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Author(s): Ronald Lawson and Stephen E. Barton

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Sex Roles in Social Movements: A Case Study of the Tenant Movement in New York City

Ronald Lawson and Stephen E. Barton

Many recent studies have documented the presence of sexism in American society, charted the oppressive impact of discrimination against women, and traced its sources.¹ So ubiquitous is sexism, and so pervasive the engines supporting it, that, ironically, its trace may be found even within movements for social justice. A literature is now developing that describes the part women have played in social movements and the sexism they encountered there. This is largely descriptive, focusing on the ideological interchange between party leadership and feminists.²

This paper is a product of the Tenant Movement Study, an interdisciplinary research project supported by the Center for Metropolitan Studies of the National Institute of Mental Health and conducted through the Center for Policy Research. Focusing primarily on New York City, the study includes a systematic analysis of the contemporary tenant movement as well as a historical examination of organized tenant activity since 1890. The findings of the study are planned to appear in two volumes by Ronald Lawson and others tentatively titled *From "Tenant Rebellion" to "Statewide Rent Control": The Evolution of the Tenant Movement in New York State, 1904-1979* and *Rent Strikes and Tenant Take-overs: Tenant Activity and the Urban Housing Crisis in New York City*. The authors wish to thank Jenna Weissman Joselit, Joseph Spencer, Jody Dworetzky, and John McLoughlin for their parts in collecting and providing historical data; Jo Curran for her help in preparing the survey data for analysis; and Candace Kim Edell for editing. We found the comments of Myra Marx Ferree, Wagner Thielens, Carol Mueller, and Maren Lockwood Carden especially helpful as we struggled to conceptualize the issues. However, responsibility for the paper as it appears rests solely with the authors.

1. An excellent review of the literature is Carolyn Etheridge, "The Dynamics of Changing Sex-Roles: An Integrated Theoretical Analysis" (paper presented at the meeting of the American Sociological Association, 1974), and "Equality in the Family: Comparative Analysis and Theoretical Model," *International Journal of Women's Studies* 1 (1978): 50-63.

2. See, e.g., Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1971); Maren Lockwood Carden, "The New Feminist Movement in the U.S." (paper presented at the Eighth World Congress of Sociology, 1975); Mari Jo Buhle, "Women and the Socialist Party, 1901-1914," *Radical*

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Lacking still are analyses of the means by which the sexism of the larger society reproduces itself within social movements whose aim has been to liberate people from societal oppression. This paper attempts to follow Robert Michels, whose 1915 study of the forces leading to oligarchy in the German socialist movement pioneered the sociological analyses of the internal difficulties of progressive movements.³ The vehicle for analysis is an urban phenomenon, the tenant movement, the crusade for the recognition of tenants' rights to security within well-maintained housing at reasonable rents in New York City since 1904. Over time, the tenant movement has evolved a complex structure existing at three levels: building organizations (BOs), neighborhood organizations (NOs), and city- or statewide federations. Women pioneered as the organizers of protest in their buildings and took the lead in helping to spread it from building to building. Men, however, were at the forefront when the higher levels of the structure first emerged. They have also usually been the leaders of organizations initiating new strategies at these higher levels.⁴ This pattern has occurred in spite of the presence of a clear majority of women in almost all organizations at every structural level. Nevertheless, once new structures or strategies have emerged, women have assumed more leadership positions. That is, women, in the forefront of organizing a grass-roots movement that has had a rather long history have been a major force in building and then keeping the movement going. This finding runs counter to the general view of women as apolitical, following their men's wishes, relying on their men heavily, or even never involving themselves in activities that cannot be immediately connected to family life.⁵

We do not mean to imply that the tenant movement has been led by crass male chauvinists who "put down" women daily while working with

America 4, no. 2 (February 1970): 36–55; Robert Schaffer, "Women and the Communist Party, USA," *Socialist Review* 45 (May–June 1979): 73–118; Phillip Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement from Colonial Times to the Eve of World War I* (New York: Free Press, 1979); Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History* (London: Pluto Press, 1974), and *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

3. Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York: Free Press, 1962).

4. We use the term "leader(s)" to refer to the spokesperson(s) and main decision maker(s) for a social movement organization. Often this is a single person bearing a formal title; sometimes the term refers best to a group of from two to four people. Our fieldwork indicates that the numbers deserving to be so designated rarely exceed four. By the "activists" or "active core" (terms we use interchangeably) we mean the group of people in an organization who do most of the work—organizing, publicity, advising of tenants, etc. This group includes the leader(s) and extends beyond him/her (them) to include less prominent participants. However, it is often not coextensive with those holding official positions. The size of the active core is most frequently between three and six persons; in some cases it may include as many as a dozen or more persons. The term "secondary leaders" is used to refer to those members of the active core who are not spokespersons or main decision makers.

