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ABSTRACT

Variations in the level of female political participation were examined in the context of the "standard" model of political participation (higher socioeconomic status, urbanism, living at society's center, increased participation) and the "decline of community" model (decreased group membership, increased mobility, decline of community "boundariness" and continuity, loss of sense of "stake" in community, participation). Female political participation was measured via observation of participant number and verbal response in 44 Vermont town meetings in 1970-71. Hypotheses tested were: (1) women will participate more in those towns where many women hold officer's posts than in towns controlled by men; (2) in those towns where the participation levels in politics are generally high, female participation will be relatively higher than in towns of low participation; (3) towns with relatively high ratios of female participation will be "modernizing" towns. It was concluded that the "standard" model was ineffective for purposes of explaining female involvement in town meetings. Variables identifying towns with higher socioeconomic status did not identify those towns with higher female participation, but modernization variables did, as female verbal response was more equal than that of men in small towns with fewer family farms and population increases. (JC)

COMPARATIVE TOWN MEETINGS: A SEARCH FOR CAUSATIVE MODELS OF FEMININE INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS WITH NEW OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF A WELL CALLOUSED DEPENDENT VARIABLE*

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I. Introduction

Sparked by the inputs revolution of the 1960's, a new interest in the dimensions of political participation has emerged. This interest is not limited solely to academe. Indeed, there is much to suggest that it was prompted by an instrumental concern: How to activate the urban poor and siphon off the hostility that was seen as a major component of the urban crisis syndrome? In fact "political participation" was written into law and operatives in the War on Poverty were instructed legislatively to work for the "maximum feasible participation" of the poor in the development and administration of the poverty program.[1] The participation spark has caught among cadres of professional scholars and now more and more studies are emerging that speak to the causal forces behind political involvement. The tinder was present, of course, in a sound, but spotty, shelf of works that has appeared for the most part since the end of World War II.[2]

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[1]For a critique of the process see: Daniel P. Moynihan, Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding (New York: The Free Press, 1969).

[2]Most of this literature appears as articles in the journals or as subsiderary material in books of wider scope. The only book to deal exclusively with the topic prior to Verba and Nie is: Lester W. Milbrath, Political Participation (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965). Before this, the best comprehensive treatment is found in: Angus Campbell et al., The American Voter (New York: Wiley, 1960). For a review of the literature see: Judith V. May, Citizen Participation: A Review of the Literature (Monticello, Illinois: The Council of Planning Librarians, 1971).

In 1972, Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie produced what is now the landmark statement on the problem, Participation in America.[3]

The literature describing the causal forces behind political participation is methodologically erratic and growing rapidly. It strains efforts to categorize. The most prominent conceptual handle we have is linked to modernization theory.[4] The modernization model sees political involvement as a consequence of urbanization and the variables associated with urbanization. Actually (as is so often the case), the direct causal forces were assumed to be the associated factors, rather than urbanism itself. Such items as higher literacy rates, more cosmopolitan life experiences, higher income levels have been traditionally associated with urbanism and increased political involvement.[5]

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[3]Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, Participation in America (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1972).

[4]Philip Cutwright, "National Political Development: Its Measurement and Social Correlates," in Nelson W. Polsby et al., Politics and Social Life (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963); Karl W. Deutsch, "Social Mobilization and Political Development," The American Political Science Review (September, 1961): Daniel Lenner, The Passing of Traditional Society (Glenco: The Free Press, 1958); Seymour M. Lipset, Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics (Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday, 1960); Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies, (New Haven: The Yale University Press, 1968).

[5]The effect of social status variables on political participation (those in the higher status brackets of education. occupation and income will participate more) is called the "standard" model by Verba and Nie and they measure all other independent variables against this "base-line" variable. See: Verba and Nie, Participation . . . , Chapter 8: Some of the more recent studies to document the relationship between education, occupation and income on political participation are: Robert R. Alford and Harry Scoble, "Sources of Local Political Involvement," The American Political Science Review (December, 1968). Alford and Scoble find that social status produced "the very highest (relationship) observed in our data"; Warner Bloomberg, Jr. and

Milbrath adds a different shading to this hypothesis with his "center-periphery" concept. His pivotal hypothesis is quoted by Verba and Nie:

> One of the most thoroughly substantiated propositions in all social science is that persons near the center of society are more likely to participate in politics than persons near the periphery . . . Persons near the center receive more stimuli enticing them to participate, and they receive more support from their peers when they do participate.[6]

