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# DESTINED FOR EQUALITY

THE INEVITABLE RISE OF WOMEN'S STATUS

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*Excerpts ...*

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, AND LONDON, ENGLAND 1998

## WOMEN'S REJECTION OF SUBORDINATION

Once the conditions supporting gender inequality started to change, women (and men) began to face new choices. Circumstances beyond any individual's conscious control dictated the choices available to women and their probable outcomes. How women could or should live their lives became less well defined. If men have increasingly ceded more of women's aspirations and demands, women have increasingly aspired higher and demanded more. If structural changes generated new opportunities and reduced the obstructing interests, women still had to seize those opportunities and champion their interests. Real women and men had to take all the actions that created, preserved, challenged, and eroded gender inequality.

Women helped erode gender inequality through several levels of action, including passive responses to altered circumstances, active efforts as individuals, and collective action in social movements. As the economy and political orders developed, in an unobservable systemic process, gender inequality underwent a gradual structural disembedding from positional inequality. Women (like men) responded to a complex realignment of interests and relationships that were not reducible to a simple series of historical events. Reducing childrearing, taking unwanted jobs, and going to school were but a few of women's important adaptations to changing circumstances. Individual efforts at advancement by ambitious women rose above simple adaptation, quietly but continuously. Women sought to better themselves, to achieve new identities, to acquire new freedoms. Taken together,

these actions left a marked historical trace. Individually, they were part of people's biographies rather than public history, and their traces died with the people who experienced them. Feminist activity transcended the limits of individual actions, occurring in sporadic but conspicuous bursts. These movements were public historical events. They were able to influence changes in social structures and norms directly.

Only in the past 150 years have women organized against subordination. Both the woman suffrage movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the modern feminist movement attracted wide followings and captured public attention for a long time. These movements played a crucial role in the transformation of women's status and in the long-term process that disembedded gender status inequality from positional economic and political inequality.

Women's private and public rebellions fueled an uneasy public awareness that women's status was an issue. Since the 1830s, women's changing role and identity have been continuously debated in the news media and popular culture. Books and articles about women's place have been published with great regularity, including many early practical guides such as *Employments of Women: A Cyclopaedia of Woman's Work* (1863) and *Women Wealth-winners: Or, How Women Can Earn Money* (1893).<sup>1</sup> Many works that we no longer remember appeared beside those that are still renowned, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *Suffrage a Natural Right*. The concrete issues changed over time, but they usually centered on women's rights to jobs, equal treatment, self-expression, and political influence and on women's obligations to children, husbands, and society.

Similarly, although magazine articles about women's identity tended to advise women not to transgress the boundaries between women's and men's roles, even the most conservative tracts demonstrated a widespread concern about women's status. Works extolling women's role as guardian of domestic virtue were common in the nineteenth century. Conservative twentieth-century advice was more likely to stress women's contribution as childrearers, but the concern with role boundaries was unchanged.

Throughout these public debates, the key point was constant. Women had some freedom to choose how they lived their lives. In particular, they could acquiesce in the social constraints that had limited women's lives in the past, or they could rebel against them. People recognized, although few could clearly articulate the idea, that

women's responses to these choices in one generation had the potential to change the choices facing the next generation. Those who saw this possibility vied to promote, to impede, or to pilot these changes.

## THE INHERENT REBELLION

Before the modern period, women's resistance to the constraints upon their lives could not budge the social structures sustaining gender inequality. Only under modern conditions, starting in the early nineteenth century, did women's individual efforts to gain greater status become more effective. Then social power migrated from households into organizations, powerful men's interests and ordinary men's interests shifted, and women found new possibilities for improvement in their status.

The changing patterns of women's individual efforts to achieve greater freedom and status have less dramatic appeal than the suffrage movement or modern feminism. Yet they probably helped to reduce gender inequality at least as much as did organized rebellion. Women sought education, they took jobs, they had fewer children, they joined voluntary associations, they entered the political party system, they joined unions, they demanded a greater voice in family decisions, and they divorced husbands to escape bad marriages. All these actions, and others, challenged constraints on women's identity. Although these were individual actions, they had historical impact because they represented the shared interests and ideas produced by women's changing social circumstances.

To be sure, men and women still often found themselves responding to similar conditions. As spouses, siblings, and parents and children, women and men were bound together by sentiment. They lived in the same households, usually had the same class and ethnic identity, and shared the same fate. Divergent, crosscutting systems of social inequality and social identity—such as class, ethnicity, and religious affiliation—stratified these households. Women and men in the same family or social group often shared more assumptions with each other than with people of the same sex in other strata. Working together, being born into the same families, growing up and dying together, loving (and hating) each other in permanent intimate relationships, raising children together, always dependent on each other, women and men thought and acted similarly. Studies have long shown women and

men to have similar attitudes. Even today, some research suggests, working women identify their class position more with their husband's position in the work force than with their own.<sup>2</sup> While inequality and the cultural treatment of gender have stressed the differences between women and men, their attitudes, their ideas, and their agendas were strikingly similar. Women and men were more similar than different. These similarities ruled people's actions much of the time.

Yet gender inequality permeated peoples' lives, placing women and men in disparate social positions that affected their outlooks and their actions. What distinguished the actions of women from those of men were their circumstances, not their motives. Both women and men tried to fulfill their socially defined obligations and to advance their interests in a practical way. However, inequality gave women different opportunities and different resources from men, making women's actions in pursuit of their interests less effective than men's.

Although there have always been both women and men who resented the constraints of their gender roles, women's expressions of this resentment produced pressures against inequality and men's did not. Two reasons stand out. Women were more likely than men to act against the system of inequality because they suffered net disadvantages while men enjoyed net advantages. Moreover, their rebellious acts were much more likely to challenge the system of inequality.

The differing circumstances of women and men directly affected their interests and their roles in changing inequality. Women's personal resources were fewer than men's in their social stratum. Women had an inferior legal status, fewer political rights, and fewer economic resources. They also confronted cultural constraints on their behavior. This strategic disadvantage meant that most women had little opportunity to improve their circumstances individually through direct conflicts with men. To avoid the typical dependency on a husband, father, or other man, women had to endure the costs of marginal life choices, such as setting up independent households with meager income or joining a religious order. To achieve more, they had to await new opportunities or engage in collective action.

Selective mating commonly assured men's resource and status advantages in marriages. If mating had ignored other sources of status such as social background, wealth, race, and, to a lesser degree, income, then marriages would have created more variation in spouses' relative resources. Wealth, education, or family resources would have

given a minority of women leverage over less well-endowed husbands. This rarely occurred. Because most marriages took place between women and men within the same social stratum, all men had a resource advantage over their wives. Middle-class women may have fared better than both poor and more affluent women. A wealthy, prominent, or influential man usually commanded resources greatly exceeding those of his wife (even if she came from a high-status family, although such a background might sometimes mitigate the resource disparity). In poor, low-status families, where scarcity gave rule to need, any gender advantage could give men considerable power over their spouses. Such men gained advantage even though their resources seemed few compared to those of people in higher strata (although low-status men's gender advantage might have effectively disappeared, if their resources fell extremely low). Gender inequality varied in some ways by class, but women were uniformly disadvantaged.

Reflecting their contrasting circumstances, women and men had opposing relations to inequality's traditional distribution of restraints and opportunities. No matter what motives or understandings they had, men reinforced inequality by fulfilling their traditional role obligations and using the associated opportunities. No matter what motives or understandings they had, women challenged inequality by resisting unequal arrangements. Thus, when thoughtlessly pursuing normal role expectations, men's actions reinforced inequality while women's actions strained the system of inequality. These opposing stresses actively influenced inequality if, and only if, altered circumstances shifted the imbalance between them.

Throughout most days, a woman repeatedly has either to contest or to concede gender inequality. (So does a man, but the tensions are different.) The issues and alternatives have changed over time, but the pervasive implications of inequality have not. Does a young woman challenge a stereotyped comment on women she overhears her brother make to her mother (or her husband make to his buddy), or does she silently assent? If a man on the street or in some gathering makes a lewd comment on her appearance, does she smile, ignore him, frown, call him names, or kick him between his legs? If a friend bubbles over excitedly because she has found a man to make her life meaningful, does a woman make a toast to her friend's good luck or advise her to quit throwing her life away on men? Does she adopt her husband's name when she gets married? Does she accept or reject responsibility

for the kids' lunch? Much of life's ordinary activity assumes or occurs along the boundaries between male and female identities, always making these boundaries a potential object of contention.

Women's part in the give-and-take of normal female-male interactions commonly strained against inequality while men's part defended that inequality. As women and men negotiated responsibilities, joint decisions, and the shared definition of reality, they pushed and pulled against the normative definitions of their gender roles and their respective resources. Usually they did not think of these exchanges as conflicts over gender inequality. Rather, they saw them in personal terms. Yet except in extraordinary cases men held an advantaged position in these negotiations. As both women's and men's claims reflected their distinctive gender interests, they necessarily pushed in different directions.

On balance, women's preferences pushed toward greater gender equality while men's pushed away from it. This might not happen when people were mistaken about the effects a choice would cause, when they were indifferent to the particular effects, or when they were exposed to peculiar circumstances that made the expected effects of actions different for them than for most others (for example, because they were employers). However important such exceptions, inequality channeled women's interests and their resentments. Therefore, women usually contended for greater equality with men, even if they did not think of their conflicts in these terms.