5. Jane S. Jaquette, *Women in Politics* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974).

them. Indeed, the reverse is generally the case: most of the men have a genuine concern for social justice, and the concept of sexism within the movement is quite foreign to them. When we have mentioned the sex-role patterns within the movement, they have often been surprised that we could find them remarkable. Many of the women activists would agree in this response. This paper is concerned, then, with a subtle process that has had a profound impact on leadership patterns and the division of labor within the movement.

Research Methods

The data for this paper were collected using a combination of three methods. Historical research on the period 1890–1972 drew on city and local press, city and state government archives, tenant organization records as available, and extensive oral history. Fieldwork covered the three main federations extensively from 1973 to 1978, the other four in less detail, and twenty-five neighborhood and forty building organizations during 1973–75. There was considerable follow-up of these organizations and extension of fieldwork to others newly important after the initial period. Surveys in 1975–76 broadened coverage to the leaders and key activists of 123 neighborhood organizations and leaders, members, and nonmembers within 108 organized buildings together with their landlords; the leaders of 120 other buildings were added later. This sample represents almost all the neighborhood groups active in 1975–76 whose central purpose was to organize tenants together with a sample of thirty-six OEO-funded housing agencies, most of which mainly serviced tenants rather than organizing them. The leaders of the buildings were interviewed twice, the second time one year after the first in order to check the outcome of their actions and their organization survival rates. When most of the actions proved to be still in process, a new sample of buildings, each organized more than two years earlier, was drawn, twenty from the files of each of six important organizations from very different neighborhoods, and the leaders of all these were interviewed.

Historical Summary

The first episode of tenant activism in New York City occurred in 1904. Sharply increasing rents provoked isolated rent strikes on the Lower East Side which women then spread from building to building until 2,000 families were participating. Organization was initially informal, relying on networks among these Jewish people. However, when rapid mobilization revealed the issue's potential, an umbrella organization, the first NO, was formed by male members of the Socialist party. This, however, collapsed before the strike culminated with gains to tenants.

The next, larger, burst of activity in 1907-8 followed a similar path: the organizers were women, the would-be NO leaders Socialist men. A third, much longer, and larger wave of activity was initiated by "tenant leagues," NOs formed by Socialist party branches after 1917. It culminated with the imposition of rent controls in 1920. Again the organizers were mainly women, but the leaders of both the leagues and of their rivals, "tenant associations" sponsored by the mainline parties, were males. However, during the 1920s when the associations continued alone, helping tenants use the complicated new law, women became prominent as NO leaders for the first time. The associations lapsed with the rent law in 1929.

Numerous NOs reemerged in the wake of the depression, focusing on the housing decay that accompanied high vacancy rates. Women, including some leaders, predominated among participants. But when the first federation was formed in 1936, all the leaders were men. However, with time, women moved into prominent positions. In 1942, when war removed the male leaders, a woman became president. Three broad federations then emerged after World War II to lobby for the retention of wartime rent controls. Men led all of them. However, when these federations were dismantled in the early 1950s following the passage of state rent controls and the onset of McCarthyite repression, movement leadership reverted to boroughwide organizations, all of which had women leaders. Women also dominated the new "Save-Our-Homes" organizations in neighborhoods threatened by urban renewal. When a federation, the Metropolitan Council on Housing (Met Council), was formed in 1959 to lobby against urban renewal, a triumvirate of two men and one woman was chosen to lead it.

Meanwhile, housing conditions had reappeared as a central issue in ghetto areas. In the winter of 1963-64 a rent strike spread outward from Harlem. Though still known as the "Jesse Gray rent strike," after the man who acted as spokesperson, it was actually run by two women. Women also predominated on the citywide Strike Coordinating Committee. During the years that followed, "Housing Specialists" funded under the antipoverty program appeared in ghetto areas. Whatever their sex, they administered generally unadventurous programs. The Met Council was also broadening its interests and consolidating its position as a citywide federation of tenant organizations. Jane Benedict had been appointed chairperson, replacing the original triumvirate. She has dominated it for over eighteen years.

The Contemporary Movement

Since 1971, tenant action in New York City has swelled considerably. Virtually every neighborhood now has at least one tenant organization, and thousands of buildings have organized and conducted rent

strikes. The spectrum of socioeconomic status (SES) within the movement has also broadened considerably. The range of tenant strategies has diversified and now includes an effective lobbying presence in the state legislature, tenant-initiated court cases, the direct expenditure of rent moneys on repairs, the management and moderate rehabilitation of buildings abandoned by their landlords, the gut rehabilitation of totally abandoned buildings through "sweat equity" by would-be tenants, the fostering of cooperative ownership of their buildings by low-income tenants, and a number of different forms of rent strike. The structure of the movement has developed commensurately: there are now one statewide, four citywide, and two boroughwide federations. They represent tenants with dissimilar housing problems and of differing socioeconomic status; they also stress somewhat distinct strategies.