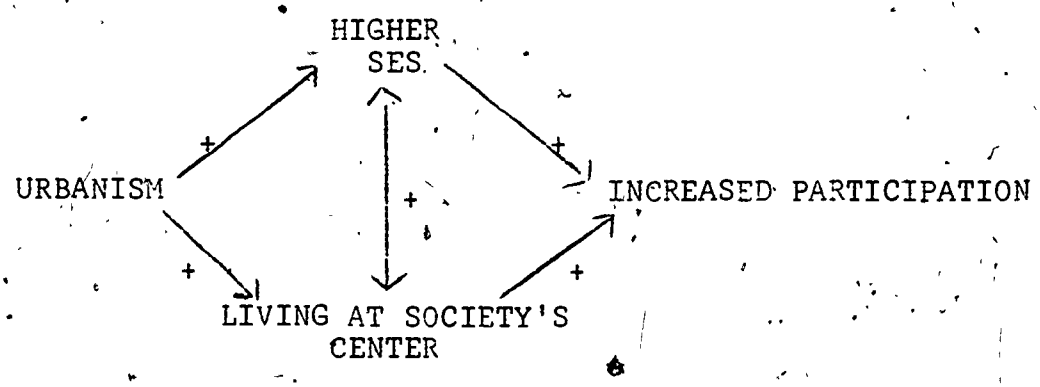
Florence W. Kosenstock, "Who Can Activate the Poor? One Assessment of Maximum Feasible Participation," in Charles M. Bonjean et al., Community Politics: A Behavioral Approach (New York: The Free Press, 1971). In this article the authors conclude that education as a causal force is not linked to the standard model i.e., education leading to mobility up the SES ladder which leads to a change in values resulting in more participation. It is linked, however, to participation through direct leadership training. In other words education can be the independent variable in the SES matrix; Alvin Boskoff and Harmon Ziegler, Voting Patterns in a Local Election (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1964); Robert L. Crain and Donald B. Rosenthal, "Community Status as a Dimension of Local Decision-Making," The American Sociological Review (December, 1967); John S. Jackson and William L. Shade, "Citizen Participation, Democratic Representation and Survey Research," The Urban Affairs Quarterly (September, 1973). Searching out the root sources of education's effect on political participation in a direct manner is a difficult process and leads to contrary finds. Richard E. Merelman finds that as children proceed through high school their "desire to participate almost vanishes." See: Richard E. Merelman, Political Socialization and Educational Climates (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1971), p. 87. Herbert H. Hyman, on the other hand finds that there is a "constant increase in participation with (increase in) year in high school." See: Herbert H. Hyman, Political Socialization (New York: The Free Press, 1959), p. 41. Nevertheless, the "education means participation" conclusion is widely accepted by most scholars in political science. One of the most prolific writers in the field today states: "We know that people who are wealthy and well educated show more than the average amount of interest in politics . . ." See: Ira Sharkansky, The Maligned States (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969), p. 51.

[6]Milbrath, Political Participation, pp. 113-114, Quoted in Verba and Nie, Participation in America, p. 230. For support of this "center-periphery" hypothesis see: Robert Lane, Political Life: Why and How People Get Involved in Politics, (Glenco,

What Milbrath seems to be saying is that there is something inherent in urbanism, being "near the center" of society that promotes political participation independent of the SES factors that accompany urbanism and also promote participation. The two factors are thus mutually supportive and the equation seems to make sense. The model looks like this:

Figure I

The "Standard" Model of Political Participation



There are problems with the standard model, however. These problems are both conceptual and empirical. Conceptually, there is a real question whether or not "urbanism" itself is any longer valuable as a linear construct. More and more scholars have decided that ruralism and urbanism do not share

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Illinois: The Free Press, 1959). Milbrath, of course, subscribes to the SES hypothesis as well. Ranking turnout levels and various SES measures in the American states, Milbrath finds strong positive correlations between income levels, educational levels, and voting. See: Lester Milbrath, "Individuals and Government," in Herbert Jacob and Kenneth Vines, Politics in the American States, 2nd Ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), p. 43.

a zero-sum relationship. While the blurring of distinctions between rural and urban have for some time been documented by sociologists, they have only recently been noticed as a caveat to the well used rural-urban variable in political science. The demise of this operational definition will have a lasting impact in the field and, if these scholars are correct, then the foundation element of the model is unsound and may well bring down the causal implications of the modernization theorists.[7]

More damning to the modernization-urbanization model is a growing store of evidence that suggests that urbanization, socio-economic development and increased levels of political involvement are not positively related. In fact there are now studies available that suggest the relationship is actually an inverse one. These works have generally involved findings from other countries, especially some of the developing nations.