Similarly, women were more likely than men to adopt a sustained strategy that challenged inequality. Men did experience resentment derived from inequality. Their resentment concerned either male responsibilities, such as those for holding jobs and providing income, or the norms that restricted men from "feminine" actions, such as the expectations that men would not care for children or express "weak" emotions. Resentment caused some men to reject the responsibilities or constraints of the male role; for example, they became criminals, dropouts, or sexual deviants. These men's violation of male role expectations did not, however, directly threaten other men's advantages. The men who rejected the typical male role also did not win any increment in status or resources to offset the social disapproval they provoked. Nothing occurred to motivate other men to follow their lead. Sometimes women rejected their gender-role responsibilities, such as rearing children or caring for a household, also without trying

to gain any position with greater status. Like men who cast off some aspects of the male role, these women's rebellion did not place pressure on gender inequality. In contrast, some women tried to enter positions usually reserved for men. These women did directly threaten male advantages. If successful, they did win some increased status and resources that served as a model for other women.

These observations stress ordinary women, but most women were ordinary in this sense. Women wielded little influence through positions of power, which men largely monopolized. The actions of powerful men had special importance, because such men exercised influence and had distinctive interests. Because very few women held positions with power, they had no comparable group. Women therefore did not influence change through decisions over institutional policies, because they did not control institutions.

Women's collective power was also less than men's. Men's gender interests received a collective defense without explicit organization toward that goal through men's economic and political links. Male-dominated government and business sustained policies favoring men. Women could achieve a countervailing collective power only if they either penetrated the institutions of power in significant numbers or created effective organizations to promote their interests. Because of women's fewer individual resources, they could successfully pursue these strategies only when changing circumstances gave them new opportunities.

Women and men had opposing experiences of the changing circumstances that led to reduced inequality. Not surprisingly, women more often welcomed and gratefully used new opportunities to engage in traditionally male activities while men more often resented and resisted an apparent erosion of their rights. Many women experienced increases in women's opportunities, available resources, and potential statuses as both practically and symbolically valuable. This positive experience prompted them to welcome and champion the changes. Some women, particularly those who could foresee no personal benefits from the changes, did sometimes feel threatened by these changes. Still, on balance, women reinforced changes that reduced inequality by using new opportunities, regardless of their motives, or understandings. In contrast, men repeatedly experienced women's efforts to improve themselves as threats to legitimate rights that men had earned, and responded with resentment and opposition. As their inter-



ests and resources shifted, men's resistance became both less energetic and less effective. Simultaneously, women's pursuit of new opportunities and struggle against their inferior status became more vigorous and more successful.

One response to changing conditions was women and men trying out aspects of the roles traditionally assigned to the other sex. People's experiments with crossing sex-role boundaries depended on structurally determined opportunities and on their perception of the risks and rewards. Inequality meant that women often experienced their chances to enter male roles as opportunities, but men were less likely to value their chances to enter female roles. Not surprisingly, more women were likely to try employment when jobs became available than men were likely to try childrearing. In contrast to women's long, slow movement into the economy, research has shown that men's participation in childrearing has begun to rise only in the past two decades and is still limited. While they can experience some facets of childrearing as an opportunity, people typically see much of it as a burden.

Neither women nor men willingly adopted the obligations of the other sex, no matter how much they tried to avail themselves of the other sex's opportunities. Despite men's collective dominance, men's individual responsibilities may have been even more inescapable than those of women, and this unavoidable responsibility may have significantly reinforced male resistance to change. Both women and men retained their traditional role obligations if they adopted some activities from the prescribed role of the other sex, but the perceived value of the changes differed. Women crossing the sex-role boundary to take a job were aiming at a status-enhancing activity and would commonly anticipate reducing their household labor somewhat, though not a commensurate amount. Working women still did more household work than their husbands.<sup>3</sup> For example, a middle-class woman taking a job might hire someone to take care of her children, to clean her house, and to cook her food. A working-class woman might pass some of these duties to a relative instead of hiring someone, but the effects were similar. Analysts have noted that this household burden both reflected and sustained women's lower status.

Men crossing the sex-role boundary to assume household tasks were taking on a low-status activity and would usually expect no reduction in their job responsibilities. Theorists have largely ignored

the inflexibility of men's traditional role responsibilities. A man taking household responsibilities could not get someone else, other than his wife, to provide income for his family. Women's lower income, the rigidity of employment alternatives, and cultural expectation left most men with no reasonable strategy for lowering their economic activity if they increased their household involvement. Because women's role activities held less prestige than men's, men were not falling over each other trying to adopt women's household activities anyway. As men were also unable to shed their traditional responsibilities, those who did experimentally adopt female role activities besides their male role activities were unlikely to provide an attractive example for other men to emulate. The uninspiring images of men who rejected traditional roles contrasted strongly with the positive models provided by many women who experimentally tried male role activities.

Sometimes women and men rejected traditional gender roles by defying or withdrawing from conventional society rather than challenging it. Most of men's rejections of the masculine role and many of women's rejections took this form. Sometimes this produced a deviant subculture, such as outlaw men, who rejected the responsibility of steady employment. Sometimes it reinforced a deviant stereotype. Still, individual rejections of gender-role definitions that did not involve a status improvement were unlikely to have a lasting effect because they did not inspire imitation.

Women have always resisted and challenged sex inequality through individual actions. While sex inequality was securely embedded in the structures of economic and political positional inequality, these efforts had no cumulative effect. Women's resistance to inequality may have prevented it from getting worse but could not make it better. Women could not pursue new individual strategies that altered the conditions under which future women made choices or that set examples attracting others to follow.

As modern economic and political organization became increasingly individualistic, women's rebellious individual actions became important. Through them, women took advantage of new opportunities and forced men to adapt to their altered circumstances. As the resources and rules governing the endless contests between women and men changed, so did the outcomes. Unlike in the past, the rebellious pioneers found their successes did alter the situation for those that followed. The pioneers served as examples. Their presence in new

roles (for example, the women working in a firm) also altered the situation and enhanced the opportunities for those who followed. Resistance could finally have a cumulative effect.

As the constraints on women's roles eroded, new, sometimes substantial choices became active. A woman had to decide how much education she should try to get. How hard should she compete with males in school? Should she seek a job? If so, what kind of job? What kinds of organizations should she join? What goals should she pursue in her life? These choices involved costs and demanded sacrifices, which could be severe. The opportunities that did exist were often available only to some women. Nonetheless, even small and costly opportunities gave women new chances to rebel against their constraints.

The aggregate actions of women rebelling against their circumstances had significant effects on gender inequality, even when their individual actions seemed insignificant when considered alone. Once the number of women who did choose to try new opportunities crossed some threshold, the circumstances constraining all women were altered. For example, the first women hired stood out as oddities or tokens. As their numbers in some jobs grew, they came to be regarded as ordinary. They also gained the potential for collective action.

The major prospect for a lasting effect of individual actions was changing the actions of other individuals. When women's individual rebellious actions succeeded and secured them higher status, greater resources, or more freedom, they set a new standard and they often inspired other women to imitate. When the number of women whose activities had changed grew large enough, the aggregate impact changed even the conditions that affected action.

While personal ambitions motivated most women pursuing goals such as improved education, employment, and political activity, their actions' cumulative impact surpassed any individual intentions. As more women engaged in an activity, adopted a role, or entered an organization, their presence created a different environment for all concerned. Perceptions, expectations, arrangements, and interests were adjusted and readjusted. Male politicians, employers, administrators, educators, students, co-workers, fathers, and husbands all had to adapt. The next wave of women faced new choices, influenced by what they now saw as women's alternatives and the reactions of men

and institutions. On occasions when women's rights became an explicit public issue, the divisions between women's interests and men's interests became more evident to all.

## ORGANIZED REBELLION

Women's organized rebellion against their inferior status complemented their continuous individual resistance to inequality. Through individual resistance, women created a constant pressure toward equality. This pressure assured the erosion of inequality as conditions changed. In comparison to this individual resistance, organized resistance created a more concentrated pressure for increasing equality, but only under special conditions.

Mainly, organized rebellion occurred when women's capacity and will to resist outpaced the improvements in women's status. While women's movements have spent much effort opposing economic and political institutions, these movements largely grew out of and reinforced integral, long-term structural developments driven by these institutions. The impetus of structural change in the economy and the political order coincided with the impetus of women's movements seeking women's equality through assimilation.

Women first organized effectively to improve their social status in the nineteenth-century United States and other Western nations. Efforts to organize rebellion against gender inequality went through several distinct phases. At first, pioneer American critics of women's low status (like those in other countries) objected most loudly to laws restricting middle-class women's economic activity. As the government gave women greater property rights, female activists shifted focus and agitated for the vote. When the government granted women suffrage, the movement lost its spark and stalled during the 1920s. Modern feminists protesting anew about women's experience and status began a new movement in the 1960s.

For simplicity, the term *feminist* refers loosely to all the ideas and actions devoted to improving women's status. Extending the term to cover all collective rebellions against women's lower status is imprecise. Still, this loose terminology usually produces less theoretical confusion than imposing arbitrary distinctions to refine the term's definition. Admittedly, feminism as a self-conscious ideology did not emerge until sometime in the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Earlier women's rights and

suffrage ideology did not clearly attribute all gender inequality to social processes (rather than to biological or divine origins), nor did it reject all gender inequality as unjust. Still, the break with the past by nineteenth-century women's movements was much greater than the differences between their ideas and those of modern feminism. The nineteenth-century efforts to improve women's rights were self-conscious, collective rebellions against women's inferior status, accompanied by attempts to understand and interpret that status. For these reasons, we can use the term *feminist* inclusively rather than restrictively.