However, certain historical patterns have continued to hold. The movement is still largely a movement of women in the sense that they make up most of the participants. Our 1975–76 survey results show that women considerably outnumber men among grassroots members: 63.4 percent of NOs report that the majority of their members are women, only 3.2 percent that the majority are men. (The remainder indicate equal numbers.) Among core activists, women outnumber men at *all* levels. However, the situation is different when leaders are separated from other activists: the higher the structural level, the more likely are leaders to be male (see tables 1 and 2).

Significant variations occur within this pattern depending on the

Table 1

Sex of Core Activists at Different Structural Levels of the Movement, 1976–77
(%)

	Building (<i>N</i> = 107)	Neighborhood (<i>N</i> = 110)	Federation (<i>N</i> = 7)
Women	54.2	48.2	71.4
Sexes equal	22.4	16.4	14.3
Men	23.4	35.5	14.3

Table 2

Sex of Leaders at Different Structural Levels of the Movement, 1976–77
(%)

	Building (<i>N</i> = 108)	Neighborhood (<i>N</i> = 123)	Federation (<i>N</i> = 7)
Women	50.9	40.7	28.6
Both sexes coleaders	23.1	8.9	...
Men	25.9	50.4	71.4

SES of the tenants. In general, the higher the income of tenants being organized or served, the greater the likelihood that leaders are male. We divided organizations among three categories according to the average income of their membership or clientele: less than \$8,000 per family (low income), \$8,000–\$12,500 (moderate income), and more than \$12,500 (middle income). Among BOs, although women are in the majority among both leaders and core activists at all income levels, their predominance decreases as income rises. At the neighborhood level, where there are more male leaders, a small female plurality among low-income groups is transformed into a clear male preponderance among the heads of middle-income groups (see tables 3 and 4).

While obtaining continuous historical data concerning the leadership of NOs and federations presented few serious obstacles, similar data for BOs were inevitably much more patchy. We do know that the formation of BOs in large numbers among middle-income tenants is a recent phenomenon, and that these BOs are much more likely to be led by men. Since the press was consistent in reporting that women led action in buildings during the early years of the movement, we would infer from these data that the proportion of male leaders in BOs has probably increased in recent years. Similarly, the formation of NOs in middle-

Table 3

Sex of Leaders of Building Organizations according to the Average Income of Membership, 1976 (%)

	Average Income		
	Low (<i>N</i> = 23)	Moderate (<i>N</i> = 22)	Middle (<i>N</i> = 36)
Women	65.2	54.5	52.8
Both sexes coleaders	13.0	27.3	19.4
Men	21.7	18.2	27.8

Table 4

Sex of Leaders of Neighborhood Organizations according to the Average Income of Membership, 1976–77 (%)

	Average Income		
	Low (<i>N</i> = 73)	Moderate (<i>N</i> = 15)	Middle (<i>N</i> = 23)
Women	47.9	26.7	17.4
Both sexes coleaders	11.0	13.3	4.3
Men	41.1	60.0	78.3

income communities has no doubt slowed the overall trend toward leadership by women at this level of the movement structure.

Part of the variation in participation by sex among income groups may reflect the larger political role which women play in the black community.⁶ Blacks are strongly represented among low-income organizations but far outnumbered among middle-income organizations (see table 5).⁷ However, the historical data make it unlikely that this accounts for all the variation between income groups, since most of the groups we studied in the pre-World War II period were predominantly white. Moreover, while the proportion of women leaders among black low-income organizations is greater than for other racial groups, the leadership patterns among organizations of all races are congruent with the general SES distributions we have described. For example, sixteen out of nineteen white NOs have male leaders in the middle-income category, but only two of four in the low-income category.

Despite these general patterns, some of the most prominent leaders within the tenant movement are women. For example, Jane Benedict's long rule over the Met Council and her numerous appearances on television and radio as the outspoken champion of tenant rights have made her the best-known tenant leader in New York City today. The general patterns must also be modified by another factor that cuts across them: men tend to hold the leadership positions when new paths are being pioneered, especially when these require the development of cooperative relationships with formal organizations such as legislatures, banks, courts, and government bureaucracies. Such cooperative relationships, frequently achieved as the result of conflictual strategies, may be characterized as "conflictual cooperation." However, once the new re-

Table 5

Race of Neighborhood Organizations according to the Average Income of Membership, 1976-77

	Average Income		
	Low (N = 70)	Moderate (N = 15)	Middle (N = 23)
White	5.7	46.7	82.6
Black	27.1	20.0	4.3
Hispanic	31.4	6.7	0
Mixed	35.7	26.7	13.0

6. Curt Lamb, *Political Power in Poor Neighborhoods* (New York: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1976).