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[7]Frank M. Bryan, Yankee Politics in Rural Vermont (Hanover, New Hampshire: The University Press of New England, 1974), Richard Dewey, "The Rural-Urban Continuum: Real But Relatively Unimportant," The American Journal of Sociology (June, 1960), Robert S. Friedman, "The Rural-Urban Conflict Revisited," Western Political Quarterly (June, 1961) Herbert Kotler, "Changes in Rural-Urban Relationships in Industrialized Society," The International Journal of Comparative Sociology (December, 1963), Alex Inkeles, "Participant Citizenship in Six Developing Countries," The American Political Science Review (December, 1969), Charles M. Bonjean and Robert L. Lineberry, "Size of Place Analysis: Another Reconsideration," The Western Political Quarterly (March, 1971); Howard W. Beers, "Rural-Urban Differences: Some Evidence From Public Opinion Polls, Rural Sociology (December, 1953), and Otis Dudley Duncan, "Community Size and the Rural-Urban Continuum," in Paul Hatt and Albert J. Reiss, Jr., eds., Cities and Society (Glenco, Illinois: The Free Press, 1956).

We find that in such nations as Chili, France, Japan, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and South Korea the urbanism-modernization hypothesis is severly questioned.[8] A five-nation comparison using the data from the classic study of Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture,[9] finds that the rural-urban distinction is wiped away as a predictor of political participation when other variables are held constant:

> We confirm the initial finding that knowing the size of the community in which a citizen lives adds nothing to our understanding of his general level of political participation.[10]

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[8]Wayne A. Cornelius, Jr. "Urbanization as an Agent in Latin American Political Instability: The Case of Mexico." The American Political Science Review (September, 1969), Elwyn N. Kernstock, "How Migrants Behave Politically: The Puerto Rican in Hartford, 1970," (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, The University of Connecticut, 1971), Mark Kesselman, "French Local Politics; A Statistical Examination of Grass Roots Consensus, The American Political Science Review (December, 1966), Junichi Kyogoku and Nobutaka Ike, "Rural Urban Differences in Voting Behavior in Post War Japan," Economic Development and Cultural Change (October, 1960), Bradley M. Richardson "Urbanization and Political Participation: The Case of Japan," The American Political Science Review (June, 1973), Steven W. Sinding, "The Evolution of Chilean Voting Patterns: A Reexamination of Some Old Assumptions," The Journal of Politics (August, 1972), Sidney Tarrow, "The Urban-Rural Cleavage in Involvement: The Case of France," The American Political Science Review (June, 1971), and Jae-on Kim and B. C. Koh, "Electoral Behavior and Social Development in South Korea," The Journal of Politics (August, 1972).

[9]Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture (New York: The Free Press of Glenco, 1963). The nations studied were: The United States, Great Britain, West Germany, Italy, and Mexico.

[10]Norman H. Nie, G. Bingham Powell, Jr., and Kenneth Prewitt, "Social Structure and Political Participation: Developmental Relationships, II," The American Political Science Review (September, 1969).

In his study of six developing countries, Alex Inkeles reports:

> ". . . our most striking finding is precisely that urbanism, despite its high zero-order correlation, fails to meet the test of being an independent school of citizenship. Neither urban origins, nor number of years of urban experience after age 15, produce significant increases in active citizenship when other variables are controlled . . . Indeed, it appears that the larger and more cosmopolitan the city, the less frequently the active citizenship in the common man stratum of society.[11]

There are also more and more studies emerging which indicate that urbanism is not a stimulant to political participation in the United States.[12] Again, the best study on the question appears to be that of Verba and Nie. They conclude:

> The small, peripheral community is not the place where participation is most inhibited. Rather, the citizens participate more than their social characteristics would predict. It is the suburbs where one finds citizens to be underparticipators--even more than in the core cities. This fact suggests that of the two characteristics of communities . . . the size of the community and the degree to which it is a well-defined and bounded community--the latter is more important.[13]

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[11]Alex Inkeles, "Participant Citizenship in Six Developing Countries," The American Political Science Review (December, 1969) The six countries studied were: Argentina, Chili, India, Israel, Nigeria and East Pakistan.