The women who fought for suffrage and the modern feminists who have struggled to give women full equality have thought differently, lived differently, and had different circumstances from the women who lived before them. Most important, the changes in their economic and political surroundings gave them better opportunities and resources while diminishing men's interests in opposing their advancement. As women used these opportunities, their changing social position allowed them to see their circumstances differently. As the resulting feminist insights combined with women's altered circumstances, women organized themselves to change those circumstances even further. Organization and collective action then allowed feminists to develop their insights even more.

Through feminist organization and ideology, women shaped their own collective future. Yet, like architects constrained by a developer's goals, building codes, and physical laws, women's movements operated within a highly constrained environment. Changing circumstances produced feminism and defined its potential. After long struggles, the state and other institutions—such as businesses, schools, and churches—repeatedly conceded feminist demands. However, these same institutions also rejected many feminist demands. Moreover, they repeatedly adopted policies that benefited women without any feminist agitation. Feminist movements had considerable room to act effectively when they sought goals consistent with the direction of general economic and political development. They had very little chance to achieve goals inconsistent with structural trends.

Several conditions foster social movements dedicated to change, according to the extensive literature on this subject. First, the more that people experience both shared dissatisfactions and hopes, the more motivation they have to act collectively. Second, the more individual

freedom and resources that people in a group possess, the more able they are to join a movement. Third, the more that a group's circumstances ease organization, the more likely it is that pioneering experiments with collective rebellion will accumulate, grow, and stabilize. Fourth, the more that a movement's aims can be accommodated without threatening the interests of those in power, the more likely it is to succeed.<sup>5</sup>

These conditions suggest several questions that can help us to explain the woman suffrage movement or modern feminism's rise in the 1960s. In each case, did more women than in previous times acutely feel dissatisfactions and, perhaps, more sharply perceive alternatives?<sup>6</sup> Did more women possess the freedom and resources that allowed them to voice their feelings and act to further their interests in these two periods? Were more women in circumstances that gave them both the knowledge and the means to create organizations?<sup>7</sup> Most important, why had such changes occurred?

The woman suffrage movement was a revolutionary break in the history of women. It lasted throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth. For the first time, women created and sustained an organized movement dedicated to improving the status of women. While women eventually got the vote, this movement's own history embodied its greatest achievements: its emergence, its growth, its public recognition, and its perseverance.

Through the nineteenth century, middle-class women gradually achieved a circumscribed liberty. An ever-growing proportion of these women had some experience of early independence from families through education or employment or both.' Although even a high school degree was still uncommon by 1900, those who attended schools often experienced autonomy from families coupled with competitive strivings for excellence. These experiences contrasted sharply with their traditional prospects of domestic dependence and social inferiority. A small but notable and growing number attended college.<sup>9</sup> Many young women, even in the middle classes, held jobs for a while before marriage (and much longer if they did not marry).

Marriage curtailed this youthful independence, but married women were also gaining greater independence. Middle-class families gradually reduced married women's domestic labor obligations by buying more of the goods they used in their homes while still hiring servants. (According to the rough figures of the census, the proportion of adult

women employed as servants began to decline significantly only between 1910 and 1920; the absolute number of women employed as servants began to decline significantly only after 1940.)<sup>10</sup> Because their husbands now worked in businesses located away from their homes, wives spent a significant proportion of their time outside their husbands' observation. The separation between economic production and the household has often been invoked as a process that isolated women in the home. It did, but another side of this separation was women's increased freedom from men's supervision. In combination with declining domestic labor responsibilities, this increasingly separated life gave some middle-class women time and space in which they could nurture an incipient independence.

As women became freer from both domestic labor responsibilities and husbands' oversight, they participated more in pursuits outside their homes. Varied arenas and activities drew women, especially middle-class women, outside their homes. Many poor and immigrant women continued to hold poorly paying jobs as before.<sup>11</sup> Many women met in the quieter pursuit of culture and entertainment associated with the explosion of women's clubs.<sup>12</sup> Membership in women's clubs had become commonplace by the beginning of the twentieth century. Significant numbers of restless, educated middle-class women also joined various reform organizations, the largest of which was the Women's Christian Temperance Union.<sup>13</sup> The *History of Woman Suffrage* volume published in 1902 listed more than 100 national associations of women, such as The National Council of Women, The General Federation of Women's Clubs, The National Association of Colored Women, The Women's Relief Corps, The International Board of Women's and Young Women's Christian Associations, and the Supreme Hive Ladies of the Maccabees of the World.<sup>14</sup> These groups claimed up to a million members and pursued a wide range of goals, including politics, charity, recreation, moral uplift, and religion.

In this general expansion of women's realms of activity, the suffrage movement stood out as the pinnacle. Even as many disparaged them, the suffrage activists became heroines and objects of awe to both women and men. Ridicule and respect came side by side. The suffrage activists' knowledge, determination, and hard work won them grudging admiration from all sorts. Politicians, in particular, discovered that the suffrage activists were among the most politically knowledgeable people with whom they had to contend and that suffrage organization often rivaled that of political parties.

Circumstances, not ideology, focused women's collective rebellion on the goal of suffrage.<sup>15</sup> When a few advanced women made the first organized demand for women's rights at the Seneca Falls convention in 1848, the right to vote was one of a handful of demands. The others emphasized education and various legal rights centered on ending women's legal subservience to their husbands. Two circumstances gradually centered the attention of women's organized rebellion on the vote. First, the state extended suffrage to white working-class men in the 1830s and to black men after the Civil War. Second, women experienced many, though gradual, concessions of the other rights, but suffrage was particularly unyielding. In part, the difficulty in getting the vote reflected a limitation in the structure of the law: women could obtain suffrage only through a constitutional change—at the state or federal level. This was difficult to achieve. In part, the resistance to giving women the vote probably represented the symbolic and practical association of the vote with power. The early extension of the vote to women in some western territories and eastern localities showed that the goal was feasible. These conditions combined to focus women's organized rebellion on the suffrage issue.

While middle-class women had enough independence to organize in favor of suffrage, they were not ready to agitate for economic advantages. Few of these women had the prospect of independence through careers. Jobs both available and acceptable to middle-class women were scarce. The number of women holding middle-class jobs was still far too small to form the basis of active organization against employment discrimination. Probably most married women actively campaigning for suffrage had gained their husbands' support (even if unenthusiastic) for the vote, but husbands would have been much more resistant to a campaign for women's careers. It was one thing for a man's wife to go to an occasional meeting in support of suffrage; it was quite another for her to take a job. Moreover, most middle-class women probably also did not find the possibility of permanent employment inviting enough to adopt a strategy of protest aimed at securing careers. Most of these women were already committed to a domestic life and had no visible prospects of a career. For them, holding a job was more likely to seem a burden than an opportunity.

How, then, did the circumstances of middle-class women fit the conditions needed for a social movement to obtain suffrage? The dissatisfactions and hope that motivated women's participation came from the increased liberty they experienced, their greater temporal



independence from men (constrained by an unchanged economic dependence), the awareness of public life produced by education and associational activity, and a sense of injustice increased by the extension of suffrage first to working-class white men and then to black men. The freedom needed to organize came from the reduction in domestic responsibilities joined with men's absence during their hours of employment. Women's widespread voluntary associations and the absence of any violent suppression also eased the organization of suffrage groups.

Thus, gradual changes due to structural developments and to the cumulative impact of dispersed women's private actions produced precisely the conditions known to stimulate social-movement activity. Changes in economic and political organization gave women more liberty and reduced ordinary men's relative resource advantage. Women who used, and helped create, their new opportunities produced the educated elite with organizational ties and skills who inspired and led the suffrage movement.

The suffrage movement revealed the growing rift separating women's stagnated political rights from their otherwise improved social status. The suffrage movement was thus a product of women's uneven progress toward greater equality, an outgrowth of the transformation toward a modern economic and political order.

The suffrage movement itself, not the vote for women that it sought, was the key historical process through which women successfully entered the political realm in the United States. The vote for women initially reduced women's collective political voice, because the suffrage movement was a more potent political force than the disorganized impact of women's votes. The suffrage movement brought women into politicians' offices and into legislative chambers. It forced politicians into long negotiations with women representing the suffrage organizations. It made women's status a central political issue for many years. For decades, it repeatedly placed women's status on the front pages of newspapers. Through the suffrage movement, women achieved an active political presence.

Although suffrage failed to induce any dramatic improvement in women's political position, woman suffrage was an extremely important change in the organization of gender inequality. After the national suffrage amendment was ratified, women did not turn out to vote in large numbers, women who did use the ballot did not vote signifi-

cantly differently from the men in their social milieu, and women did not move into political office in significant numbers. Yet the social changes that resulted in a few years or even a few decades should not measure the effectiveness of woman suffrage. A century is a more appropriate time span. Fundamental changes in social organization, such as removing gender inequality, can happen only over long periods, despite our hopes, desires, and expectations for faster remedies. We already know that women's vote has had significant influence. In contemporary politics, every elected official has to consider how women and men vote differently. After women gained the vote, political actors (including the state apparatus) did become increasingly responsive to women's political impact. It has taken time for the promise of woman suffrage to be fulfilled, because political processes are not simple reflections of the most obvious political rules and laws. Winning the vote was not so much a culminating event as the beginning of a new process. Suffrage was the breakthrough that opened the gates to women's political assimilation.