7. We identified an organization as a particular race if two-thirds or more of its members were of that race; other organizations were identified as mixed race. Almost all of the latter had strong black components.

relationships, structures, and/or strategies have been accepted, women have been likely to replace male leaders who drop out.

For example, in the mid-1970s a number of NOs began developing new tactics to save or reclaim buildings from abandonment: moderate rehabilitation, sweat-equity rehabilitation, the forming of low-income cooperatives. These groups deal with very poor tenants, the very range where the majority of NOs are women led; but sixteen of the twenty organizations now using these strategies are led by men. Another example is organizations founded during the 1970s in fourteen middle-income groups based in large housing developments, that is, buildings or groups of buildings with from 3,000 to 60,000 tenants in one place with one landlord. These had never been organized until recently, but the threat of forced condominium conversion or massive rent increases mobilized them. Twelve of the fourteen are led by men.

The exceptions show that women *can* and *do* lead organizations that require skills in dealing with bureaucracies; however, they have been unlikely to do so initially. On the other hand, women are in the majority among the leaders of NOs following the more traditional strategies: those fostering rent strikes (thirteen women, eleven men), opposing demolition of buildings for redevelopment and institutional expansion—the successors to those who fought urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s (six women, no men), and mainly or solely servicing individual tenants (twenty-one women, fourteen men).

Nevertheless, with the passage of time the new strategies have been incorporated more frequently in the repertoires of NOs led by women, as the pattern that has been isolated would predict. The leaders of NOs that encourage striking tenants who are being stonewalled by landlords to spend their rent monies directly on fuel and/or repairs—a decision that is often tantamount to accepting *de facto* responsibility for managing the building—are evenly divided between men and women. Several women leaders are successfully managing city-owned buildings under community management contracts between their NOs and the city (among the twenty NOs with such contracts, five management programs are headed by women). And because most NOs have a majority of women among their activist cores, sweat-equity rehabilitation⁸—a strategy which would seem to demand traditionally male skills—often finds women working in building construction along with men on an equal basis.

This pattern, where males occupy leadership positions while new directions are evolving and females are more likely to take over once these become established, may also be illustrated structurally. The major structural innovation of the 1970s has been the emergence of multiple

8. Under this strategy tenants gain equity in a previously abandoned building through volunteering their labor (“sweat”) in its rehabilitation. Such a building is then cooperatively owned and managed.

federations. These reflect the mobilization of new constituencies among tenants with different problems and the consequent need to introduce new strategies. The original leaders of six of the seven federations were males, or in one case a male majority within a triumvirate. The one exception, City-Wide Save-Our-Homes, a coalition of NOs fighting demolition because of institutional expansion, was really founded for mutual support rather than with specific bureaucratic targets in view. All four cases of leadership succession at this level where a change of sex was involved have been from male to female; two especially notable ones occurred early in 1979. As a result of these changes, two and one-half of the three most important federations, and three and one-half of all seven federations, are now led by women.

Analysis

Most tenant leaders are so imbued with goodwill and idealism, and the prejudices associated with sexism so foreign to their consciousness, that it is tempting to explain the movement's participation patterns in terms of internal processes, where female personality variables allow males to come to dominate leadership competition. However, the actual roles of the female organizers and the strength they display in them lead us to reject this. A combination of the impact of structural variables, infringing on the movement from without, and sex-role socialization is a more parsimonious explanation, which we now wish to explore in more detail by addressing three questions.

1. *Why are women predominant among organizers, other active participants, and rank-and-file members, so that the tenant movement has been numerically largely a movement of women?*

An awareness of the division between home and community on the one hand and workplace on the other is vital to an understanding of the participation patterns we found. The home is regarded as primarily the sphere of the woman rather than of the man. Consequently, when a rent increase or a deterioration in services impinges on the home, it is usually the woman's task to deal with it since it lies within her sphere. This pattern holds true more frequently in working-class than in middle-class households because of the greater separation of the roles typically found there.⁹ Building organization mobilization is commonly based on a network of social ties within a building which women, whether employed outside the home or not, are much more likely to form. The homemaker activities of women in their building and neighborhood—doing the laundry, neighboring, watching over children, shopping for food—all foster the creation of common ties; men, on the other hand, often lack

9. Mirra Komarovsky, *Blue-Collar Marriage* (New York: Random House, 1964).

them.¹⁰ In addition, building organizations, like PTAs, provide an acceptable avenue for social action, since activities outside the home are seen as threatening by a significant minority of working-class husbands.¹¹ These factors surely help considerably to explain why women participate in BOs to a far greater extent than men and why their participation relative to men is more extensive among those of lower SES. They also account for the fact that employment outside the home does not affect the participation of women adversely. Indeed, while 87 percent of employed women in organized buildings report membership in the BO, this is so for only 80 percent of unemployed.