[12]Walter Dean Burnham, "The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe," The American Political Science Review (March, 1965), V.O. Key Jr., Southern Politics in State and Nation (New York, Alfred Knopf, 1950), James Robinson and William Standing, "Some Correlates of Voter Participation: The Case of Indiana," The Journal of Politics (February, 1966), and Gerald W. Johnson, "Political Correlates of Voter Participation: A Deviant Case Analysis," The American Political Science Review (September, 1971).

[13]Verba and Nie, Participation in America, p. 236.

In short, Verba and Nie argue that size of place makes no difference when socio-economic factors are controlled. Small places are the repository for high participant citizens to the extent that small places are most apt to be self-contained communities with well established communal boundries. It is important to note that in many small communities participation is higher than the socio-economic "base" of the community would predict. This seems to indicate that community structure has an independent effect of its own which can overcome the causal implications of lower SES qualities.[14] The finding that the kind of community involved can have independent effects on voter turnout does much to qualify even the SES leg of the "standard model." Increasing levels of income and education have been seen as the causal forces behind the modernization theory of participation. That SES factors are

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[14]Ibid. p. 243. In what he calls a "reconceptualization" of Milbrath's center-periphery concept, Bradley M. Richardson explains much of Japan's high rural participation levels: ". . . differences in community life and social involvement between the urban and rural districts are reflected in sectoral differences in the proximity of ordinary persons to these local decision-making centers. These differences quite clearly favor rural districts." Richardson seems to be trying to rescue the center-periphery notion by pointing out that it very well may hold if we reidentify "center" in terms of the stable center of small local communities. People in these environments are indeed at the "center" of their societies and not on the periphery at all. They are at the periphery of the national center only. See Richardson, p. 452-453. Verba and Nie point out that the small, boundried community promotes activity in national politics in the United States almost not at all when the effects of SES are controlled. Verba and Nie, Participation in America, p. 242.

important is verified by Verba and Nie when they point out that without high scores on these variables even small, boundried communities are not associated with higher participation at the national level. Yet in local matters the correlation between participation and community size and "boundriness" is strong even where educational levels are low.[15] In other words, community structure is more important than SES. Another important study which verifies the fact that there are instances in which higher educational levels are rendered impotent as predictors of increased political activity is the major study of voter turnout in American cities by Alford and Lee. The authors analyze the relationship between turnout and a series of structural, political, and SES variables in a wide array of American cities and conclude that educational levels are actually negatively associated with turnout in American cities in both concurrent and non-concurrent elections. The strongest relationships reported are between governmental structure and turnout ("reformed" cities with lower turnout). These relationships hold under controls for social structure.[16] To summarize, the real problem with the modernization-urbanization center-periphery model is that the loss of "community" caused by the forces of modernization causes a decrease in participation despite the positive impact of the SES factor that accompanies the process.

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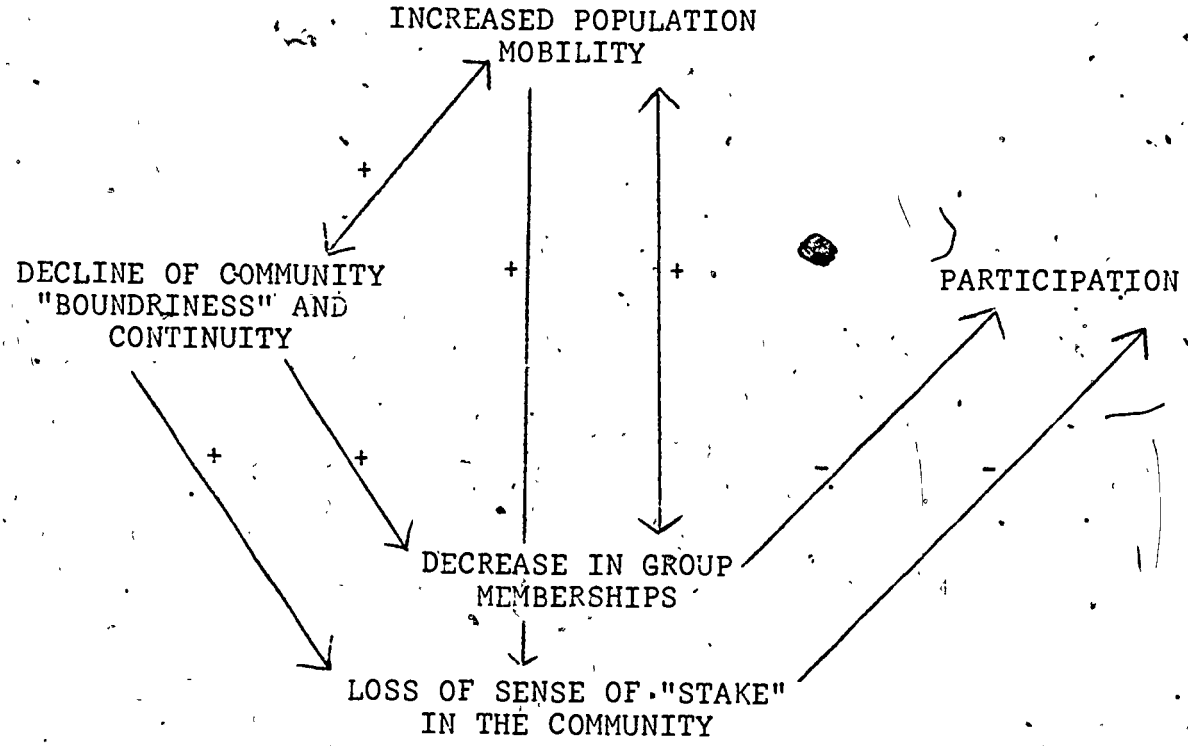
[15] Ibid.

