms of the NCNW college program and its relationship with middle and lower level administrators. What did "simplifying registration procedures" mean? Should registration be conducted on or off campus? Where should the students' records be maintained and who might have access to them? The professional academics and neighborhood women in NCNW needed to work together to respond to these difficulties.

The academic professionals within NCNW began to think of themselves as "bridge people" facilitating discussions between academics at LaGuardia College and the neighborhood women, translating each group to the other. These bridge people were able to speak with both groups. Their own academic backgrounds gave them credibility in discussions with other academics. Their months of working closely with neighborhood women to develop the program allowed them to understand and advocate the neighborhood women's point of view as well. The neighborhood women themselves learned to be persuasive advocates for the program. It became a matter of principle that all meetings with representatives of the college be attended by members of both groups from

NCNW. Some departments were amenable to adapting courses and requirements to the needs and interests of the neighborhood women; others were not. The social science department, for example, was amenable to incorporating the theme of neighborhood and community into its interdisciplinary introductory social science course, even though the course previously had been organized around the theme of work. The English department was somewhat less willing to consider modifying its list of required and suggested literary works to include ones that voiced the concerns of working class women, although individual instructors proved somewhat more flexible.

Some LaGuardia faculty members were eager to work in the NCNW program, others were not. There were a variety of responses to a class of adult students who knew what they wanted because they had spent months planning and discussing their education. Some instructors considered their work in the NCNW program a high point of their professional lives, enjoying the enthusiasm and strong motivation of the NCNW students as well as their desire to be more active participants in the process of shaping their educational experience. Others did not care for what they viewed as a less orderly class room. Some LaGuardia instructors were influenced by their NCNW experience and by the issues raised by their students.

The program did not employ instructors from the LaGuardia staff only. Some of NCNW's professional advisors taught in the program as well. Other faculty were recruited from the vast pool of academic talent available in the New York metropolitan area. A number of distinguished and imaginative academics

from various universities as well as independent scholars taught in the program. They were interested in the NCNW program for a variety of reasons. Some agreed with its educational philosophy while others were attracted by the tenacity and motivation of the students. Some were eager to collaborate with students in developing innovative course offerings that were not necessarily welcomed elsewhere. Although there were occasional tensions between instructors hired by NCNW and those recruited from the LaGuardia faculty, in other cases instructors initially employed in the NCNW program were recruited to teach courses at LaGuardia College. LaGuardia College subsequently developed its own campus based women's program, incorporating many features of the NCNW program.

Students wished to appropriate or create categories that would allow them to conceptualize their experience as women and as members of families and communities in a meaningful way. Another important element of bridge building was the process of developing scholarly perspectives that would illuminate everyday experience and of using experience to open up categories of academic discourse. Doing original research and discussing their findings in the classroom provided ways for students to attempt a synthesis of academic work and everyday life.

Students expressed a great interest in history once they came to understand it as an account how things became the way they are rather than as a list of events accompanied by a string of dates. Students did a number of historical research projects centering on their neighborhood. They were

interested in knowing about changes that had occurred over the years, the impact of industrialization, ethnic succession, and even how various streets had gotten their names. They interviewed the oldest residents they knew as well as examining their own recollections of past events. They followed this up with research in the archives of the Brooklyn Historical Society and the Brooklyn Public Library, finding old newspapers, diaries, photographs and other sources.

Their work on the neighborhood became a focus for understanding labor history, patterns of immigration and work, and the development of cities. This line of inquiry could be pushed in two directions. Understanding events in the neighborhood could take them in a more microanalytic direction by being applied to understanding their own lives and those of their family members. One student studying both labor history and the family learned through her research that her grandmother had participated in the famed "Bread and Roses" strike in Massachusetts. This discovery transformed her view of her grandmother and of the historical process and the role of ordinary people in it. She wrote an unforgettable oral history that was published in the NCNW newsletter and evoked a response from people all over the country. The process could also lead to a more macro-analytic perspective by investigating the impact of analogous developments in the larger society. This process of historical reconstruction of what had previously been a taken for granted part of their lives helped students make a transition from a view of the social world as static and fixed to that of a more fluid world that is always in the process of being created or destroyed.

It also allowed students to understand that they have a history and that their lives are connected to the larger themes they were studying.

Culture was a central concept in opening up this more fluid and dynamic view of the world. Students were able to investigate the customs of their neighborhood not as something that people simply did for quirky or idiosyncratic reasons but as part of a larger pattern of neighborhood culture that involved meaning, symbolism, values and tradition. Students discussed the various elements of how culture was formulated such as class, ethnicity, region and locality. They recognized themselves in descriptions of working class culture with its emphasis on work, family, religion, tradition, and continuity. They discussed ethnic and local variations of working class culture, noting that even matters such as the relationships between husbands and wives or between parents and children that they had assumed were purely personal, had a cultural component.

Explorations of neighborhood culture was a central and engrossing theme of the evolving curriculum of the program. These explorations took many forms, including life histories, family histories, cross cultural comparisons, and ethnographic investigations. They were also expressed in the students' creative work, through stories, poems, art work, dramatic and musical presentations. In investigating how the actions of their everyday lives reflected and expressed the meaning of their culture, women deepened their understanding both of the concept of culture and of their own lived experience. They were also able to discover the relationship between different elements of their culture that previously had seemed separate.

For example, the Italian women noted that the prominence of a religious festival dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and celebrated by a procession in which women marched behind an ancient statue of Mary holding the infant Jesus was related to their own role as wives, mothers, and guardians of the family. The statue had been brought over from a church in a small town in Italy nearly one hundred years earlier, accompanying and protecting the parishioners on their arduous and frightening journey into the new world. They had built a church in the neighborhood to house her. When her church was torn down to make way for the Brooklyn Queens Expressway, they built another, larger one. Throughout the years, her festival continued. Her annual celebration marked their survival and the continuity of their beliefs and customs. The students noted that the themes of religious belief, tradition, and family life were intertwined in the symbolism of the celebratory procession. They also discussed the political potential of such celebrations, which reminded people of what they valued in their culture and of the possibility that they could unite to protect these values.

There are many examples of how the college program made it possible for people to recreate their identity and reestablish the continuity of their culture. I would like to highlight one particular class as an example of this theme. This class is "Sociology of the Family." Students were very interested in this subject because they considered the family the central institution of their lives and felt that any insight they might develop concerning families would be of great value to them. The examples that I will discuss are taken from a number of different sections of this course which I taught over a period of several years.

Most of the sections of the family sociology course were initially structured in a fairly conventional manner. They included a textbook, selected additional readings, and independent research work by students. However, the concerns and questions brought into the class by the students as well as their response to the readings also influenced the direction of the class.