The history of women's suffrage suggests that women's agitation for the vote was neither an independent, exclusive cause of suffrage nor an unimportant sideshow. Over time, some industrial nations developed strong woman suffrage movements, some produced weak movements, some produced almost no organization for woman suffrage. Ultimately, all granted suffrage to women.<sup>16</sup> If woman suffrage emerged in countries without agitation by a women's movement, some other social conditions or processes must have been crucial. The experience of achieving woman suffrage at the state level in the United States showed that timing of adoption was poorly related to the degree of organization. This experience was replicated internationally, as countries that granted woman suffrage early often had low levels of organization among women. Examples include Finland, Norway, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Ireland.<sup>17</sup> These comparisons show that a woman suffrage movement was not a universally necessary condition to the extension of the vote to women. They also show that suffrage organization was not a simple determinant of the timing of woman suffrage. It did not consistently give women the vote earlier in countries or states with higher levels of organization. Rather, the woman suffrage movement in the United States (and other countries) was an integral part of a larger process that changed the status of women.

While the structural changes in economic and political organization progressively undermined the supports for gender inequality, they did not directly determine *how* the decline in gender inequality would come about. Differences among the states showed this clearly. Some American states granted women suffrage before women organized or agitated. Others gave in to the demand after a long struggle. Still others gave women the vote only because the national constitutional amendment forced them to do so. In this social and historical context, the American woman suffrage movement was a necessary and essential part of the process that brought women the vote. The movement was not the exclusive, fundamental cause of woman suffrage. The structural and organizational transformation created the potential for equalizing women's political status. Nonetheless, the movement was the crucial historical "agent" that did the most to realize this potential for raising women's status through the vote.

The disembedding of gender inequality from economic and political inequality did not involve or produce a moral commitment to raising women's status. Ordinary men's resistance to women's efforts declined over time because their resources and interests altered. Men with power also responded to changing personal and organizational interests that sometimes caused them to introduce policies that benefited women and further eroded gender inequality. Neither ordinary nor powerful men's interests became associated with a general goal of raising women's status, and neither group was infected with a moral commitment to end inequality.

Some aspects of gender inequality evaded the effects of gradually changing conditions. Women's exclusion from power and their responsibility for children were the most important. Economic and political development did not produce male or organizational interests that were inconsistent with the persistence of these limitations on women. Men's pursuit of new opportunities for profit and power did not produce policies that contested these facets of gender inequality. Instead, men's ordinary individual efforts to fulfill their responsibilities and succeed continued to sustain women's exclusion from high-status posts (and their responsibility for children). This happened even when men were not directly concerned with women's relative status.

Yet men had no compelling interest in keeping the vote from women. By this, I do not mean that men felt simply indifferent. Many politicians feared the unpredictable risks inherent in a dramatic expan-

sion of the electorate. Many ordinary men were suspicious of the symbolic rise in women's status. These anxieties did not represent any substantial interests, however, so they induced only a passive resistance. Men's passive resistance was long effective, because women could gain the vote only through male actions. Some men, usually politicians, first had to support a proposition to give women the vote. Other men had to ratify this proposition. For state constitutional changes, this usually meant the male electorate. For the national constitutional amendment, this meant the men in state legislatures.

Initially, men could block woman suffrage by doing nothing. Whenever sufficient support had made woman suffrage an issue, men could block it by simply voting no. Woman suffrage lagged behind other legal and social changes that benefited women because such mild, passive male resistance to change was so effective.

In these circumstances, women's collective efforts to gain the vote seem much less difficult to explain than would have been an absence of such efforts. Middle-class women were receiving greater status, liberty, and resources while being denied a major component of citizenship that the state awarded to men of a lower class. They could not hope to gain the vote through individual action. They had the resources they needed to act collectively. The opposition they faced was largely passive, even if sometimes hateful and oppressive. These circumstances included all the materials that typically produce a social movement. The opportunities for a movement to begin were greater than in many other countries. The decentralization of American government meant that each state (and many municipalities) offered separate platforms on which to launch a suffrage campaign. A women's movement for suffrage would have become unlikely only if suppressed by some highly influential historical conditions, such as a prolonged depression or some other enduring social tension.

The modern feminist movement that arose during the 1960s was the second major episode of women's collective rebellion against inequality. While its history is very different from that of the suffrage movement, its causes and consequences reveal many parallels."

The stage for modern feminism was set by a combination of long-term and short-term changes in social life that widened the gap between women's expectations and experience. This gap magnified the dissatisfactions of women in varied walks of life. The same changes in society that caused more women to be acutely dissatisfied also gave

more women the freedom to rebel and the capacity to organize. A rapidly growing group of women earned college degrees in the twentieth century. They then found the promises of their learning achievements denied by the closed doors of professions and business. A growing group of women nonetheless sought, owing to extraordinary commitment or circumstances, to fulfill those promises by pushing their way into business and professional occupations. They found their limited successes hard fought and their progress blocked, leaving them frustrated and angry. Many middle-class women increasingly found themselves victims of the failed social experiment of the suburbs that, after World War II, promised an idyllic domestic life. For many educated, often ambitious, women, this suburban domesticity all too soon proved to be more a breeding ground for malaise. Simultaneously, ideological norms of meritocracy and equal opportunity had progressively eclipsed the formerly blinding effects of ideological justifications that described sexual inequality as necessary and beneficial. And the dramatic, widespread civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s gave numerous young women (many the children of suburban mothers) a profound confrontation with sustained male domination all too clearly contradicting the essential premises motivating the movements.

Thus, by the 1960s the development of major social institutions had placed ever larger numbers of women in circumstances in which seemingly legitimate expectations were thwarted. Greater education, higher female employment, a stronger meritocratic ideology, and liberal social movements gave high aspirations to more women than ever before. These aspirations were then dashed against the rocks of employment discrimination and social prejudice. Discontent is endemic to the human condition, and the universal subordination of women has everywhere exacerbated that discontent. During the century ending in the 1960s, however, social circumstances forced progressively more women to suffer a severe disparity between expectations and experience, a disparity that was increasingly difficult to disguise or justify, a disparity, moreover, that appeared straightforwardly susceptible to remedy.

Most accounts agree that the women's movement in the United States grew along two lines. Both were composed largely of college-educated women from affluent circumstances.<sup>19</sup> The branch exemplified by the National Organization for Women drew employed pro-

fessional and business women seeking to use political organization to eliminate sexual discrimination and further their collective interests. Women frustrated with the experience of women in the civil rights, antiwar, and student power movements started the branch better known as the Women's Liberation Movement. It blossomed about universities, drawing its membership from current and past students. The new feminism grew mostly among educated women who had grown up in affluent families. The affluent beginnings gave these women the aspirations and resources to pursue higher education and careers.

Following these goals, many women had become enmeshed either in the culture of urban professionals and business people or in a college culture (most commonly a prestigious university). By the mid-1960s more than 2 million women were attending college. Of the more than 25 million women in the labor force, more than 4 million held positions classified as white-collar professionals, technicians, managers, proprietors, and the like.<sup>20</sup> The growing number of women in these special cultural settings had freedom to voice their dissatisfactions with women's lot. Some were independent of men. Others found that the men on whom they depended were unwilling or unable to restrain their rebellions against restrictions based on their sex.

Affluent college students living away from their parents' homes had largely escaped both parental supervision and economic responsibility. Fathers had lost their control, and husbands were still in the future. Moreover, the intellectual life of the university, however flawed in reality, gave students the freedom to think beyond the confines of their upbringing, a freedom temporarily magnified by the social movements that captured the imagination of activist students in the 1960s.

Women employed in professional or managerial positions possessed significant status and income even if discrimination denied them the responsibilities and rewards that men achieved for equivalent education and performance. These employed women's resources restricted the ability of men to exercise control over their private lives. Also, as a result of the mutual selection process governing the choice of marital partners, such women probably married men who were more likely to sympathize with their wives' status frustrations.

An ever-increasing number of women had the freedom to express their dissatisfactions, because the prestigious universities accepted more female students and the professional and managerial strata em-

ployed more women. These women had less fear of restriction by men (or women) on whom they were seriously dependent. This freedom was relative, not absolute, of course. Not all women in college or white-collar jobs had this freedom. Many who did have it may have lacked the ability to recognize or use their freedom. Granting these limitations, the trends were unmistakable. Ever more women exposed to strong, legitimate dissatisfactions due to sexual discrimination were in circumstances that allowed them to express their frustrations and share their plight with their peers.

From similar circumstances, more women than before possessed the knowledge and capacity to organize themselves. Again the key was participation in settings separated from their households. Colleges tied together students. Facilities were readily available for organizations. The civil rights, antiwar, and student power movements also brought students together under movement banners. These students also received special training in organization. Professional and business women met each other through their occupations. They also participated in occupationally related associations. Their shared experience of discrimination made it easy for them to discover their common interests.

Women in these social worlds possessed greater knowledge about organizing, and their institutional relationships lessened the difficulty of organizing. Thus, as gender inequality disembedded from economic and political inequality, women participated more in universities, professional and business occupations, and social movements. These experiences allowed women to escape the confines of domesticity. Within these contexts, women gained the opportunities and skills to organize a sustained, collective response to their shared dissatisfactions.