[16] Robert P. Alford and Eugene C. Lee, "Voting Turnout in American Cities," The American Political Science Review (September, 1968).

It is in the context of the demise of the "standard" model of political participation and the arrival of the new model (called by Verba and Nie the "decline of community" model[17]) (see Figure II) that this paper seeks to explain variations in levels of participation on the part of women in rural communities.

Figure II

The Decline of Community Model of Political Participation



[17] Verba and Nie, Participation in America, p. 231.

II. Women in Political Life

There are two views of political involvement for women, the traditionalist and the modern. The traditionalist view reads as follows in this description of women in Deering, Massachusetts in the 1920's:

> Into their 40's they shared their last-born babies, sons, embarrassed and giggling all the same, forgetting afterward the worry of yet another child born to raise in hard times. They would sit nursing them at the back of the Town Hall at all the public gatherings they could get to, diapers modestly draped across their bosoms as they rocked and commented on local politics and social affairs with a fine mixture of sharp perception and grim humor--and always laughter.[18]

This was the old way and it is remembered nostalgically as part of the direct form of democracy in the New England town. Vivian Scott Hixon in her study of local politics in Vermont and Michigan records the following lament on traditional town meeting lost:

> I came from a little town where you stood on your own feet and said your piece. Women brought their babies--it was a big event.[19]

The old view is being erased from the national consciousness[20] and the role of women in politics has become more than simply

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[18]Esther Titcomb McLean, "Give My Regards to Deering," Yankee (February, 1975), p. 86-93.

[19]Vivian Scott Hixson, "The New Town Meeting Democracy: A Study of Matched Towns," Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Michigan State University, 1974), p. 86.

[20]The Gallup Poll indicates that changing attitudes toward women in politics are evidence by the percent of the population who indicated they would not vote for a woman for president. This percentage dropped from 66% in 1937 to only 29% in 1971. These finding are reported in: Milton C. Cummings and David Wise, Democracy Under Pressure (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Javanovich, Inc., 1974), p. 171.

being "called in for political activity" when local leadership cadres needed them to work for party organizations in registration drives.[21] The movement away from the traditionalist view has been slow and has had its setbacks. In two of the original American colonies, for instance, women had the vote prior in independence, only to have it snatched away after the revolution.[22] Most studies still list voting turnout on the part of women as about 10% lower than that of men.[23] However a decreased interest in political participation on the part of women is not typically American[24] and in other countries such as Great Britain and West Germany participation by women in public affairs is lower than in the U.S.[25]

[21]Arthur J. Vidich and Joseph Bensman, Small Town in Mass Society (Princeton, N.J.: University Press, 1958), p. 203.

[22]These colonies were New Jersey and Massachusetts. See: Anna Garlin Spencer, Woman's Share in Social Culture (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott Company, 1912), p. 287.

[23]These findings are found in most text books. See: Milton C. Cummings and David Wise, Democracy Under Pressure, Dan Nimmo and Thomas D. Ungs, American Political Patterns 2nd Ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), p. 156, and James David Barber, Citizen Politics: An Introduction to Political Behavior (Chicago: Markham Publishing Co., 1969), p. 27.