As tables 1 and 2 demonstrated, women are also more likely to act as organizers and leaders at this local level. (These two roles frequently coincide within BOs.) Several factors are relevant here. The initiative for action often grows out of networks within buildings, where women's ties are typically much more dense than those of men. Again, because of their familiarity with their neighborhoods women are more likely to know of and to make contact with a NO when housing problems arise—and the person who makes that first contact often becomes the leader of a BO. The offices of NOs are typically crowded with women, even at night. Moreover, even though leadership roles are more demanding than the roles of the rank and file, employment status is not significant in determining who fills them: the leader/follower ratio among employed women is almost identical with that among unemployed within BOs.

Relatively few tenants active in their own BOs are drawn into efforts to help other buildings, but those doing so are much more apt to be women than men. Indeed, this is the major means of recruiting women to the ranks of NO activists, and it is the reason for their numerical predominance there: 85 percent of female activists in NOs had been recruited via BOs, compared with 56 percent of males. Men are more likely than women to choose to become active in NOs without ever having belonged to a BO (see below), but this source of male recruitment does not compensate for the predominance of women among those drawn into neighborhood activism from the grass roots. Women begin to work with other buildings because of their involvement in neighborhood friendship networks and because they are already involved in their own BOs and have found that they are good at organizing and enjoy it; in a few instances it is also important that they are not working. Only 9 percent of NO activists do not have paid employment, but 85 percent of these are women. These make up 19 percent of women activists, com-

10. Selma James, "A Woman's Place," in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, ed. Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1974), pp. 57–79.

11. Lillian Rubin, *Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working Class Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), pp. 176–84, 201–2.

pared with 2 percent of men. That is, only as activism takes them out of their own buildings does the employment status of women begin to play a determining part. The involvement of these women in a NO in turn reinforces and extends their neighborhood networks, and their experiences help to strengthen, or perhaps create, an ideological commitment.

We would also argue that female socialization for "interpersonal orientation, empathy, sensitivity, nurturance, [and] supportiveness" often develops a greater interpersonal sensitivity that is important to organizing, especially where people are fearful and distrustful, as tenants facing problems often are.¹² In contrast, males receive systematic training against sensitivity and trust and for aggressiveness and competition.¹³ Masculine socialization and behavior thus prove to be disabling for grass-roots organizing, particularly in domains where women are a necessary constituency. McCormack has suggested that the apparently greater conservatism of female voters may be due to the aggressive masculine style of working-class politicians.¹⁴ Male union organizers have failed in attempts to organize women office workers for similar reasons.¹⁵ Our files contain several instances where men have fought for dominance in tenant organizations and driven out the losers. On the other hand, male socialization prepares men to handle confrontations with often hostile forces outside the organization such as landlords and courts.

Finally, in the tenant movement *both* organizers and rank and file have tended to be women. Men organizers have both neglected women and attempted to exclude them from organizations. In the tenant movement women were not ignored, for women were organizing other women. Sharing a common understanding, a language, they could appeal to a common culture (e.g., the effect of poor housing conditions on their children). Moreover, women could spend time with the women organizers without being suspected of having a sexual relationship and without husbands fearing that their wives were being seduced.¹⁶

2. *Why have a disproportionate number of the leadership positions been held by men?*

12. Judith Bardwick and Elizabeth Douvan, "Ambivalence: The Socialization of Women," in *Woman in Sexist Society*, ed. Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (New York: Basic Books, 1971), pp. 147–59.

13. Ruth Hartley, "Sex-Role Pressures and the Socialization of the Male Child," in *Men and Masculinity*, ed. Joseph Pleck and Jack Sawyer (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), pp. 7–13.

14. Thelma McCormack, "Toward a Nonsexist Perspective on Social and Political Change," in *Another Voice: Feminist Perspectives on Social Life and Social Science*, ed. Marcia Millman and Rosabeth Moss Kanter (New York: Anchor Books, 1973), p. 24.

15. Stephen Barton, "Understanding San Francisco: Social Movements in Headquarters City" (unpublished manuscript, 1979, available from author), p. 67.

16. The presence of strange men, whether as organizers or as sociological researchers, is often regarded with suspicion (Lyn H. Lofland, "The 'Thereness' of Women: A Selective Review of Urban Sociology," in Millman and Kanter, pp. 144–70).

Men have tended to hold the positions of leadership within the tenant movement because of a societal structure in which institutions favor men and discriminate against women. Sponsoring organizations have often placed men directly in advantaged positions in the movement, and men have also gained access to relevant skills and networks as a result of external experience in organizations that have been closed to, or more restrictive toward, women. Meanwhile, women have been exposed to discriminatory policies that have imposed costs on their attempts to lead or have removed them from leadership competition altogether.