Modern feminism, like many social movements that aim to improve the circumstances of a disadvantaged group, arose in response to institutional changes that had bettered women's position in society. Increasing numbers of women from affluent families were going to college and seeking careers, meritocratic norms had become dominant in ideology, and contemporary social movements placed women in ever more conflictive circumstances. These changes yielded progressively more women with acutely frustrated ambitions, personal independence, and the capacity to organize. Accumulated long-term changes in society had been progressively raising the potential for a feminist movement for decades. The higher that potential, the more

likely that historical events could trigger collective action and organization. By the mid-1960s the potential for a feminist movement had become so high that avoiding its emergence probably would have been more difficult than inducing it.

In the face of this potential, the 1960s produced conditions and events that seem, in hindsight, ideal for igniting the feminist movement. As an offshoot of civil rights legislation, the federal government passed measures that opposed discrimination against women. Social movements for blacks' civil rights and against the Vietnam War provided a political, ideological, and organizational training ground for feminists. These historical conditions were effective catalysts, igniting the latent potential for a social movement produced by women's changing circumstances.

To understand the impact of modern feminism, we must return to the issue of uneven change. Long-term structural changes and individual women's efforts to better themselves largely account for the circumstances in which the modern feminist movement arose. The path of these gradual processes led to women's assimilation in lower-status positions. Women's movement into higher-status positions was far more problematic. Neither organizational interests nor the personal interests of powerful men prompted anyone to bring women into high-status positions. No obvious advantages accrued to men who promoted women or sponsored their careers. Instead, women were riskier choices for organizations and powerful men, because they were less likely to succeed than were men who had similar credentials. Men controlling policies and promotions were concerned with their personal interests, the interests of their network, and the interests of their organization. Moral uplift and altruism had no role.

In these circumstances, organizations did little to initiate policies bringing women into high-status positions, and, as individuals, aspiring women could rarely overcome these obstacles. Without any interests at stake, organizations had no incentive to promote women upward. Without affirmative organizational policies favoring their advancement, women had no path that led into high-status realms.

Yet organizations and powerful men lacked a strong interest in excluding women. While prejudice against women was commonplace among powerful men, few organizations exhibited a high commitment to preventing women's entry. The key to women's effective exclusion from high-status positions was not the effort expended to keep women



out. On the contrary, most organizations sustained women's exclusion with little effort and low costs. When affirmative action policies and judicial decisions raised the stakes, few organizations risked anything to resist women's entry into high-status positions.

Nonetheless, the barriers against women were almost insurmountable through individual effort. To advance into high-status positions, people usually pass through a chain of entry points and promotions. They must go through a series of educational institutions, join some organization such as a firm or a political party or profession at an entry-level position, and then rise through some hierarchy of statuses and positions. However able and ambitious an individual is, she or he depends on the goodwill, cooperation, and support of others for success. This dependence occurs at every level in this process and affects advancement to every new level. To prevent women from rising individually, organizations and powerful men normally had only to withhold that support. No one needed to exert a dynamic effort.

Wherever these low-effort exclusionary practices were absent, women did advance. For example, this sometimes occurred in businesses and organizations where all-female sections gave women the chance to rise into supervisory positions; it also happened sometimes in professions in which promotion limitations or a female clientele avoided the development of male strongholds. Women were also elected or appointed to a few political posts. Usually such achievements meant both that men were not overly interested in the position and that it was "assigned" to a woman as a reward for women's political party work.

Curiously, the selection processes and ideology used to choose which men would advance to high-status positions were flagrantly contradictory to women's exclusion. Organizations increasingly stressed that merit should decide promotions, even if those making decisions preferred to follow their whims and fancies. Merit implied that criteria such as education, knowledge, skills, dependability, and performance history should decide who gets ahead. Although organizations could and did apply these criteria discriminatorily, deference to these criteria ideologically controverted that discrimination.

In contrast to the impression often conveyed in the popular press, the main goals of the modern feminist movement coincided with the trends of institutional development. Those defending the barriers to women's advancement into high-status positions, not the feminists,

were the ones opposing the momentum of history and the logic of organizational development. Feminists sought assimilation into high-status economic and political positions and a general end to discrimination and unequal treatment based on sex. These goals were entirely consistent with organizational rationality, economic optimization, egalitarian representative government, and meritocratic ideology. The compatibility between modern feminist goals and the logic of institutional development has largely created the opportunity for feminist successes. It has also defined the limits to those successes.

Those defending women's exclusion were butting heads against destiny. Realistically, they were not even defending the status quo. The present was not a static entity that could be preserved. It was a system in movement. Instead, their implicit goal was to reverse some essential consequences of organizational, economic, and political development while retaining the rest. This was a romantically implausible quest.

Women's position in society has improved in many ways since the rise of modern feminism. More women are employed, including those with young children. Most important, more employed women hold high-status professional and managerial jobs. More women are seeking and achieving advanced educational degrees. More women hold political office. Fewer women willingly accept subordination to men. Women have more legal rights, particularly for abortion, divorce, financial credit, and protection against sex discrimination.

Inevitably, men instituted most of the changes in social policy that have improved the collective status and opportunities of women. This was unavoidable because men have held most positions of social power. Male legislators, judges, employers, and educators have enacted most policy changes in government and business that benefited women. The issue, however, is not who enacted the changes, but why they did so. Men, as a group, did not have an interest in reducing sex inequality, few men conceived greater sex equality as a valuable goal, and the goal of enhancing women's status rarely motivated the male actions that did benefit women. The gap between men's motives and the effects of their actions pinpoints an analytical issue. It suggests that we need to show how circumstances induced men to adopt policies conducive to increased gender inequality.

Men were the gatekeepers. Why did the men controlling the gates to high-status positions open them to women? Two hypothetical scenarios that might account for the policy trends seem so inconsistent

with the historical evidence that we can discount them. Powerful men could have conceded these policy changes because a dominant women's movement compelled them to act against their own strong interests. Or, powerful men could have enacted these changes because an ideological epiphany converted them into true believers in the justice of feminist claims. Neither of these alternatives seems plausible.

While trying to influence changes in the position of women, the modern American women's movement acquired neither integrated, disciplined organization nor irresistible political power. Since its origins, the women's movement has been fragmented, and the factions could not agree enough on goals and methods to join in one association. Groups who voiced the least controversial goals and committed themselves to the least controversial methods have obtained the greatest organizational success, like the National Organization for Women. While appearing well regulated and enduring, however, even these groups lacked a disciplined membership and were unable to rule their members' actions predictably by collective policy decisions. Therefore, strategy could not extend beyond policies sure to gain voluntary compliance of the membership.<sup>21</sup>

The women's movement also failed to achieve much legitimate political power by winning political offices for its members. Nor did it effectively threaten the power of male-dominated government. It did not accumulate the capacity to control elections, to deter the normal progress of political and economic institutions, or to mount a civil insurrection.

Women's vote was the feminist movement's greatest hope for political influence, but this strategy has also fallen short. Women's voting behavior remained too erratic. For women to gain a gender-based influence over the political process through the vote, women's and men's voting preferences have to reflect the difference in their gender interests. Also, the issues revealing these differences have to become prominent. The distribution of attitudes about public issues does differ by sex, but the differences are commonly less dramatic than the similarities. Also, gender-relevant issues commonly get diminished by other issues during elections.

Politicians *have* become highly aware of women's potential political clout and the possibility of gender differences in attitudes about some issues. A concern with the consequences of alienating women voters (or the hope of wooing them) has become more explicit and important

to the political process. The gender gap in voting has increased in recent years and may become a significant force in the future. It was not that large during the decades associated with modern feminism's influence, however.

Without effective political power, the women's movement was repeatedly a supplicant before men's institutional dominance. Instead of coercion, it relied on moral courage, moral suasion, and the clever manipulation of legal and political conditions. It tried to gain by finesse what it could not win by power. Yet, sympathy with the arguments of feminism also seems rarely to have motivated the men who enacted policy changes benefiting women. Although many politicians and many businessmen ultimately adopted public positions supporting women's assimilation, true advocates of feminist causes seem to have been rare in these circles. During the period when any particular policy was being contested—whether it was a very local issue such as women's bathrooms in a manufacturing plant or national issues such as laws governing loan practices—men responsible for policy decisions were generally resistant to feminist demands. The moral arguments justifying women's demands for equality had been widely known for many years before the modern feminist movement emerged. If the justice of women's resentments had swayed men in power, the feminist movement would never have arisen, grown, and lasted as it did. Of course, those running businesses, government, and other organizations are primarily practical, not moral, actors.

Why and how, then, did many policies change in the direction sought by feminists? The key was that no significant interests of organizations and powerful men conflicted with these goals. By the 1960s, gender inequality was sufficiently disembedded from political and economic inequality that organizations had little interest in defending it. Organizations had not gained interests that propelled them to oppose gender discrimination as a general policy or to recruit more than a few women into high-status positions. However, the changes had effectively diminished these actors' interests in preventing women's entry or sustaining discrimination. Many, probably most, men with organizational power harbored personal prejudices against women. When organizational interests were neutral, powerful men could satisfy those prejudices through continued discrimination. Such actions became problematic when they conflicted with organizational interests.