[24]In both the Netherlands and Finland men are much more apt to respond that they are interested in politics than women. See: Robert A. Dahl and Edward R. Tufte, Size and Democracy (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1973), p. 49.

[25]Almond and Verba, The Civic Culture, p. 247.

What accounts for the lower political participation found to be typical of women? Most scholarship links minimal roles in politics to socialization processes during youth. Simione de Beauvoir puts it this way:

> Women have been conditioned by life and history to look upon themselves as "the other." They have as a result lost their desire to achieve full equality with men--socially, legally, or on any other basis.[26]

These differences in attitudes toward politics are deeply ingrained and have created a situation which will not likely soon be altered. A leading scholar on political socialization reports:

> The present data cast particular doubt on theories which suggest that political sex differences will disappear in the near future, on the assumption that such differences derive mainly from the individual's adult experiences . . . Women who find it especially threatening not to be "feminine" and who see politics as a male function, will be drawn into the political arena only at the cost of great psychic discomfort . . . political sex differences are unlikely to vanish soon.[27]

Additudinal sex differences which result in lower political participation on the part of women center around their lack of aggressiveness and their sense of a lack of political

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[26]Simione de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), p. 23.

[27]Fred Greenstein, Children and Politics (New Haven, Connecticut The Yale University Press, 1965), p. 126-127, quoted in: Thomas J. Volgy and Sandra Sue Volgy, Women and Politics: Political Correlates of Sex Role Acceptance (Tucson, Arizona, The University of Arizona, The Institute of Government Research, Research Series No. 22), p. 2. The Volgy study contains an excellent bibliography linked to political differences between men and women. They contest Greenstein's pessimistic view.

efficacy.[28] Easton and Dennis in their major work on the political development of children point out that girls are apt to become sensitized to politics at a later date than boys and that they keep the personalized view of the political system longer.[29] In short, the great bulk of the literature on women and politics indicates that the political socialization process is different for men than for women and this results in the fact that women are more apt to defer political roles to men and share a much lower assessment of political self worth. These forces result in lower levels of participation in the political process.

Although we know that women participate somewhat less than men in general, we also know that participation levels among women vary and that many women participate extensively. What is the key to the variations in participation levels among women? Are there any variables that serve to minimize or neutralize the damage done in the socialization process? Once again there is substantial unanimity in the answer. Scholars generally agree that education is the independent variable in feminine participation. Women do not participate because they are less educated than men. Jenny Mansbridge, in her study of

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[28]For aggressiveness see: Volgy and Volgy, Women and Politics, p. 1. For efficacy see: Angus Campbell et al., The American Voter (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960), p. 487.

[29]David Easton and Jack Dennis, Children in the Political System (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969), p. 335-343.

political participation in a small town in Vermont, records an interview with one of the women of the town as follows:

> A lot of people are not educated enough to understand it, like which I am. I mean I'm too shy to get mixed into a lot of stuff like this, and I haven't got the kind of education to decide in this stuff like my husband has, and I think that is a lot of it.[30]

Give women equal educational opportunities and sex differences in political involvement will disappear, say most authorities on the subject.[31] The two leading works on participation, those of Lester Milbrath and Verba and Nie, agree that when socio-economic status is controlled the effect of sex on political participation is erased.[32] In the first part of this paper we observed that there is some question of the independent effect of SES factors on participation in the light of the "decline of community" model. If we may assume that the effect of "decline of community" is no more severe

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[30] Jenny Mansbridge, "Town Meeting Democracy," Working Papers for a New Society (Summer, 1973), p. 7.

[31] William Flanigan and Nancy H. Zingale, Political Behavior of the American Electorate 3rd. Ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1975), p. 27, V. O. Key, Jr., Public Opinion and American Democracy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 331.

[32] Lester Milbrath, Political Participation, p. 136, and Verba and Nie, Participation in America, p. 359. Under controls for socio-economic variables Verba and Nie's correlation coefficient for sex and participation (overall participation) is only -.062. For a critique of this work see: Judith Stiehm and Ruth Scott, "Female and Male: Voluntary and Chosen Participation: SEX, SES, and Participation," Paper Presented for Delivery at the 1974 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, 1974.

for women than for men (in other words it is a constant by definition), we are ready to see if SES factors have their predicted impact on feminine participation in small rural communities.