Sponsorship was especially important during the first years of the movement. The earliest NOs were sponsored by political parties which took the initiative in placing personnel directly in movement positions. Because of the sexist structures of the sponsoring organizations these personnel were almost always men, the very few exceptions being Socialists during the 1917–20 period. The sponsored NO participants had several advantages: not only were the NOs actually formed around them, making them the incumbent leaders, but they also had ready access to outside resources, such as skills, networks, and money. There were also prospects of personal rewards in the sponsoring organizations.

Ties to sponsoring organizations continued to be important in later years: to the American Labor party in the years immediately before and after World War II; to the two main parties, especially the Democrats, at various times since that war; and to various churches, particularly the Catholic church, since the mid-1960s.

Beginning in the 1930s, this force favoring males began to be intertwined with, and often replaced by, a second factor: previous access to relevant skills and networks. The early Socialist-backed NOs sought to make a political impact through the use of mass rent strikes and other confrontation strategies. Later NOs tended to become more Janus-like, separating to some extent their goals of influencing politicians and bureaucracies from those of organizing buildings, bargaining with landlords, and servicing tenants. While organizers pursued the latter goals, the leaders found that they needed bureaucratic and manipulative skills in order to deal with the former, a facet that received increasing emphasis as some NOs began to manage buildings and administer various government programs in the 1970s. For their part, federations have almost always been formed with legislative and/or administrative targets in view and with bureaucratic strategies in mind. For example, the New York State Tenants and Neighborhoods Coalition was formed with the express purpose of establishing an “*expert* lobbying presence” with Albany legislators.

Such organizations are very different from the home-centered BO's. Their leaders need access to influential networks and skills with which to approach experts and authorities. While social-emotional roles are im-

portant for mobilization of people, bureaucratic roles are often the key to strategic impact, and males have usually been better prepared to fill such roles. Experience in other institutions within the society has provided many men but only a few women with personal skills and/or access to relevant infrastructures. Several of the early federation leaders, all of them, without exception, men, had previously held administrative posts. By the 1970s the strategies used by the movement had broadened considerably. The proportion and variety of skilled personnel among its leaders expanded rapidly. Men with formal skills still far outnumbered skilled women; among key NO activists 38 percent of the males had entered with relevant skills they had learned outside the movement compared with 16 percent of the females. Among the key activists in the multiple federations of the past decade the comparable statistics are 77 percent of men and 54 percent of women. Perhaps the most striking example is that of Robert Schur, who in 1975 moved from a post as administrator within the City Housing and Development Administration to become director of the Association of Neighborhood Housing Developers. There he provided NOs with technical knowledge about the very programs he had previously administered, doing much of the negotiating on their behalf himself.

Professional expertise and bureaucratic manipulation are broadly transferable to other organizations and movements. On the other hand, the more movement-specific skills (familiarity with people in a neighborhood, knowledge of organizational procedures) of the secondary leaders, the majority of whom are women, are less heralded and transferable. Thus for men the motivation for pursuit of leadership positions within the tenant movement is often as a step toward future career goals, frequently in politics. Paul Ross, a federation leader from 1948 to 1952, later ran for mayor. Jesse Gray, who began organizing tenants in Harlem in the 1950s, ran for several offices before being elected to the state assembly as the "Harlem Rent Strike Leader" nine years after the event. Today one state senator and two assemblymen continue to cultivate the NOs which were their original political bases, while several other tenant leaders clearly aspire to similar advancement. All are men. By contrast, Marie Runyon, a recent single-term assemblywoman, was defeated for reelection when the predominantly male leadership of the Columbia Tenants Union turned against her because she refused to act as a figurehead.

Career goals are therefore much more potent in motivating men than women: 34 percent of men entering NOs as volunteer activists are so motivated compared with 3 percent of women. Many of these enter NOs in their communities without ever having been involved with BOs (19 percent of men, 2 percent of women); but about half of these men are active prior to becoming involved with the NO in local Democratic clubs. Of twenty-one key figures active at the outset of the present-day

federations, only four, all women, seem not to have been motivated at least in part by career goals. Of the other seventeen, who included only two women, three were hoping for legislative or administrative careers which they in fact did not secure, although all three were furthered toward different administrative careers as a result of their involvement. Ten secured paid posts for themselves within the movement, for the remaining four these positions were next steps in already existing salaried careers within the movement.

More than half of the core members of NOs (56 percent at last count and rising) are now salaried. This is a recent development, dating back a little more than ten years to the first OEO-funded "Housing Specialists" and mushrooming only in the last three or four years with the expansion of rehabilitation and management strategies supported by government funds. Although most of these positions pay fairly poorly, and much of the funding is in soft money, it is nevertheless beginning to be possible to think in terms of a career within the tenant movement. Women have been more successful in securing these positions than might have been expected: the proportion of paid women activists matches that of men activists almost exactly. However, the women's paid positions tend not to be at the highest level. For example, only one of the four salaried federation leader positions is held by a woman, and she, a new incumbent, is the first woman to hold such a position. On the other hand, women hold four of the six voluntary federation leader positions.