The feminist movement could achieve some of its major goals because limited changes in costs and risks were enough to alter an organization's balance of interests. When organizational interests shifted, so did the interests of the men who got their power from those organizations. The barriers against women's progress into high-status positions by individual endeavors had been effective because they did not cost much, required little effort, and held no risks. Most of the time, men really did not have to keep women out. They simply had to withhold the support women would need to gain access.

Collective action by women suddenly introduced new costs and risks. Feminist organization was erratic and fragmented, but it was also spirited and widespread. Suddenly such risks as electoral reprisals, social unrest, work stoppages, or lawsuits entered the calculations of policymakers. For many issues, women's collective actions nearly reversed the risks and options facing men running organizations. Before, these men could foresee almost no likelihood of gain by introducing policies to give women equal access to high-status positions and equal treatment generally. Yet they could easily imagine many risks and costs if things went wrong. After women began a wide range of collective actions, the policymakers saw their expectations undergo a sharp shift. Refusing to give women equal treatment risked varied costs. Because no significant, equivalent organized opposition to gender equality existed, granting *reasonable* feminist goals held lower risks.

How balanced were the organizational interests favoring and opposing egalitarian practices before modern feminist agitation began? We can assess this only indirectly. Let us recall here that institutions began to assert some more egalitarian policies benefiting women in the decades before modern feminism emerged. The equal pay acts and the inclusion of women in the Civil Rights Act were examples in the political realm. Employment statistics show that women had gained somewhat better access to high-status positions by the mid-1960s, although progress was slow. Similarly, young women were catching up with men in higher education. These observations show that men in power were already adopting more egalitarian measures when circumstances particularly supported this strategy, even when they faced no risks as a result of women's collective action.

After the modern feminist movement began to agitate for changes, the fate of each egalitarian goal seemed to depend most on how much

active opposition it provoked. Men in positions of power found it increasingly practical to adopt policies that favored the status and opportunities of women. The emerging institutional structure of society made the continued domestication of women more costly and difficult to defend ideologically. Yet some issues—such as women's status in the military, abortion rights, and preferential hiring treatment—aroused strong opposition. Significant opposition on any issue, whether based on interests or on ideology, generally stymied feminist efforts. Because feminist organization was weak, even moderate opposition could be enough to stymie a feminist goal.

Government responses to modern feminist agitation suggest that feminist efforts to affect national legislation succeeded only when they defined the issues narrowly, minimizing potential effects on gender roles.<sup>22</sup> Feminists did influence legislation, such as laws that provided women equal access to credit, required schools receiving federal funds to give equivalent support to girls' athletics, and required disability plans to cover pregnancy leaves. These successes seem to have occurred because none of these laws threatened to initiate significant changes in the status of women or the relations between the sexes.

Feminist successes seem mainly to have involved rational adaptations to past changes in the activities of women. Therefore, they did not threaten any substantial interests. Much the same has been observed about the earlier suffrage movement. Speaking of the movement at the beginning of this century, Viola Klein argued that "in spite of all their failings feminists saw almost all their demands gradually realized . . . simply by force of practical necessity, and because their claims were in accordance with the general trend of social development."<sup>23</sup>

These interpretations suggest that modern feminism could be interpreted, in part, as an adaptive response to unavoidable changes in the relations between the sexes.<sup>24</sup> Women were being pushed out of domestic life and into the economy. Men (as Barbara Ehrenreich argues) were increasingly rebelling against family responsibilities. Nonetheless, cultural norms and institutional practices largely continued to assume women's subordination and domesticity. Women, as Mirra Komarovsky argued in 1946, faced inconsistent and contradictory role expectations.<sup>25</sup> Feminism responded actively to the painful inconsistencies arising in the midst of the long-term transformation in women's social position. Although modern feminism has exhibited

many distinctive ideologies, the principal shared goals of feminists—equal opportunity, freedom from discrimination or harassment, and a right for self-determination—have been a practical and effective response to the contradictory circumstances facing women.

While the modern feminist movement apparently achieved its goals only when they were consistent with long-term developments in society, the movement's efforts had a marked effect on history. True, the historical evidence suggests that feminist agitation rarely overcame significant contradictory organizational interests or defeated determined opposition rooted in such interests. However, the most fundamental feminist goals fitted within these limits.

The evidence also suggests that feminist activity was the principal reason that egalitarian policies (though limited to ones consistent with structural developments) rose dramatically and realized their historical form. Before then, the passive resistance of men and organizations effectively preserved discriminatory practices against women's individual efforts to improve their status. The collective action of women was the decisive force that overcame this roadblock.

#### WHY WOMEN AVOIDED OR OPOSED FEMINISM

Gender inequality has always given women an inherent interest in changes increasing equality, an interest that most women confront repeatedly in their daily lives. When changing circumstances gave women new opportunities, some vigorously pursued the new chances to get ahead. Through acts aimed at personal improvements, women gradually altered the social environment. Some aspects of women's status, such as voting rights and access to high-status jobs, were less amenable to the processes gradually improving women's status. Eventually, a sharp discontinuity arose between these retrogressive facets of women's lives and those aspects that had improved. This discontinuity induced collective actions. Through such actions, women were able to shift the balance of interests influencing men's actions in their favor.

Yet how do we explain the actions of women who opposed the social changes that reduced gender inequality? Not all women have embraced feminism. In recent decades ever more women (and men) have acknowledged sympathy with the egalitarian goals of feminism. Not surprisingly, research has consistently shown that most women enjoyed the recent improvements in women's status associated with the goals of feminism. Nonetheless, most women have resisted identi-

ying themselves as feminists. A significant minority of women went further and opposed change. At its extreme, women's opposition has produced organized efforts to stop the passage of woman suffrage and to deny passage of an equal rights amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

We need to distinguish women who simply did not support feminist goals from those who actively opposed them. Many withheld support, but only a few women actively opposed the principal feminist goals aimed at reducing inequality. (By the principal goals of feminism, I mean the major goals accepted by most segments of the movement, including ending general sex discrimination, gaining equal access to high-status positions, establishing equal treatment by bureaucratic processes, and ending sexual harassment of women by men. This list omits popular goals that did aim directly at inequality, such as abortion rights, and goals associated more with factions, such as lesbian rights.)

No difficulty arises for explaining why many women never directly conceived feminist goals as a possible part of their lives. Usually, such women simply had never been part of a social network that made feminist ideals or a feminist identity into feasible alternatives. Most people's ideals, relationships, and actions conform to the patterns and expectations made familiar by their biography and reinforced by their surroundings. Most people understand the world and their place in it through the ideas that they receive from the surrounding culture. Under stable conditions of gender inequality, the dominant ideology presses both women and men to accept the current standards of feminine and masculine behavior. The culture depicts sex roles as just, valuable, and necessary. Most people step outside this familiar terrain only when circumstances render ineffective the strategy of unthinking conformity or when events force them to accept or reject some alternative action.

People's tendency to conform to the expectations of their social circle is one reason that social movements commonly draw their new members from the social networks of old members. People who have no relationship with a member of a social movement are unlikely to consider its point of view. In short, most women who did not support feminist goals commonly did not support antifeminist goals either. If asked about a specific issue, they might give an opinion in either direction. The overall conflict between feminist and antifeminist ideology did not loom large in their lives.

Now we must account for the women who directly opposed



changes meant to reduce sex inequality. Why did they seemingly act against their own interests?

Our culture has a deep concern about inequality. We care about its effects on people's lives. We believe that being a member of an advantaged group is always more desirable. We think power is better than subservience, that autonomy is preferable to dependence, that wealth surpasses poverty, that status is more desirable than obscurity. These beliefs seem so encompassing and self-evidently shared that we rarely bother to make them explicit. Therefore, it is perplexing that members of a subordinate group would withhold support from changes that should improve their circumstances.

No evidence shows that women who opposed feminist goals were more ignorant about the consequences of those goals than women who supported them. Realistically, both women for and women against feminist goals have had a limited understanding of inequality and social change. Women who resisted change were commonly ignorant about social policies and the determinants of social conditions. The average woman opposing change did not know why women have a lower status than men. She could not give a clear, accurate description of feminist goals. However, not all women who supported feminist goals were experts either. The average woman who supported feminist goals had not read a pile of theoretical books. She had not tried to learn the social statistics that documented discrimination. Feminists and antifeminists were much more distinguishable by their interpretations of women's circumstances than by the amount or quality of their knowledge.<sup>26</sup> Activists on both sides were much more knowledgeable than other women. Women on both sides of the issue have had easy access to the ideas of women on the other side. Women sought the information that supported their expectations and turned a blind eye to evidence that cast doubt on it. Those on both sides believed they had a truer and more comprehensive knowledge than their opponents.

Alternatively, women opposing changes might have been more devoted to traditional values. Women who opposed feminist goals did claim more traditional values and higher church attendance than those who supported change. Yet feminists also claimed that they were pursuing traditional values. The bundle of traditional values is so general and internally inconsistent that feminists and antifeminists could draw on them equally.

Neither ignorance nor traditional values seem sufficient to explain antifeminism. Some women may have resisted change because they did not understand the issues, and some may have wanted to preserve traditions. Nevertheless, these possibilities do not appear adequate to explain the patterns of committed resistance evoked by feminist movements. Not many women were so isolated from alternative perspectives that inescapable ignorance blocked them from discovering the meaning of what they did. Similarly, few women seemed so committed to traditions that they were ready to choose a worse life to preserve them. Instead, these women seemed to believe their lives would be better if they resisted change than if they promoted it. Rather than assuming that ignorance or inflexible values blinded these women about their interests, let us ask why they might have had good reasons to oppose change.