One book to which the students responded strongly was the ethnographic study, All Our Kin by Carol Stack. This work describes the female based kin network that provides the organizational structure in a poor black community in a midwestern city. The author makes the point that kinship itself is the central principle, rather than being a fragmented or disintegrating remnant of the nuclear family. One variation on the kinship principle described by the author is fictive kin, a relationship in which people are not related by blood, marriage or adoption but agree to act cooperatively as if they were true kin. A student of Italian ancestry remarked that in her family, only blood relationships were seen as important and the principle of fictive kin would have been incomprehensible. In response, a black woman who had grown up in the rural south described her own childhood. Her mother had died when she was an infant, leaving her father to bring up a family of five young children. She explained how with the help of kin, friends and neighbors, he had succeeded in holding the family together in a way very similar to the account of kinship in the book. Students observed that these two stories suggested very different ideas about the meaning of family.

This opened up the area of differences in black and Italian views of family life. Many of the Italian women in the class had come from particularly

traditional backgrounds. They described their sheltered lives as single girls in their parents' home, the importance placed on marriage and motherhood as a woman's true vocation. They described being admonished emphatically and often about the importance of virginity and chastity. They had been taught to please their husbands by being good wives and mothers. While their husbands were often difficult, their children were their greatest joy. Some of them still spend most of their time in the house, going out only to run errands and do chores. Many seldom left the neighborhood. They did not know how to drive and felt uncomfortable using public transportation.

The black women, many of whom were young single mothers, responded by explaining the pride and satisfaction they took in their independence. They were proud to be able to run their households on their own, without, as they said, "having to depend on some man." They described how they helped and supported each other and how older women taught the younger ones how to manage their scarce resources. They explained how, lacking the income that a man might provide, they used their ingenuity to meet their family's needs. One student who was a talented cook sold prepared food to weary working mothers and catered parties. Another, too ill to hold a steady job, used her talents as a seamstress to provide for her daughter. They told about going out on the weekend, dancing and flirting -- knowing that they could have a good time, while still remaining independent women.

What was amazing about this exchange was its complete candor and lack of condemnation or judgment. The members of each group simply stated their



views and listened to the opinions of the others. The views of these two groups of women were quite opposite to each other. Nonetheless, the exchange took place with great good will and cordiality. One of the most traditional of the Italian women noted that she had always believed that what she had been taught about women's roles and family life was true, but that she was willing to reevaluate her views. This was not just polite talk as the woman's future actions showed. She had been one of the most retiring and homebound of housewives, but she became a leader and advocate in many community matters. At the end of the semester, the class decided to have a party at the apartment of one of the black students who lived in the housing project. By attending this event, the Italian women broke a strong taboo, namely that Italian women do not enter "the projects."

Perhaps equally notable about this exchange is the light it sheds on proposed policy decisions regarding the allocation of public funds. Wilson (1987) has discussed the importance of providing jobs for black men, in order thus to strengthen the black family. The reports of these young black women strongly suggest that his definition of the "truly disadvantaged" is flawed. The disadvantage is not a result of female-headed households per se. As well as illustrating different evaluations of family life, and indeed different implicit definitions of what constitutes a "family," the discussion just mentioned also suggests that policy makers must determine what strengths exist within a community, and build on those strengths and existing support structures, rather than arbitrarily decide what structures ought be strengthened. I do not suggest

that provision of jobs for black men is irrelevant. I do affirm that given the importance of the black woman and the mutual support systems black women have developed, equal attention should be paid to assistance of black women as independent entities, not merely as wives and/or mothers.

The reservoir of good will developed through the process of working together to create the program made exchanges of this type possible. Students felt free to reveal their experiences, express their views and ask each other questions. The class room had become what Evans and Boyte have termed a free space.

The process of relating their own experiences to larger social themes proved a fruitful avenue for exploring new ideas. One woman wrote about her difficulties as a single, working mother of four children. She described the way in which her determination to work and support her family was continually undermined by structural constraints. There was little available in the way of suitable and affordable day care, especially for that number of children. Schools took for granted that at least one parent would be available during the day for parent conferences and other school events. Few medical professionals had evening hours. Even food markets and other retail stores were closed at night, leaving her with no alternative but to shop in smaller and more expensive grocery stores.

This student enlarged her frame of reference to include more than her own experience by asking what would the world be like if it really cared about single mothers and their children. The answers she provided to this question

foreshadowed some of the arguments subsequently made by social scientists developing the concept of the feminization of poverty. Issues she raised are still being debated today in policy discussions focusing on the position of women and children. Her work highlights the particular strengths of the program in terms of how it permits the women to begin by describing their own experience, then broadening their conceptual framework to see the larger implications of that experience and finally formulating generalizations that both includes and broadens their original analysis. The lives and problems of single and working mothers and their children is a question that continued to claim the attention of class after class of NCNW students, just as it currently claims the attention of policy analysts and legislators.

Another issue that was repeatedly discussed in family sociology classes was the issue of family violence, particularly wife beating and child abuse. Although family violence was just beginning to be noticed by social scientists, policy analysts, and the media as an important social problem, NCNW students knew from their own bitter experience how significant and how widespread the problem was. One student recollected how the father of her traditional Italian family disciplined her mother by beating her. He exercised this right routinely as the head of the household, just as he had the right to punish his children. In another class a woman described running into the police station with blood streaming from her head following a severe beating. She was told to go home, calm down, and "make up" with her husband. No report was filed of her complaint. In another class, a young mother reported how her husband's

psychological abuse reinforced the terror that his physical abuse engendered. Like many battered wives she had found the strength to leave her husband only when she realized that she would not be his only target, but that her children were becoming part of the pattern as well.

Another young woman presented a thorough and well documented report on agencies that deal with family violence. When she completed her formal presentation, she looked up and said that her research had helped her to acknowledge that she had been an abused child and was herself an abusive parent to her young daughter. She was going for help to one of the agencies she had discussed in her presentation. The entire class looked in amazement at this well groomed, well dressed, intelligent, and articulate young woman. We knew that she held a responsible job. She was certainly at the other end of the spectrum from any generally held conception of a victim of abuse or of an abuser, yet she stood before us with tears streaming down her face, describing the terrible secret that made the reality of her life quite different from how it appeared to others.

These classes would not be very useful or really academic if they were only the setting for telling horror stories about various instances of family violence. Students used these vivid examples to develop an analysis of family violence from a working class woman's point of view. Their analysis brought out several points. They noted that family violence creates an internal conflict between women's roles as mothers and as wives. Often they must choose between their relationship with their husbands and their children's welfare.

Others feel that they must choose between their children's sustenance and their own safety. The students' analysis led them to conclude that women become paralyzed by their inability to make this choice and, consequently, do not take any action at all. Instead they take on themselves the responsibility of creating better family relations by attempting to be perfect wives and mothers. Inevitably, they fail in this attempt and their failure adds to the burden of self blame.

Like other analysts of family violence, the NCNW students became convinced that battered women could not help themselves unless they had a safe haven and a guarantee of shelter and sustenance, at least for a period of time. Students discussed their conclusions with others in NCNW. There was a general consensus that programs for battered women were an important policy priority for working class women. In response to these discussions, NCNW together with another women's organization responded to a legislative initiative by presenting a proposal for state funding to open a shelter for battered women and their children. NCNW was one of the two organizations selected to develop a battered women's program and to open a shelter in New York City. Some of the students who had expressed their concern about this problem were able to respond to the need they had uncovered through action and involvement. A number of these students became members of the board of directors of the Center for the Elimination of Violence in the Family or part of the staff of Women's Survival Space, the programs that NCNW developed for battered women.