Meanwhile, discrimination against women has compounded the advantages held by male leaders. It was most overt in 1904, when Bertha Liebson, the most prominent of the strike organizers, was vetoed as treasurer of the new NO on grounds that a woman was not qualified to hold such a post. Recently it has been more subtle. For example, court bureaucracies have on occasion refused to deal with organizers, who tend to be female, demanding instead lawyers, more frequently male. While the various rehabilitation and community management programs were being developed, usually as a direct result of movement pressure, members of the city housing bureaucracy were loath to deal with movement personnel, whom they considered to be "unprofessional." They stressed the need for "professional packaging." This attitude meant support for male middle-class leaders at the expense of female and less educated male leaders. Similarly, NOs have trouble gaining approval for would-be "7A" administrators of buildings when no professionals are available.

The factors covered in the analysis so far also explain why men are especially likely to be at the helm when new structures or strategies are evolving. When needed skills are not part of the movement's experience, skilled personnel must be mobilized externally. Males have frequently used the advantages of broader experience to assume leadership in a changing situation by taking the initiative to found new NOs. For exam-

ple, the three NOs most prominent in pioneering rehabilitation and management strategies in neighborhoods undergoing abandonment in the early 1970s were led by white, well-educated males whose bureaucratic skills and access to relevant networks enabled them to manipulate the city's housing bureaucracy to create whole new city programs. One of them, Henry Lanier, then joined the Housing and Development Administration as a commissioner, where his task was to develop and administer the new program. Women have also created new NOs in response to threats, especially the threat of demolition of their housing. But throughout most of the movement's history they have not been in a position to respond to career opportunities. While the NOs they have created have also been strategically innovative, for example, the use of squatter takeovers to combat urban renewal and institutional expansion, they have relied more on mobilization of people than bureaucratic skills.

It is appropriate at this point to consider the oldest existing federation, Met Council. Not only is it led by a woman, Jane Benedict, but a majority of its activists and of the leaders of its branch and affiliated NOs are women. Throughout its twenty-year history it has refused to compromise its position on tenants' rights. Indeed, it has strengthened it by adding to its slogan of "decent, integrated housing at rents tenants can afford" a call for the replacement of private ownership with "housing in the public domain." Because of its intractability, a product of the "old Left" ideology of its leadership, it has rarely been taken seriously as a political force. Met Council uses lobbying trips to the state capital as a tool to educate its members concerning the futility of expecting changes to be given when they must be forced by direct action. It also emphasizes the necessity of tenants relying on the strength provided by organization and unity rather than depending on the expertise of lawyers and other professionals. Indeed, though a federation, over the last eight years it has rejected the usual political role of federations and has instead poured most of its resources into organizing rent strikes in buildings. Thus, by rejecting professionals and refusing to enter the established political arena, Met Council has avoided the main avenues of male domination within the tenant movement.

In brief, some of the factors Michels found conducive to oligarchy, the greater knowledge and skills of leadership and the vested interest of leaders in preserving and furthering their careers, also help maintain male predominance in tenant leadership. The firmly oligarchic leadership of Met Council is, however, ironic evidence that women's leadership is not inherently democratic.

3. Under what circumstances have women replaced men in leadership positions?

The turnover among leaders of the tenant movement has been quite substantial. For example, of eight federation leadership positions, three of which have been held occasionally by more than one person at a time,

four are currently held by long-term incumbents. However, a total of fourteen leaders have come and gone during the life span of the federations, eleven in the past five years. Turnover among federation activists has been even more rapid: the average term of a member of Met Council's executive board is only two years. The NO leaders also turn over at a substantial rate, though less quickly than federation leaders. Why do movement leaders leave with such frequency? Some of the leaders may be described as having vaulted up successfully from their movement bases to political or administrative careers, while others were similarly successful within the movement. These two groups together comprise 15 percent of federation and NO leader turnover. For them the hope that participation in the movement would further their careers was fulfilled. Almost all of them are men. Other departing leaders are less upwardly mobile. More than a third, 38 percent, "burn out," finding their participation insufficiently rewarding. Some find the personal costs of tenant activism unmatched by the rewards and retire to private lives. Some have withdrawn before repression: one federation leader, Alfred K. Stern, fled abroad during the McCarthy period. Organizational vicissitudes cause another 30 percent to leave: those paying their salaries run out of funds or fire them, they are voted out of office, there are splits in organizations. Smaller numbers have been removed by outside forces such as the call to military service or the 1920 split in the Socialist party. Some have been moved on by sponsoring organizations. Others, like the recent opposers of demolition, have left because the short-term goals they sought were settled or rendered moot. Some positions are vacated because of retirement, illness, or death.