The status quo served some women's interests better than the promises of change. Those women had more to lose than to gain. Women could reach this conclusion by two routes. Some women had such a large investment in the current system that their future well-being was tied to its persistence. Other women's values, talents, and aspirations better fitted the limited opportunities and female role available under the system of sex inequality than did the expanded, but different, opportunities promised by equality. Some women apparently felt that feminists sought to draft them as foot soldiers in a war that could only bring them harm. Lofty rhetoric did not meet their practical needs.

Most women had made a workable accommodation with inequality. A woman who had spent youth's choices and made lifelong commitments no longer saw a future in which anything different was possible. A married, middle-aged woman with children, for example, rarely aspired to going to law school and starting a trail-blazing career. Such a woman wanted to protect the life she had. She wanted her husband to stay faithful and obligated to support her. How could she use women's new career channels or new sexual freedom? Feminist agitation asked her to bear the costs of a social transformation. If she saw little hope of reaping its rewards, her interests lay elsewhere.

Some women could reasonably believe that they could do better in life using their opportunities under the existing system than by the prospects promised by gender equality. They might value the life offered women under the status quo more than that promised by the system of equality. Some women valued the secondary benefits of in-

equality more than the primary benefits promised by equality. For example, sex inequality could give women freedom to avoid men's responsibility for holding jobs and providing an income for a family. If a woman really preferred taking care of a household to holding a job, she had reason to oppose the removal of sex-segregated work roles. Similarly, some women found marriage a better route to a good life than competing as an individual in the labor force. Economic inequality cut across sex inequality. Some women gained economic and status advantages through the personal ties of subordination to successful men. Such a woman achieved an affluent lifestyle and high community status through marriage. This could give her a better life than many other people, both women and men. She could reasonably decide this was more than she could achieve through an education and career.

In her well-known study of women in the professions, Cynthia Fuchs Epstein argued that "the American middle-class woman has a substantial interest in the status quo. The commitment is clearly linked to the secondary gains that have accrued to her, seemingly as rewards for service to her class, her husband, and her society."<sup>27</sup> Middle-class wives, Epstein suggested, could get a good income and high social status but escape their husbands' need to work hard and continually, compete successfully, constantly prove themselves, and bend to the requirements of their jobs. Essentially, her portrait suggested that to achieve more success, husbands had to have more talent, work harder, and endure more stress, but the more successful the husband, the less his wife had to do to enjoy the privileges she derived from his success. By this means, some women experienced relative advantages through the system of gender inequality. To many of us today, the relative advantages may not sound appealing, but we should recognize that others found them highly desirable.

Some women, then, resisted changes meant to reduce gender inequality because they judged those changes harmful to the conditions that gave them individual advantages. Changes that improved the general status of women might make their lives worse. The ideology and social characteristics of women who opposed feminist policies confirm this conclusion.

Women's organized resistance to feminism focused on defending the family and women's place in it. Antifeminists were generally much more concerned with maintaining men's obligations than with limiting women's opportunities. Organizations that opposed women's suffrage

early in the century stressed fundamental and immutable differences between men and women. In recent decades, women's groups who opposed the Equal Rights Amendment used similar rhetoric.<sup>28</sup> The differences that concerned them were those defined by sex roles.

Groups resisting feminism aimed to defend what they saw as women's special rights and to reinforce men's traditional obligations. The women opposing gender equality argued that progressive policies placed the family in jeopardy. They proclaimed their mission to be the preservation of the traditional family. To them, the traditional family meant a middle-class ideal of a permanent alliance between an employed husband and a wife fully dedicated to home and children. They believed this gave women advantages they could lose. In 1910 an antisuffrage writer warned that "if women claim equality, they must lose their privileges."<sup>29</sup> Similarly, modern antifeminists argued that feminism would rob women of their rights to avoid the military, to stay home with their children, and to have their husbands supply an adequate income.

Antifeminists in both periods claimed that women's moral virtue and nurturing capacity made them ideal domestics and childrearers. Men's aptitudes and competitiveness suited them for economic and public life. According to the antifeminists, they were defending God, religion, prosperity, and democracy. To sustain these values, they claimed, it was necessary to maintain the traditional family and women's place in society.

In her study of the politics of abortion, Kristin Luker found that women leading the opposition to abortion rights had similar conceptions of their mission. They also emphasized intrinsic differences they believed distinguished the sexes. They proclaimed that those differences made women and men ideally suited to the distinctive roles of the traditional family. They argued that women should be wives and mothers. They felt that this job was so demanding that women must devote themselves exclusively to it and that it was so fulfilling that every normal woman should desire it. The anti-abortionists emphasized the value of children, disapproved sex outside marriage, and appealed to religion as a moral defense of their goals. They believed abortion is associated with free sexuality, declining interest in children, and the erosion of differences between the sexes.

In their arguments, anti-abortionists expressed a fundamental fear of social changes that would undermine the traditional family. Abor-

tion symbolized all these changes. These changes jeopardized the moral and structural assurances that women could choose the role of homemaker and mother. They threatened homemakers' confidence that their husbands would provide for them and that society would honor them.<sup>30</sup>

This rhetoric appealed to women who believed that feminist goals threatened their past lives and future expectations. They had invested their lives in the family and the division of labor between the sexes.

Comparing anti-abortion activists with activists defending the availability of abortion, Luker found that those actively opposed to abortion were less educated, much less likely to have careers (indeed, rarely did they have jobs), married earlier, and had more children. Other studies found similar characteristics for activists opposing the Equal Rights Amendment and the ordinary women who supported them. Having made a large investment in family life and having low expectations for personal economic success motivated women to oppose feminist goals. These women had made a commitment to family life. Having made it, they feared social changes that threatened that commitment. These threats included changes that would challenge the beliefs that gave meaning and value to their memories. They also included changes that would diminish the security of their future.

Social policies that attempted to increase gender equality by eliminating the differences between women's and men's opportunities—and therefore eliminating differences between their obligations—offered little to these women. Such policies implicitly criticized their lives and might jeopardize what they possessed. In short, these women adopted an ideology opposed to feminist change because they realistically doubted that such change was in their interest.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, some women have resisted feminist goals because their interests were inconsistent with the long-term, abstract interests of women as a group. Policies intended to increase equality threatened to erode their social position and expectations. For some women, being the wives of successful and dependable providers promised a better life than having to work at a poorly paid and demanding job. For women who had already made the commitment to a domestic and mothering role, the proposed changes threatened to diminish their moral worth and to reduce their husbands' obligations. These women's private self-interests contradicted the long-term class interests of women.

The unpredictable risks attached to social change increased

women's susceptibility to conditions that prompted resistance to feminism. For many people, the risks of social change seemed more fathomable than the prospects for gain. They could conceive what it would mean to lose valued aspects of their lives better than they could grasp how their lives might get better.

With every increase in women's status, feminist goals jeopardized fewer women's personal interests. By the 1990s three-fourths of working-age, married women were in the labor force. This was true for both working-class and middle-class women. Fewer and fewer women were subject to antifeminist interests arising from a sustained, exclusive investment in a childrearing, domestic role. Simultaneously, increased equality eroded the opportunities for women to find status and security as homemakers. Fewer men wanted to support stay-at-home wives, and cultural ideals abandoned them. In the long run, changing opportunities seem sure to shrink the number of women with antifeminist interests until they become notable more as social curiosities than as a political force.

## WOMEN'S ROLE IN CHANGE

Feminist movements have both reflected and directed social change. Changes in society's fundamental institutional structures—the economy, the state, and the family—diminished the supports for inequality. These institutions removed some aspects of sex inequality because they conflicted with the institutions' own needs. Institutional interests explain, for example, the laws giving property rights to married women and the hiring of women for selected occupations. These institutions did not follow any plan explicitly pushing people toward greater equality. Thus, they left many aspects of inequality in place while they altered the balance of resources between the sexes. The resulting disparities created social rifts when aspects of sex inequality in some realms of social life persisted that did not reflect changes in women's lives. Feminist movements arose out of these crosscurrents.

In a context of gradually improving opportunities, ambitious women could seek to advance themselves through individual efforts or by combining with other women. Collective action was unlikely while the expansion of opportunities allowed women sufficient outlets through individual strategies. Whenever and wherever opportunities appeared, some women found them and sought to improve their lives.

Coordinated rebellion became most likely when accumulated changes and existing constraints placed women in a squeeze. For this to occur, some of women's aspirations had to become *expectations*, and those expectations had to be unachievable because of unequal constraints on women.

Partial assimilation was the key. In the nineteenth century, women who gained legal rights, education, and some relief from domestic obligations came also to expect voting rights like men. In the second half of the twentieth century, educated women who were long-term employees and young women in college became particularly discontented. They came to expect the same job opportunities and the same treatment by organizations as men in similar circumstances. Seeing their expectations as individually unrealizable gave women the motivation to organize. Believing that their expectations were practicable goals that were being unjustly and irrationally blocked made collective actions seem a reasonable strategy. At this juncture, the uneven pattern of advances through economic and political development made collective rebellion more responsive to ambitious women's personal interests than to a strict strategy of individual efforts.