III. The Study of Town Meetings

Historically, nearly all the work on participation has measured the dependent variable in terms of the voting act. The development of survey research skills has allowed a new set of attitudinal variables to be measured that seek to explain political participation as it is said to be by citizens themselves. In survey research, we are compelled to accept levels of participation and attitudes toward participation as they are described to us by our respondents, and, despite sophicticated technologies employed in interview vehicles to strip away the contamination of false responses, it is clear that the gap between what people tell us they think, do, and feel is sometimes substantially removed from what is actually the case.[33] It would be helpful to have a measure that involves more substance than aggregate voting records of political units and is more reliable than survey research.

The value of this study rests in the way it measures political participation. We have taken the last operative case of direct participation in policy-making

[33] These remarks should in no way be interpreted as an attack on survey research. There is simply no doubt that development of this technique in the social sciences has undergone massive improvements in the last three decades. Without it there would simply be no way in which political science could continue its development. This alternative approach is offered simply as that alone--an alternative.

left in the world and have measured political involvement as attendance at and participation in Town Meetings. This was done by the only method possible, which does not rely on survey research, observation.

It is a relatively simple matter to attend a Town Meeting and record at different times during the day how many people are in attendance. These attendants can be identified as either men or women and in most cases as town officers or rank and file citizens. Moreover, it is also perfectly possible to count the number of times people participate in these meetings. Since the meetings are very small and orderly, it is feasible to record the number of times each person who does speak up repeats the activity. In 1969, a spring project was undertaken in the Political Science Department at Saint Michael's College in Vermont to send students to various Town Meetings around the state to determine if it would be possible to construct a vehicle which would provide data on the participatory characteristics of Town Meetings. In the first year students attended twenty-eight meetings. They employed carefully constructed coding devices and it was determined on the basis of this pre-test that with minor changes in the technique that it was indeed possible to record accurately the kinds of information described above. The next year (1970), the debugged vehicle was employed in forty-five meetings and in 1971 forty-four different Town Meetings were analyzed. Those towns where the data was incomplete were delated from the sample leaving eighty-two towns for purposes of analysis.

Also some towns in the 1970 sample were revisited for comparative purposes and in the subsequent years (1972-1975) the time series work has continued with a view to a ten-year study. To date, over 200 individual Town Meetings have been coded.[34] However, the 1970-71 sample of eighty-two towns serves as the base for our work here.[35] Since so much depends on the reliability of the data collection method, I offer the following defenses of the method:

(A) The students for the most part were from the urban centers of southern New England, New York, and New Jersey. They attended these meetings with few preconceived notions. As a matter of fact their urban biases fed analytical appetite almost anthropological in nature. To these students the experience was a scientific trip into the past to "view the natives" and they went about their work seriously. The project was immediately tradionalized in this small school and professors from other departments cooperated in the venture. The combination of the "time machine" mentality and the adventurism linked to data collection in back woods Vermont fed a unique spirit of cadre and responsibility among the students.

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[34] For the most part Town Meetings are held once a year in Vermont.

[35] Some preliminary and more or less descriptive elements of this long-term project have already been reported. See: Frank M. Bryan, "The Politics of Town Meeting--Another View," Chittenden (February, 1970); ____ "Comparative Town Meetings: Citizen Involvement in Politics," (A paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the New England Political Science Association, 1973).

(B) The vehicle itself was geared to constant attention and did not allow lapses of activity. In other words, the students were very busy from the time the meeting began until the time it ended. Due to the pre-test there were proper data sheets and procedures for nearly all possible contingencies. (Excluding, of course, such events as the fire in Tunbridge that sent most of the attendants scurrying off to man the hoses.) Moreover since the data gathered was cumulative, it was easy to detect those teams of students that did a sloppy job and omit those towns from the final sample. There were very few of these.

(C) The towns studied were all very small. Attendance never exceeded 400 and usually there were well less than 250 in attendance. Moreover, enough students were sent to each town to maintain about a 1-75 ratio between students and attendants.

(D) I have used the method personally on over ten occasions and find the process exceptionally accurate.