All of this exemplifies how the NCNW College Program operated. Students introduced issues suggested by their own experience. They

supplemented personal experience with academic and practical research. This process enabled students to broaden their view of an issue and to ground their analysis in a more theoretical assessment of a particular topic or issue. In some situations, this analysis led to social action in response to a problem or issue. State funding was not often available just at the time when students were investigating a particular issue. But in the case of battered women, it was possible for students to put their analysis into action.

Some of the students' concern centered on broader social problems, as in the case of battered women, but some of their interest was focused on the problems of a particular individual. In one case, a Sociology of the Family course was the setting for a discussion of one student's loss of custody of her children. The student's problem prompted the class's interest in doing research on historical, legal and social aspects of child custody. Students related their analysis to changing social and legal definitions of the family and to changing views of the rights and responsibilities of mothers and fathers. They analyzed a number of important custody cases. From the perspective of the whole class, the issue of custody served as a way of introducing the historical study of family life. From the perspective of the student in question, the new knowledge and the support of her classmates encouraged her to begin to take a more active role in her children's lives and to institute legal action to have the custody arrangements modified.

Another important element of the program was helping students become aware of the relationship between choice and constraint. Many of the women

saw constraint as the dominant focus of their lives. They were cognizant of the many elements which confined them and narrowed their choices, but they were less aware of areas of freedom that either already existed or could be created. The college program was constructed so that, to the greatest degree possible, it presented a realm of freedom. Women freely chose to create and participate in the program. They constructed through a series of choices, its curriculum and administrative structure. They had formulated its schedule and picked its location. They decided not only the general curriculum but also which courses would be offered during any particular term. They held a strong veto power, if not absolute free choice concerning the choice of instructors.

The small size of the program was an important asset in maintaining this openness of structure. It was also a reminder of how much of the constraint built into the structure of larger institutions is the result of administrative convenience rather than of any logical requirement of higher education.

In some cases, the freedom the women exercised in choosing to be fulltime college students opened up and redefined their lives in previously undreamed of ways. Given their age, family circumstances and economic class position, becoming students required a great investment of time and resources. It became possible for the students to make this commitment only when they felt free to do this for themselves. To achieve this freedom, some had to defy their families' prohibitions, while others braved their scorn and mockery. "Will it make you a better mother?" one mother-in-law inquired, sarcastically. "Do you mean you're going to be out of the house every night!" was a frequent response from

husbands of students. In some cases, the doubts students expressed came not from outside but from their own fears about their competence or their general suitability for intellectual life. Choosing to become students helped them to perceive the possibility of choice in other areas of life.

The college program did become a catalyst for neighborhood activism. Research questions and activities were framed in terms of the issues of neighborhood life, thus maintaining the connection between the college program and the community. Students learned to theorize, and they used their theoretical knowledge to understand their community and the political and economic matrix which influenced neighborhood life.

Because the college program was situated in the community and because most of the students were neighborhood residents, community issues naturally filtered into the classroom. These problems and issues became the focus for policy oriented research about such concerns as education, housing, race relations, neighborhood history, problems of single parents, medical and legal service needs of the community. Women's issues such as rape, family violence, pornography and household division of labor were also raised. The neighborhood women may have had weaker academic skills than traditional college students, but they brought a lifetime of experience and struggle into the classroom.

Theoretical approaches helped them to understand this experience in a broader context. Many people in working class communities complain about the difficulties of their lives, but the step from grumbling to analysis is a critical one.



Doing original research in the neighborhood helped the students to take this step. They learned to consider the experiences of individuals and to ask what these experiences had in common and what broader conclusions could be drawn from studying them.

One consequence of these investigative activities was an increased sense of belonging to a larger whole and being connected to others both in the present and over time. The students in the program became connected to each other as participants in the college program as their common enterprise. They became more connected to their own past as they came to understand the historical events that had shaped their lives and that they and members of their families had participated in. They became more connected to their community as they studied its patterns of life, its culture and social structure and its strengths and weaknesses. Understanding patterns inherited from the past which had structured the associations and antipathies of the present, they were able to develop new personal relationships to people in the program who were different from them in terms of race, class, age and ethnic background.

An undertaking that exemplified the spirit of the college program perhaps more than any other was The Williamsburg/Northside/Greenpoint Colloquium. This project, developed during the second year of the college program, was funded by grants from a local corporation and a national foundation. The Colloquium offered a group of special interdisciplinary projects that groups of students under the guidance of a mentor could pursue over the course of an academic year. In the Colloquium, students had the opportunity to utilize the

skills and knowledge acquired during the first year of the program to develop an original project geared toward the needs of the community as well as their own interests and emerging talents. The areas students chose to pursue were:

1. health research concerning the medical needs of a working class community,
2. social science research focusing on the legal needs of a working class community,
3. oral and family histories of working class people,
4. creative writing, stories and poems about life in the neighborhood, and
5. media studies, depicting the experiences of neighborhood people on videotape.

Mentors were selected on the basis of practical experience in their respective fields as well as academic credentials and interest in topics selected by the students. Each project was to have as its outcome a practical and concrete product usable in the community. The medical group chose as its focus the problem of alcoholism and its impact on working class neighborhoods. They hoped to suggest a model community based program to deal with this issue. The legal group surveyed the legal needs of the community and proposed a model of legal education and service to meet these needs. The creative writing group wrote stories and poems about their experiences growing up in the neighborhood. A number of these works were published in neighborhood newspapers and a few found a broader audience. The oral history group researched and wrote the histories of various neighborhood residents as well as of their own families. The

video group wrote, directed, filmed, did the technical work for and starred in a video tape depicting the history of the college program.

After nine months of work, the students invited the entire community to a presentation of their work at a gala "College Night" held at the local public library. Scholarly and creative material was presented. The oral histories were read, dramatized and reenacted in a multimedia setting. The short stories reminded members of the audience of their own life experience. People expressed the opinion that the legal and medical studies would be useful in other neighborhoods as well as their own. The videotape featuring footage of actual classroom sessions and interviews with students, told the story of the students' own experience in the college program and what it had meant to them.

The event provided an occasion for students in the college program to reaffirm their continuing commitment to the neighborhood, but also to express their own growth and development. They still felt part of a deeply rooted community, but their ability to express their feelings and ideas in creative and scholarly ways gave a new dimension and a broader scope to their experience. They were the same women -- housewives, mothers, neighbors, church members and neighborhood activists -- that they had been before, but they had new abilities, new powers and a new sense of themselves as growing and developing. The audience of family members, friends, and neighbors responded strongly and affirmatively to these various and loving versions of life in their neighborhood. Indeed, many members of the audience that night later applied for admission to subsequent classes of the college program.

Graduation was a festive event for the first class of NCNW students; nearly the entire entering class was graduated. Other classes entered the program approximately once every two years. The program received a number of grants from the federal government through the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). This funding helped to sustain and build the program as well as to enable NCNW to disseminate the results of its work.