Both the suffrage movement and modern feminism were predominantly middle-class movements brought to life by institutional changes that improved women's social position. These social changes produced more women with acutely frustrated ambitions, personal independence, and the capacity to organize. Working-class women experienced as much frustration but had less capacity to organize, and the lower horizons of their best job prospects produced more ambiguous goals.

Self-interest motivated some women to question and sometimes oppose the demands of the feminist movement. Some women have received secondary gains by accepting their dependence on men. They avoided, for example, economic responsibility and the competitiveness and subordination to bosses characteristic of employment. This attitude applied particularly to older women. They feared that they still could lose the advantages of their middle-class marriages but did not see themselves able to use the opportunities promised by gender equality. Secondary gains also appealed to some young women who believed that they could achieve greater success in the marriage market than in the labor market. Because affluent homemakers generally preferred their circumstances to dull, low-status jobs, and because

greater gender equality would reduce the security of homemakers, these women's disapproval of feminism did reflect their interests.

Feminist goals that aroused significant resistance from women can be roughly grouped into three categories. First, any objectives that seemed to threaten the integrity of the family aroused opposition from women (and men) who felt dependent on prevailing family norms and strongly identified with them. Second, any goals that contradicted existing beliefs in immutable sex differences incited resistance from those (including many feminists) who had a practical and emotional investment in those beliefs. Third, goals that seemed to increase women's *obligations* (for example, to serve in the military or to earn an income for their families) incited diverse opposition, often disguised in rhetoric. These direct conflicts between some women's interests and feminist goals caused most of the enduring opposition from women.

Although many women rejected any identification with feminism and opposed some parts of the feminist agenda, an ever-growing majority emphatically supported some of the fundamental goals and accomplishments associated with feminism. Equal opportunities and equal rights for women have received overwhelming support, particularly as established political voices have adopted these ideas.

Feminist movements helped to drive forward increasing gender equality induced by structural changes and helped to direct the changes in women's social identity. As an autonomous entity, neither the suffrage movement nor the modern feminist movement achieved decisive social power. They posed no telling threat to the existing organization of power dominated by men. The feminist movements, nonetheless, had several significant effects. They established a new identity for active participants. They also helped to direct, accelerate, and ease the changes in women's social identity.

Most important, feminist movements supplied the effort, organization, and ideas needed to produce egalitarian changes that were beyond the scope of gradual institutional processes. Even as the gradual changes removed the institutional interests in preserving some key aspects of inequality, they did not supply any mechanism to ensure a transition toward greater equality.

The disembedding of gender inequality from economic and political inequality slowly undermined gender inequality. It did not, however, equally erode all aspects of gender inequality. The shift of power into organizations, the expansion of impersonal profit motives, the devel-



opment of representative government, organizational rationalization, and related trends transformed interests and redistributed resources. As a result, organizations gradually discovered some interests in treating women like men. And women gradually discovered ways to better their lives, relying on their declining resource disadvantage compared with men and using the new opportunities offered by organizations.

Certain resources were much more resistant to these gradual processes. In particular, the transformation of interests and resources did not produce any institutional process that would directly give women access to social power. Nor did these processes create conditions under which women could hope to gain positions of power or status through individual action.

Women's organized rebellions induced powerful men to concede rights implied by the logic of institutional development but denied by the reality of male dominance. The nineteenth-century women's movement sought to establish equal treatment of women and men by the state. The modern feminist movement sought equal treatment of women and men by all organizations. The major feminist goals were consistent with the inherent tendencies of institutional development. Modern organizations, the modern economy, and the modern state had no inherent interest in the distinction between women and men, but considerable interest in attaining optimal use and control of both. Although feminist movements did not achieve great organization or power, they acquired enough to tip the balance of interests among powerful men.

To understand the role feminist movements played in the long-term decline of gender inequality fully, several points are important. First, the feminists' attack on inequality was much more consistent with the developmental logic of the institutions they engaged than was the resistance by the men who held institutional power. The women's movements had the momentum of history and structural evolution on their side. Second, the episodic pressures of women's movements combined with and depended on two persistent forces: the steady disembedding of gender inequality from economic and political inequality and the constant individual efforts of women to better themselves and resist their subordination. Feminist movements arose because these persistent processes had uneven and incomplete effects. Third, overall, the anonymous women struggling to better themselves probably made a greater contribution to gender inequality's decline than did the much

better-documented movements. Over the past 150 years countless women took risks, endured harsh conditions, and defied convention to better their lives. Often acting in isolation, able to depend only on their own resolve, these women provided continuous pressure that propelled gender inequality's decline.

## 5. WOMEN'S REJECTION OF SUBORDINATION

1. For full bibliographic information on these and other books, see Duane R. Bogenschneider, ed., *The Gerritsen Collection of Women's History, 1543-1945*.
2. Andrew J. Cherlin and Pamela Barnhouse Walters, "Trends in U.S. Men's and Women's Sex-Role Attitudes"; Karen O. Mason, J. L. Czajka, and S. Arber, "Change in U.S. Women's Sex-Role Attitudes, 1964-1974"; Janeen Baxter, "Is Husband's Class Enough?"
3. For a recent assessment, see Scott J. South and Glenna Spitze, "Housework in Marital and Nonmarital Households."
4. See, e.g., Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*.
5. Neil Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior*; John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements"; Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*; William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest*; Russell Hardin, *Collective Action*; Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*; Jean L. Cohen, "Strategy or Identity"; Anthony Oberschall, *Social Movements*; Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement*.
6. It is possible to phrase these questions in terms of severity rather than in terms of numbers of women, for example, by asking if women were more dissatisfied. But there have always been some women at every level of satisfaction with their circumstances, from delighted to distraught. And it is better to avoid the ambiguity created by discussing dissatisfaction, freedom, or other attributes of individuals as if they increased or decreased for all women.
7. For a much more detailed examination of these questions and other related ones, see Steven M. Buechler, *Women's Movements in the United States*. Buechler's interpretations differ in some cases from those offered here.
8. Anita J. Rapone, "Clerical Labor Force Formation."
9. Mabel Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*; Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*.
10. See Chapters 1 and 3 for more details on women's employment. Based on data in *Historical Statistics, vol. 1*, pp. 139-140; Alba M. Edwards, *Corn-*

- parative Occupational Statistics for the United States, 1870 to 1940*, pp. 113-129; U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, *Time of Change*, pp. 55-56.
11. Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women*.
  12. Theodora Penny Martin, *The Sound of Our Own Voices*.
  13. Ibid.; Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*; Jack S. Blocker, "Separate Paths."
  14. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and Ida Husted Harper, eds., *The History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 4, pp. 1042-73.
  15. Ibid.; Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle*; Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920*; William L. O'Neill, *Everyone Was Brave*; Buechler, *Women's Movements in the United States*; Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*. Richard J. Evans, *The Feminists*, provides comparisons with other countries.
  16. Janet Saltzman Chafetz and and Anthony Gary Dworkin, *Female Revolt*.
  17. See Evans, *The Feminists*; and Chafetz and Dworkin, *Female Revolt*. For suffrage dates see Ruth Leger Sivard, *Women: A World Survey*; and Elise Boulding et al., *Handbook of International Data on Women*. Chafetz and Dworkin, for example, conclude that the countries named in the text (among others) never had more than incipient women's movements when they achieved suffrage (pp. 105-162).
  18. Myra Marx Ferree and Beth Hess, *Controversy and Coalition*; Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation*; Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism*; Ethel Klein, *Gender Politics*; Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums*; and Cynthia Ellen Harrison, *On Account of Sex*.
  19. See, e.g., Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation*.
  20. *Historical Statistics*, vol. 1, pp. 383,140.
  21. This experience is comparable to that of labor unions, which rarely become effective unless they achieve the organizational conditions necessary to compel, or at least induce, conformity to their policy decisions. See Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*; Robert Max Jackson, *The Formation of Craft Labor Markets*.
  22. Joyce Gelb and Marian Lief Palley, *Women and Public Policies*.
  23. Viola Klein, *The Feminine Character*.
  24. See, e.g., Jessie Bernard's argument that feminism serves society by forcing it to properly accommodate structural changes; "Foreword," in Ferree and Hess, *Controversy and Coalition*.
  25. Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men*; Mirra Komarovsky, "Cultural Contradictions and Sex Roles."
  26. On antifeminism see Margaret Hobbs, "Rethinking Antifeminism in the 1930s"; Susan E. Marshall, "In Defense of Separate Spheres" and "Who Speaks for American Women?"; Erin Steuter, "Women against Feminism"; Anne M. Benjamin, *A History of the Anti-Suffrage Movement in the United States from 1895 to 1920*.

27. Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, *Woman's Place*, p. 129.
28. Jane Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA*; Mary Frances Berry, *Why ERA Failed*; Susan E. Marshall, "Keep Us on the Pedestal"; Carole J. Sheffield, "Sexual Terrorism."
29. Quoted in Marshall, "Keep Us on the Pedestal," p. 574.
30. Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*.
31. Luker (*ibid.*, p. 196) found that anti-abortion activists were three times as likely to have been raised as Catholics. Although sampling deficiencies make these numbers unreliable, they suggest the importance of early cultural milieus for determining the life choices that result in adult commitments. More interesting, Luker also found that one-fifth of the anti-abortionists had converted to Catholicism, while an equivalent one-fifth of pro-choice activists had abandoned the Catholicism of their childhoods. This result suggests the willingness of adults to adopt new ideologies and associations that are suited to their interests.