The turnover among men is greater than among women: 80 percent of the male activists in presently existing federations compared with 50 percent of the females; 56 percent of the men NO leaders but only 44 percent of the women. This disparity is explained in part by the career orientation of much of the male participation; consequently, men tend to come and go while women, who are more solely committed to the movement, often serve for long periods. Jane Benedict's tenure at Met Council is only one of several examples among women. No male leader equals this record. In the past male leaders have been especially likely to drop out of the tenant movement during waning periods when rewards of the kinds that had initially attracted them seemed less likely to accrue. This finding is congruent with, though the obverse of, the experiences of other movements that have been enlarged and institutionalized to the point where they offer highly rewarding careers. There, men have often stayed in leadership for long periods in spite of predominantly female memberships. For example, all the presidents of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union have been men.

When leadership turnover has occurred within the tenant move-

ment, women have been more likely to succeed to the positions vacated than they were to have held the positions in the first place. Since men have been especially likely to vacate positions during periods of movement decline, when these posts appeared less likely to provide avenues to political influence or to personal career advancement, men were not knocking on the doors wanting to come in and take over. Women, in contrast, were much less likely to exit at these times: they did not have sponsoring organizations to pull them out; their skills, which they had often learned within the movement, were frequently movement-specific; and they felt a high degree of commitment to the movement itself and to their fellow workers. Moreover, they were in the majority among the activists. Because they had worked so closely with the previous leader, they often knew most about his work. Leadership, therefore, passed naturally to some of the women found so commonly among the secondary ranks where they had, on the job so to speak, developed a fluency with the strategies in use.

This pattern parallels closely the racial transition among the leaders of the first three NOs to use tenant management and rehabilitation strategies in neighborhoods undergoing abandonment. As indicated above, these organizations were founded and led by well-educated white males from outside the neighborhoods who recruited indigenous blacks or Hispanics to subordinate positions. The latter might never have had the expectations of success to found, nor the skills to run, such organizations successfully. However, by the time that the founders moved on, taking advantage of career opportunities opening to them, such subordinates had developed sufficient skills and access to networks to take over.

The result of this male-to-female succession pattern was that women gradually moved up through the ranks in the movement structure, taking over the leadership positions from men. At the outset—in 1904, 1907, and again in 1917–20—they were organizers whose prominence was usurped by the men who formed the first NOs; by the 1920s they were leading NOs themselves; in 1942 a woman headed a federation for the first time; by the end of the 1970s they were as prominent at the federation level as the male volunteers, though still somewhat behind in the salaried, more technical, posts.

This whole process has accelerated since the growth of the modern women's movement, which has made it easier for women to enter male-dominated positions. Career motivation has been rising just at a time when paid positions within the movement have been opening up. Moreover, some of the women leaders are now bringing skills to the movement: of the thirteen women federation leaders and key activists seven, including a lawyer, two social workers, a labor organizer, and two administrators with considerable political experience, have externally gained skills. Moreover, the same seven, unlike all but one of the other

six, entered the movement through NOs rather than BOs. And nine of the thirteen hold salaried positions within the movement.

These are as yet a rather special group of women within the movement: such skills are rarer among activists in NOs. As noted earlier, women are more likely to lead NOs using traditional strategies. Nevertheless, these seven skilled women, the appointment of four women as leaders of the three key federations, the fact that women are competing more evenly with men in the job market within the movement, and the fact that a few of them have even gone out of the movement to promising careers outside are all evidence of considerable change.

These processes are also making their impact elsewhere, such as among community development groups at the national level. One example is National People's Action, led by Gale Cincotta from Chicago. Both the New York State Tenants' and Neighborhoods' Coalition and the Association of Neighborhood Housing Developers are in close contact with her group, taking part in its annual conference and demonstration in Washington each year.

Conclusion

We believe our analysis serves to show the importance of both social-emotional and functional roles for mobilization of people and strategic impact. The "social relations of reproduction," centering on the home and neighborhood and their accompanying role training, help lay the groundwork for successful mobilization at the grass roots. On the other hand, the "social relations of production," pivoting around careers and the workplace, provide the skills necessary for dealing with government and bureaucracies. We have argued that these roles have, in general, been divided according to gender, so that women have tended to be the organizers and followers and men the leaders of the tenant movement. Nevertheless, as we have demonstrated, over time, and especially recently, women have successfully learned the necessary skills and broken through the structural barriers to become leaders in their own right. One can only hope that men in turn will come to recognize the disabling features of their own socialization and the distorted values incorporated into the structures of most large, formal organizations and will come to value and, ultimately, to use the skills which women have brought to bear in organizing tenants at the grass-roots level.

*Urban Studies Department
Queens College (City University of New York) (Lawson)*

*Department of Urban and Regional Planning
University of California, Berkeley (Barton)*