It became increasingly clear that the NCNW program had implications beyond the local neighborhood. NCNW became part of a national consortium of freestanding college programs. The NCNW women held a number of education conferences throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. They invited representatives from other innovative and community based programs to discuss their techniques and approaches. Members of community groups and interested colleges from all across the country came to explore the possibility of establishing similar programs. Two branch campuses were set up in other Brooklyn neighborhoods as well as in Pittsburgh. A Philadelphia group started its own highly successful neighborhood college program for women based on the NCNW model (Lutrell, 1989). Various other groups incorporated parts of the NCNW model into their own programs. NCNW women spoke about the college program in conferences throughout the country. Accounts of the program were included in anthologies on feminist education and neighborhood activism, as well as in historical and sociological works on working class women. NCNW received a Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) grant to develop two model curricula, one on women and leadership and one on women and neighborhood economic

development. A handbook on neighborhood life written in collaboration with an antipoverty organization included a chapter on how to develop a neighborhood based program of higher education. NCNW developed a neighborhood women's resource center to collect, catalogue and make available materials on women and community life.

Though many of the innovative programs of the 1970s have been discontinued or greatly modified, the NCNW program continued to exist and to educate neighborhood women (and some men) until quite recently. The NCNW college program, like other programs, suffered from the attrition of funding for social programs that has occurred nationally during the last decade. The end of free tuition and the general budgetary constraints of educational institutions has made it increasingly difficult to fund the college program. In the early days of the program its innovations as well as its success in articulating and achieving its goals made it attractive to foundations, government agencies and other funders. However, it has been difficult to continue to attract grants because it required constantly developing new programs. Increasing amounts of time, energy and resources of the program's leaders were devoted to fundraising efforts. NCNW was in competition with other programs for funds. Even within NCNW itself, the college program had to compete with other programs for increasingly scarce resources.

Problems concerning NCNW's relationship with cosponsoring colleges have continued. NCNW's relationship with LaGuardia College ended when changing state regulations made the sponsorship of an off-campus program

increasingly difficult. Subsequently NCNW became part of the Empire State College of the State University of New York, a college with a special mandate for campus-free higher education. Recently that relationship ended as well, and currently the three Brooklyn campuses of NCNW, each of which is now independent, have developed their own sets of affiliations with a variety of public and private colleges.

The stories that could be told about the events of the college program and its meaning for individual students are endless. Many have gone on to careers and opportunities they had not dreamed of in the past. A welfare mother became a medical student. A former hair dresser is doing research in higher education. A quiet housewife has become the legislative aide of a state assemblyman. Another graduate directed the continuing education program in the local high school. Still another directs the local senior center. A number of graduates have become teachers and counselors. One serves as a legal advocate for women like herself who attempt to deal with abusive husbands in the family court. Other have served in various social agencies and advocates and social service providers in their neighborhood and in similar ones. One has entered a doctoral program in anthropology.

Many NCNW graduates have continued as activists in the local community in both paid and unpaid positions. Graduates have served on the community planning board, held office in various local organizations and been leaders in the continuing struggle to maintain the neighborhood. Many demonstrated the

interracial solidarity developed in the college program by participating in the successful campaign of a local black women candidate for the State Senate.

In what way does the college program provide an illustration of the concept of working class feminism? There are many ways to look at this question. I would like to approach it from three perspectives. First, the emphasis on community in the college program grows directly out of the experiences of working class women and allows them to build and expand on this basic element of their lives. The college program provided the students with a way to remain within their natural community while also establishing a new consciously chosen and created community. The new community that is the college program itself maintains the positive values of neighborhood life such as connection, interpersonal relations, family and ethnic tradition. At the same time it addresses the problems and limitations associated with this way of life. Within the program women find a safe space to seriously question the ethnic and racial prejudice, the restrictions placed on them as women and the parochialism of the local community. They are able to develop new connections with women who differ from them in terms of race, ethnicity and class, but who share their values. These new connections strengthen and enhance their self concept, their role in the community and their political effectiveness as working class feminists. Community is still central in their lives, but it need not only turn inward toward itself. There can also be a bridge to the larger world.

A second defining element of the college program as working class feminist practice is the concept of using knowledge as a way of being connected

to the world. It is important to recollect that working class women are oppressed in terms of class as well as in terms of gender. Middle class women know what there is in the world in terms of privilege, power, resources, opportunities etc. Their protest is about being shut out of these areas. Working class and poor women need to connect with the larger world in a way that will allow them to understand their history, their social position and their culture and their relationship to the larger society. Within the college program, many women discovered a need to assert their personal right to have access to art and literature as well as their political and collective right to keep the schools, hospitals and firehouses being taken from their community.

Many analysts have noted the "I'm not a women's libber, but..." phenomenon that seems to be particularly strong among working class women. These women loudly proclaim their opposition to the women's movement, and at the same time agree to most of its specific ideas. Working class feminist practice as exemplified by the NCNW college program allows these women to create their own rendering of women's role in politics and in the world and to create a position for themselves from which they may express their own views as women and make alliances with others, if they choose to do so.

Working class women in the neighborhood setting define themselves mainly in terms of affiliations with their families, their friends and neighbors, their community, their religions, and their ethnic groups. Women in the mainstream women's movement more often define their position either in terms of rights for individual women or in terms of individual emancipation from the



oppressiveness of these ties. Within the college program, the women attempted to strike a balance, maintaining the strong ties that have defined their life in the past, but also claiming for themselves a measure of independence and self expression not previously available.

This new balance between the individual and the community is perhaps the most striking characteristic of the kind of feminism that the women built within their new institution. Within this framework it seemed possible to preserve the community without sacrificing one's self and to develop one's self without withdrawing from community life. Working class women can show the way to a broader and more inclusive definition of the meaning of feminism, one that includes all women and all the activities that women undertake.

## **Chapter VII**

### **Conclusion**

#### **The Significance of Working Class Feminism**

**What is the relevance of understanding the theory and practice of working class feminism? What can be learned by viewing the world from the perspective of working class women?**

**Working class feminism demonstrates that there is no necessary contradiction between the individual and the community. In contrast to liberal individualism's insistence that individual freedom can be gained only by weakening community ties, working class feminism illustrates how individuals can empower themselves to build a strong community and create institutions that serve their ends.**

**Working class feminism makes it possible to lay the groundwork of a more inclusive feminism. Deriving a feminist practice from a community based orientation opens feminism to the participation of many previously excluded groups of women such as poor and working class women, African American women and the women of Asia, Africa and Latin America.**

**Working class feminism expands our understanding of the concept of community. From the perspective of neighborhood women, community, though**

grounded in the geographic base of neighborhood, is more importantly a social process. The ideas and actions of working class and poor women are fundamental elements of this social process. These women create community through the social interactions accompanying and surrounding their everyday tasks and activities. Their social actions embody the larger social and cultural meanings of everyday life.

The concept of working class feminism facilitates our understanding of the process by which community is created and understood by working class women. Understanding the intersubjective significance of community directs our attention to the importance of such community building rudiments as everyday life, informal social interaction, networks of kin, friends and neighbors and informal personal communication between people who know and trust each other.

Understanding this process provides a tool for analyzing patterns of neighborhood social life. It is largely women who sustain a sense of community in intact neighborhoods. Neighborhoods that deteriorate into slums frequently lack this social infrastructure of informal neighborhood life and community organizations.

Working class feminism presents the possibility for a synthesis of tradition and innovation. Neighborhoods such as those discussed here are clearly more tradition based than middle class and suburban areas, but it is an error to regard them as rigidly traditional. Working class residents of such areas cling often tenaciously to certain core values, but they are also capable of innovative and

creative thinking and action in many areas. When the residents of these often embattled urban neighborhoods unite to defend their communities and lifestyles, they create institutions that weave together strands of tradition and innovation.

Neighborhood women have been the group most deeply engaged in creating these new institutions. As noted in Chapter V, the organizing tactics of this group combines the most effective features of a number of other styles of neighborhood organizing. This inquiry into the combination of neighborhood social life, political organizing and reflective consciousness that I have termed working class feminism provides insight into the process of building and maintaining community.

Working class feminism provides a way to address the tension between universalism and particularism in social movements. Some social movements are universalistic, addressing problems affecting an entire society or a whole category of people. Others are particularistic, addressing issues in a particular place or those affecting a specific and usually local group. Universalistic movements occur at particular times, but are frequently short lived. Particularistic movements and organizations are narrower in scope but address people's everyday concerns and are more likely to be sustained. This separation weakens both and militates against progressive social change. In working class feminism an alliance between local activists and feminist activists made it possible to consider both local issues and the possibilities of creating a broader movement. The activities of NCNW included both national advocacy and movement building and local programs.

Understanding the world view of working class women clarifies the positions taken by some women on women's policy issues. Here I refer to the women investigated in such works as Dworkin's study of right wing women, Luker's work on abortion opponents and Mansbridge's analysis of "why we lost the ERA." These analysts attempt to understand the position of women who oppose the women's movement and who participate in public discourse to contest feminist goals and issues. Examining these works in terms of working class feminism displays their underlying unity and the importance of a working class women's perspective in understanding the phenomena that these authors investigate.

### Rethinking Community: Viewing Classical Social Theory from the Perspective of Working Class Feminism

Community is a central concept in the development of social scientific thinking. The development of sociology as a discipline may be seen as an attempt to understand and conceptualize the nature of modern industrial society. A number of classical sociologists viewed the concept of community as central to their analysis.

In the theory of Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft, Tönnies analyzes the transformation of society from a small, personal, close knit social unit ruled by tradition and custom into a large, anonymous society of strangers governed by laws and contractual relations. In the gemeinschaft, social interaction was embedded in a pre-existing network of social relations that presented each

individual to the other as a whole person with a personal history and specific network of associations. In contrast, social relations in the gesellschaft are characterized by a large number of fragmentary, impersonal, and functional social interactions between anonymous carriers of social roles.

Tönnies's nostalgic preference for gemeinschaft is clear. He believed that people needed the sense of continuity, belonging and place that gemeinschaft provided and he pondered how these needs would be met in the increasingly rationalized and impersonal gesellschaft.

The kinds of communities developed by the activities of working class women in general, and working class feminists in particular, may be viewed as one possible response to the questions posed by Tönnies's work. These communities attempt to maintain the continuity of traditional ties, while acquiring the flexibility to respond to changing conditions. For many, modern life requires choosing between the continuity and stability of traditional family and community life and the possibility of individualism, mobility, and personal growth. Choosing community may require sacrificing one's full human potential but choosing individualism may mean being alienated, lonely and cut off from peers.

In the classic community study Streetcorner Society, for example, these two possibilities are represented through the stories of Doc and Chick. Doc remains on the street corner as the leader of the Norton Street gang. Here, he uses his intelligence, leadership, and other abilities to preserve the group. Tied to the gemeinschaft, Doc is a respected member of the community, but Whyte

believes he has sacrificed his potential for individual advancement and wider success.

Chick, who exemplifies the values of gesellschaft, attends college and is planning a career in law and politics. Whyte sees him as a selfish and solitary figure, organizing a group based on function rather than friendship, for his own self interested purposes. Chick has defined himself as an upwardly mobile college man, distancing himself from the corner boys. To attend college, Chick has paid the price of leaving the community, not just in a physical sense but in terms of his values, life style, and world view. Gans presents a similar comparison in Urban Villagers when he discusses people-oriented individuals who are more geared to the local neighborhood and thing-oriented individuals who are more aligned with the larger world.

In contrast to both Doc and Chick as well as the neighborhood residents described in Gans' work, the NCNW women have created an institution that allowed them to sustain the values of neighborhood life while strengthening their connection to the wider world. Participation in the college program did not oblige the women to leave their neighborhood, to turn away from its values, or to relinquish their place in its social network. On the contrary, participation in the college program became a vehicle through which the women deepened their engagement and connection with community life while increasing their ability to understand and respond to the challenges posed by an increasingly rationalized and bureaucratic world.

A number of distinct elements of the program were involved in creating this synthesis. First, the program remained within the geographic bounds of the community, allowing participants to move easily from everyday activities into the activities of the college. Secondly, the participants in the program explicitly supported the values held by members of the community. Thirdly, informal neighborhood social structures were incorporated into the program and valued for the support they provided to program participants.

The program itself became a new community that built on existing community ties but transcended them as well. Unlike the older neighborhood community, the new community of the college program was a multi-racial, multi-ethnic community. Participants in the college program succeeded in overcoming the racial and ethnic antipathies that often play a role in closely knit neighborhoods. The program provided a free space in which participants could both express their differences and explore their common concerns. Helping and supporting each other and working together led to the development of cross-racial associations and ultimately, friendships. For example, one student from a very traditional Italian background declared that she felt closer to her classmates than to anyone else, with the exception of her family. Her sentiments were echoed by most of the students in her ethnically and racially diverse class.

These new and more open relationships were possible because the program was structured in terms of participants' common goals as women, as students, and as advocates for their neighborhood. Additionally, the program itself produced a working class feminist analysis of public issues, community



building, and neighborhood activism. Program participants enhanced their sense of personal efficacy and gained self confidence as they learned new skills, received and provided personal support, analyzed issues from a women's perspective, enlarged their intellectual and vocational horizons, and became more skillful and effective community builders.

Marx, from an opposite perspective than Tönnies, but one that is related to Tönnies' concept of *gemeinschaft*, presents an image of community through the concept of primitive communism. Primitive communism refers to a precapitalist formation in which people lived and worked in small cooperative communities in which it was possible to strive simultaneously for one's own good and for the good of the whole, since the two were identical. As Marx noted:

The original unity between a particular form of community (clan) and the corresponding property in nature, or relation to the objective conditions of production as a natural being, as an objective being of the individual mediated by the commune--has its living reality in a specific mode of production itself...The community itself appears as the first great force of production (1973, p. 495).

In such a community the means of production had not yet become private property and the divisions of power, privilege and economic advantage that mark class society had not yet been created. While the division of labor and the increasing complexity of larger societies have provided humanity with enormous benefits, Marx believes that the cost of these material and technological advances has been paid in terms of class inequality with its consequent destruction of community and contraction in the possibilities for human development.

Unlike Tönnies, Marx is not nostalgic for the past, but for the future. In that revolutionary and perhaps messianic future, Marx envisions human beings who become the masters rather than the slaves of their history, and are able to liberate their own ingenuity. They express this mastery by creating a social organization that combines the human values of primitive communism with the productive achievements of class society. Marx, like Tönnies, emphasizes the importance of community and presents the possibility that human beings can achieve both gemeinschaft and gesellschaft in the same social order.

In some ways, the project of the neighborhood women reflects Marx's view of community. Their project was based on the sense of solidarity that grew out of shared experiences and values. It developed to include elements of community that the women created through their common participation in an oppositional culture. Mina Caulfield (1974) has indicated the oppositional potential of such locally based familial, neighborhood and ethnic cultures as the women's culture of Williamsburg. However, beyond passive participation in a common culture, the NCNW women actively created the college program as an institution that represents the principles of working class feminism as well as being grounded in their culture and based on their needs, wishes, and world view.

In the act of building that institution, the women came to develop and understand their own power as human beings in new ways. One achievement of the college program was that participants were able to develop their own capabilities without sacrificing their traditional affiliations within the community. Stack's work discussed in Chapter II displays a situation in which the benefit of

community support is purchased at the price of sacrificing individual goals to the group. The institution created by the women of NCNW empowered individual women through the very process of creating a communal institution. Just as in Marx's concept of community, the good of the group and the good of the individual were mutually sustaining rather than contradictory.

The project of the community women differed from that suggested by Marx in certain ways. First, the activities under consideration occurred not in the workplace, but in the community. Secondly, the participants did not identify themselves primarily in terms of a single role as workers. Rather they saw themselves in terms of a multiplicity of roles such as that of wives, mothers, family members, neighbors, participants in local institutions, defenders of the local community and carriers of local culture, as well as wage earning workers.

These activities, as Linda Nicholson (1986) reminds us, were defined by Marx not as work, but were relegated to the less important realm of reproductive activities. There is however an inconsistency in Marx' own formulation of this issue. Narrowly defined, labor is the production of goods. Broadly defined however, labor is the process by which human beings create and define the social world they inhabit. One of Marx' major themes was that the social world was created by the activities of human beings and may therefore be changed by them as well. In this broader sense, the activities of the neighborhood women fit into Marx' category of labor. By their activities as creators of neighborhood life and by their participation in creating a new social organization, they are deeply

engaged in the labor of creating the social world and creating themselves as human beings at the same time.

Among the classical social theorists, Max Weber did not specifically address the issue of community, rather he emphasized the centrality of the individual social actor and his/her motives for action, as well as the macrosociological issues of historic change in whole civilizations. However, like Tönnies and Marx, Weber was interested in understanding how the modern world was different from preindustrial society.

Weber's analysis of what he terms the disenchantment of the world and of the process of rationalization provide an essential counterpoint to the concept of community. Weber's formulation of the category of administrative rationality as well as his inquiry into its development as a form of social relations and its expression in the social construction of bureaucracy provide critical insight into the social structure of the larger world.

As I have indicated throughout this work, the continuing existence of community in the modern world is problematic and must be understood in the context of and in tension with the rationalized bureaucracy that has increasingly come to dominate larger social institutions. In this regard, the examination of such themes as how the NCNW women maintained the community-based structure of their college program within the formal structure of the accrediting institution becomes interesting. The description of this relationship presents a microcosmic account of a larger question that I see as implicit within Weber's

work, the question of how a sense of community may be sustained in the midst of a social world increasingly defined and dominated by bureaucracy.

Durkheim's most powerful analysis of community is to be found in The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1915). Here Durkheim delineates his category of the sacred as that dimension of human existence that both creates and expresses social integration, that is people's experience of being part of a larger whole. Durkheim's concept of the sacred highlights the process through which community members simultaneously create, experience and express social unity in their acts of collective worship. Through the idea of the sacred, Durkheim's work presents the concept of community as process. This concept bridges the differences between theories emphasizing communities of place and those that emphasize communities of interest. In neither type can community be said to simply exist as a natural phenomenon. Durkheim's analysis shows that all types of community are created and expressed through social action.

In the case of working class women, communities of place -- their neighborhood itself -- form the substratum of community. However, their sense of belonging and social integration develops through the active process of creating community. In the case reported here, this occurs on two levels. On the first level, neighborhood women create community through the informal social interaction of everyday life. On a different level, the politics of working class feminism creates a different and more reflective awareness of community. The particular women in the college program created that institution as a way of embodying, expressing and further developing their idea of community.

Durkheim and the neighborhood women share a concern for the continuity of community values and social integration in the modern world. The tribal society Durkheim uses as a point of departure for his analysis comprised a community of religious believers who also acknowledged other forms of fellowship. In the modern world, the existence of such communities has become increasingly problematic.

In The Division of Labor (1933), Durkheim asks what, if anything, will replace religion as a force for social integration. He asserts that work and the productive process, including the division of labor, will form the basis of a new social unity. People will be bound together, he argues, not because they are similar and share the same values, but because they are different and increasingly interdependent. In a modern specialized economy, no single individual or family can produce all that is required. Durkheim concludes that our reciprocal need for one another knits us into a social fabric of mutual recognition and accommodation.

Durkheim's concept of community in the modern world was formulated in opposition to Tönnies' more pessimistic analysis. Society is not deteriorating, he contends, only changing into a more complex whole. In his work on religion, Durkheim presents social life as the embodiment of the sacred. In his investigation of the division of labor, he disavows the centrality of the sacred by suggesting that it could be replaced by pragmatic economic necessity.

The work of the neighborhood women provides a new approach to this contradiction. By insisting on the incorporation of community ties and rituals

into the college program, they preserve its sacred character, while at the same time designing it as an instrument that allows them to respond to the rationalization of the larger society.

The issues raised and the questions asked by classical social theorists about the nature of modern societies, their social relationships and their social institutions, are questions we still ask today. We want to know whether it is possible to maintain a sense of community and common humanity in the face of enormously powerful social institutions that enclose us within social roles. We want to know whether oppositional cultures are possible in the face of a monolithic mass culture. An understanding of the culture of working class women and of the activism of working class feminism provides one set of answers to these inquiries.

### Creating a More Inclusive Feminism

Working class feminism provide a platform from which to ask: Is feminism based on the concerns of women as a group or does it only express the concerns of the minute fraction of women who write in academic journals, study feminist theory as an academic subject, and join officially sanctioned feminist organizations? If academic and professional feminists choose to use their scholarly and organizational skills to construct a feminism that expresses only their own view, how are they different from the male oppressors they confront? Adrienne Rich (quoted in Eisenstein, 1983, p. 144) called for a "politics of asking

women's questions." Through working class feminism, many groups of women may ask the questions that arise out of their own lives and experiences.

By articulating and insisting on the importance of the everyday concerns of women in communities, working class feminists broaden and reformulate the definition of women's issues. By so doing, they make possible a sense of connection between women in different societies and cultures.

Working class feminism connects various elements of women's lives and concerns. Through working class feminism it becomes possible to link the concerns of the mainstream feminist movement in the industrial west to those of other women's movements in different parts of the world. The concept of working class feminism calls attention to issues that various women's movements define for themselves, whether or not participants in these movements label themselves feminist.

In western society, working class feminism has more points of connection with black feminism than do other branches of the women's movement. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) for example, discusses black feminist thought in terms that resonate with the concerns of working class feminists:

. . . racial oppression has fostered historically concrete communities among African Americans and other racial/ethnic groups. These communities have stimulated cultures of resistance (Caulfield, 1974; Scott, 1985) . . . Social class may be similarly structured. . . Moreover significant overlap exists between racial and social class oppression when viewing them through *the collective lens of family and community*. Existing community structures provide a primary line of resistance against racial and class oppression (p. 226).



Collins contends that black feminist thought grows out the concerns of black women in their communities, particularly the concerns of these women for all the children of their community. Further she asserts that black feminist thought is not expressed only or even mainly in scholarly work. Rather, she contends it is expressed in literature, in popular culture such as "the blues" and in the folk culture of black communities. Like working class women, black women derive their feminist analysis from everyday life and struggle.

Working class feminism also more closely parallels the concerns of non-western women. As Caulfield (1974) notes, non-western women who band together to work on the common problems of their lives conceptualize their own actions in terms of family and community life rather than in terms of individual rights. Like working class feminists, these women are likely to fashion new institutional structures based on pre-existing social ties of kin groups, communities and villages. In these ways, their approach more closely resembles that of working class feminists than that of other western feminists. This is illustrated in the following description of the goals of a "popular," (working class and poor) women's organization in Venezuela.

The objectives of the popular women's circles were to create a forum where women could:

- \* Share and discuss the most immediate needs of their families and communities.
- \* Discover...how they could initiate a process of self-development that would permit a critical understanding of their situation and to affirm their identity as women.
- \* Explore ways of working for the good of the community . . . so that the community could address its own problems.

- \* Suggest workable alternatives to women's most critical problems in their neighborhood or community.
- \* Open up space in discussions of national policy so women could speak out about their situation as women and as part of the popular sector (Kamel, 1988, p. 83).

This list of goals -- personal development, local problems, neighborhood and community focus and a national voice for women -- parallels almost exactly the goals of NCNW.

Understanding working class women in the present also provides a link to the world of women in the past. The rich and complex web of social relations that neighborhood women weave into the tapestry of community life serves as a living reminder of the way that women and indeed most people lived until quite recently. The community life built and preserved by working class women refute the idea that mass society and possessive individualism are the only possible ways to live in the modern world.

Feminist scholars have asked why many women oppose feminist ideas and policies. One may view these women as misguided, wrong headed or manipulated by male leaders and dismiss them as dupes at best, enemies at worst. Using the principles of working class feminism to understand the position of these conservative and anti-feminist women opens up new possibilities for analysis. In such works as Dworkin's Right Wing Women (1983), Luker's Motherhood and the Politics of Abortion, and Jane Mansbridge's Why We Lost the ERA (1986), the authors find that the traditional women they investigate espouse a similar set of beliefs concerning the importance of family life,

community, and affiliation. Each of these works analyzes a particular issue, but they have an underlying thematic unity. The women in these studies share some segment of the perspective of the women I investigated for this work. The perspective of working class feminism eliminates the simple dichotomy between feminist and anti-feminist women, thus creating the possibility of a more inclusive feminism.

In Right Wing Women, Andrea Dworkin (1983) attempts to understand the position of women who support conservative and reactionary political organizations, particularly those involving women's issues. She analyzes several popular books of advice to women as well as writings of such right wing spokeswomen as Anita Bryant and Phyllis Schlafly. The books Dworkin investigates are based on a single premise and present similar advice, advocating women's total submission to the will of their husbands. Under conditions of male dominance, Dworkin argues, right wing women regard traditional marriage as a way to gain protection from men in general by submitting to the rule of one man.

Dworkin notes that right wing women see male domination and female submission as fixed and unchanging and therefore regard marriage as the "best deal" a woman can obtain. Women can claim sanctity only as mothers. Married women are protected as the wife of a particular man. Dworkin (1983) notes:

Right wing women have surveyed the world: they find it a dangerous place. They see that work subjects them to more danger from more men; it increases the risk of sexual exploitation....They see that traditional marriage means selling to one man, not hundreds: the better deal (p. 68).

These women choose the conservative and anti-feminist position, Dworkin concludes, to protect the sanctity of marriage, the family, and women's traditional role of wife and mother, which they view as their single defense against the persecutions and attacks of a male defined society. Dworkin asserts that right wing women's traditional and anti-feminist views are a logical and rational choice from their perspective.

Kristin Luker in Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood (1984) investigates the "social values" and "beliefs" of pro-choice and pro-life activists. She too finds that women who take an anti-feminist position, in this case, women active in the anti-abortion movement, place a higher value on marriage, family, and motherhood than do their pro-choice counterparts. Like Dworkin's right wing women, their position may be partially accounted for by religious beliefs and affiliations. However, beyond religious belief, their position on abortion is based on their world view and the value they place on women's role in the family.

Pro-choice women are better educated, have more income, and view the family as an important but not defining aspect of their lives. They expect to have families but also to have other interests, particularly work and career interests. They believe they will have the resources they need and that opportunities will be available to them. For these women both divorce and life outside the family are reasonable options.

In contrast to the above, pro-life women see their family role as central, giving their lives consequence, dignity, and meaning. They view the pro-choice

position as an attack on the family and therefore a threat to them. If the family and child bearing becomes one choice among many, then they who have devoted their lives to the family and who believe they have no other choices, are also less important. Pro-life women link the rising divorce rate to the legalization of abortion and view both as liberal attacks on the foundation of family life.

A strikingly similar analysis is presented by Jane Mansbridge (1986) in her study of women who worked to prevent passage of the ERA. She notes that women who are full time homemakers have seen their social status diminish as more well-educated, high status women chose careers. In Mansbridge's description of these women's views, we see once again the centrality of family in their lives and their perception that ERA, by making men and women less different and more equal threatens "the common law contract between the sexes . . . that if a women did the housework, raised the children and obeyed her husband, he had to support her" (p. 108).

The women described in these studies are not declaring their independence from family, household, or the domestic sphere as they see little that is appealing or accessible in the public sphere of work, politics, and public life. Clearly, these are women who define themselves in terms of affiliation, attachment and membership, rather than as individuals. The gulf that separates them from the goals of middle class feminism is evident. Concerns of middle class feminists such as individual rights, work and competition do not interest them. The goals of radical feminists frighten them and the analyses of socialist feminists do not seem to elucidate their experience.

However, working class feminism can and does address some of their concerns. This does not mean that the existence of working class feminism will lead to a mass transformation of conservative, anti-feminist women into advocates of feminism. It does provide the possibility that women who previously believed that the women's movement threatened their existence may begin to see the possible relevance of this movement to their lives. Conversely, feminist women who had previously viewed these women as enemies may begin to perceive common concerns.

The concerns of women form a continuum and even those women who affirm traditional family values and oppose abortion and ERA may, on other issues, take positions that feminist women share. For example, the issues of wife beating, child abuse, and rape are relevant to women of all backgrounds. As discussed in Chapter VI, this is an issue that working class feminists have analyzed and acted on.

A number of other issues are of a great interest to many women. Education, the environment, and housing are not usually seen as feminist issues, but they are the public concerns of many women. Women have played important roles in political movements around these issues and have helped to define them as matters of public concern in the West and in Africa, Asia, and Latin America as well. Another policy area of great interest to many women is the existence of extreme poverty and the administration of government aid programs, as these impact directly on the lives of women and their children. Sofia Mendoza (1983) a community organizer in East San Jose reports:

Chicanas ask: How can I ask for liberation and freedom for myself when my man and children are being oppressed? How can I ask for services for myself when my family doesn't have any? Why should I become politicized and not my family?

Working class feminism, by creating a connection between women who work on social issues and women who call themselves feminists, allows many women to experience their common interests and to support each other's work.

Further, this mutual acknowledgement of a broad range of women's issues make it possible to develop a women's analysis of these concerns. Should feminist analysis be restricted to an area narrowly defined as women's concerns or should there be a feminist analysis of all the issues in society that affect women? It is working class feminism that can provide an arena of discourse for women's shared concerns and make these connections possible. Like the conservative women discussed above, working class feminists value family and community, but in contrast to these women, they are also self consciously feminist in their orientation.

### Working Class Feminism as a Social Movement

Karen Hansen discusses what she terms "the social" as the sphere between the public and private. She maintains that this sphere is defined by women's informal activities; I have called this sphere community. This is the sphere defined by human interaction, rather than by the institutionalized dichotomy of public and private. Spontaneous interactions of individuals in this arena bridges the gap between public and private life as well as the tension between the

individual and the group. It is the free space in which social movements may arise.

Consciousness raising groups made it possible for the mainly middle class women who participated in them to redefine their potential as individual women and to claim for themselves a broader horizon of consciousness and action. Political participation has served as a kind of consciousness raising for working class women, allowing them to express their concerns for family and community through political action as they empowered themselves as public persons.

Stepping outside of the traditional roles imposed on working class women to assert a new identity in the public world is an act that transforms natural community into conscious community. Women who fight for their neighborhoods and assert the value of their culture are no longer immersed in that culture; they are simultaneously inside and outside of it. Choosing to struggle to preserve one's social world is a conscious choice and one that opens up the possibility for other choices as well. It is a way of asserting the autonomy of the social, of spontaneous community as opposed to the controlled sphere of existing institutions. It is simultaneously the sphere of freedom and the sphere of connection. It includes the potential for the creation of new institutional forms based on free choice and a sense of connection.

To develop oneself fully as an individual can only occur in the context of community. The bourgeois image of the solitary individual pursuing her/his interests and pleasures is a truncated and alienated vision of individual freedom;



true individualism defines itself in terms of connection with others and in the creation of institutions that express these values.

An institution that people create may under certain conditions become a social movement, one that has the potential to change society as well as the individual and the community. Social movements require all of these elements -- free individuals, communities of connection and concern, and the will and energy to create institutions. They cannot be leader dominated because that destroys freedom, connection and creativity. They require the strong roots of trust and concern that develop through a history of association. For example, the New Left had a great deal of spontaneity and creativity, but little shared history. It lacked the legacy of trust and mutual concern, associated with local movements, that could have held it together for the long haul.

Richard Flacks (1988) reminds us that social movements grow out of the connection between what he calls "making life" and "making History." One of the chapters of his book is subtitled "Everyday Life as the Seedbed of Political Action." In that chapter he notes that at times even the most everyday activities such as how one dresses, one's work or leisure pursuits can take on historical significance if they are part of a consciously intended program of opposition.

Flacks distinguishes between movements of resistance in which people oppose abuses and negative changes or advocate for better conditions, and movements of liberation which aim for broader and deeper changes. However, the two are connected and "Aspirations for liberation may arise in the process of resistance" (p. 76). Flacks also notes that participation in any movement in which

disempowered people attempt to make their lives better gives them a sense of history and a critical consciousness that continues to permeate their everyday life. Like Gutman and the social historians, Flacks insists on the importance of the liberatory potential of everyday life, a potential often invisible to those whose grand designs for revolution allow them to see only the big picture.

Social movements face many problems in maintaining their goals, the allegiance of participants and the integrity of their process. Many of these problems grow out of the tendency of social movements to isolate themselves from the world. Movements may degenerate into cults that make a fetish of the leader, the group, or the "correct" analysis. Such movements and groups shut out the world in order to endure and ironically, often self destruct in the process. A movement may become the creature of its elite and lose the loyalty of rank and file members. If this occurs the movement loses the very elements required to sustain its existence and its connection to the world. Working class feminism provides a bulwark against these tendencies. By insisting on the link between the community and the social movement, it remained anchored in the real world and the concerns of ordinary people.

Empowerment means being able to act to create change and being aware that one's activities and those of other human beings create the world. It also means understanding the political implications of everyday life and the ways in which everyday life and history are connected. It means struggling continuously to clarify the relationship between being an organization and being a movement. In theory, an organization provides services; a movement struggles for change.

In practice the two are not unconnected. Many groups like NCNW engage in both types of activities and live with the tension between the two types of goals.

This is a tension between universalism and particularism that exists within many social movements. In a review essay (Feminist Studies, Vol. 17, #1) Joan Tronto comments on this tension within the women's movement. In discussing Nancy Cott's work The Grounding of Modern Feminism, Tronto notes the effectiveness of the women's movement grew out of women's identity as a group. However as the movement succeeds in enhancing the social position of women, individual women have less and less need for this group identity. "Once women have gained the recognition they need, they no longer need to identify as women." In her reading of Cott's work, this raises a fundamental question about the feminist movement.

"When success is measured by individual accomplishment, conflict has become privatized rather than socialized." The existence of this tension within feminism highlights both class differences among women and the importance of working class feminism. It is overwhelmingly middle and upper middle class women who will be drawn off into the pursuit of individual success. Working class and poor women who become feminists do so as agents of their community in order to accomplish collective rather than individual goals. Rethinking feminism to include their concerns will not only strengthen it as a social movement, but may be key to its continuing existence, its ability to attract adherents and its impact on public policy issues.

What goals can there be for a future feminism? Hester Eisenstein (1983, p.144) suggests that there are three possible directions. One is "agreeing to compete in a male dominated world," that is competing with men on their own terms by becoming like them, after the manner of Margaret Thatcher. A second is to declare the patriarchal world intractable and unchangeable and to retreat into enclaves of feminist separatism. The third possibility is to remain a part of the world while simultaneously struggling to transform it and to recreate it in terms of woman centered values of community, connection and concern. Such a feminism would provide a feminist analyst for all liberation movements and be women's special gift to the world. Working class feminism is a starting point.

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