The Town Meeting has long been held up as a model of participatory democracy. It is the prime governmental unit for hundreds of towns in northern New England. It stands as the best possible laboratory in which to measure the ideal against the actual in researching democratic theory and practice. Yet the empirical cupboard containing the facts on Town Meetings is remarkably bare. In a nut shell, we are unable to answer even the simpliest of questions: What percentage of the voting age population usually attends Town Meetings? How many of

those attending actually participate in a vocal manner? How many women attend? Do the officers dominate the participation? We know how many people generally vote in the state of Idaho or the city of Detroit. If we had a comparative data base with which to measure participant levels in Town Meetings we might be able to add much to our knowledge of political behavior in a democracy. To date this study represents the only such data base in existense and may be the most thorough aggregate data collection on direct participatory democracy in existence.[36]

This ignorance about such an important ingredient of American Political culture has led to a debate over the merits of Town Meeting that is shot through with bias and oversimplification. As I have said elsewhere:

> Tradionally the debate over Town Meeting has resembled a kind of "Rumplestilkskin dilemma" with its defenders all too quick to claim for it an ability to spin democratic gold from political straw (harkening back to the words of de Tocqueville and Bryce) and its attackers all too quick to aim their arrows at the fraud, finding it more easily punctured than the institution itself.[37]

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[36] This is a substantial boast, I am aware. However, I await it's refutation. It should be noted that the record of involvement in Town Meetings on a comparative basis is available in the vaults of town clerks in hundreds of tiny rural towns all over New England. Since the voting lists were "checked" as one proceeded to vote in Town Meetings over the years, a massive research project could make basic assessments concerning attendance at Town Meeting. However, all one would know is the number of persons who came to the meeting long enough to vote on one or more of the relatively few issues which demand a ballot. Mansbridge has attempted this kind of painstaking research for her study of a single Vermont town with success. See: Mansbridge, Town Meeting Democracy, p. 14.

[37] Frank M. Bryan, "Town Meeting Government Still Supported in Vermont," The National Civic Review (July, 1972), p. 348.

The "model" portrayed by de Tocqueville, Bryce, Jefferson and others is indeed a magnificent target:

> Town Meetings are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they bring it within the people's reach, they teach men how to use and enjoy it . . . the existence of the townships of New England is in general a happy one. Their government is suited to their tastes and chosen by themselves . . . the commotions of municipal discord are infrequent. The conduct of local business is easy.[38]

> . . . the town or township with its primary assembly is best. It is the cheapest and the most efficient; it is the most educative of citizens who bear a part in it. The Town Meeting has been not only the source but the school of democracy.[39]

> (Town Meeting is) . . . the wisest invention ever devised by the wit of man for the perfect exercise of self-government.[40]

More up-to-date comments are not as positive. The works of Vidich and Bensman, Robert S. and Helen M. Lynd, Thorstein Vablen, Dahl and others are generally heavily critical of small town government and Town Meetings as they are portrayed above.[41] Nevertheless, one of the world's leading urbanologists said as late as 1961:

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[38]Alex de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (Cambridge: Sever and Francis, 1862). Parts of this quote appear in: Joseph F. Zimmerland, "On the Other Hand," The National Civic Review (January, 1966), p. 14, and Hixon, The New Town Meeting Democracy, P. 6.

[39]James Bryce, The American Commonwealth (2nd ed. rev.) London: 1891), p. 591, quoted in Zimmerman, "On the Other Hand," p. 14.

[40]By Jefferson, quoted in: John Wood, "By the People," Country Journal (March, 1975), p. 44.

[41]For a summary of this literature see: Hixon, The New Town Meeting Democracy, pp. 2-6.

> . . . the failure to grasp (the Town Meeting form) and continue it--indeed to incorporate it in both Federal and State Constitutions--was one of the tragic oversights of post-revolutionary development. . .[42]

We do not seek here to resolve the question of the relative merits of Town Meeting government. However, it is important to remember that Town Meetings exist and that they work. Every spring in New England thousands of people leave their homes, travel to a meeting hall, listen to public discussion, rise to address their fellow citizens. The point needs emphasis. For in this paper we are measuring the participatory act not as the casting of a ballot or a series of responses in a battery of survey research questions. Our operational definition of participation is a day-long exercise (or in some cases an evening-long) exercise. And it is the act of standing before the town in political debate. Some towns in Vermont are systems where women are quite willing to take these actions. Other towns are systems where they seem to be inhibited from these acts. Why is this so? What kinds of socio-economic and political-cultural environments are associated with low participatory levels for women? What kinds of towns have participatory levels for women that match those of men? Do these findings match the expectations of the literature cited earlier? We will approach these questions as follows: First we will present a statistical overview of the towns studied. Next a general descriptive portrait of participatory levels at Town Meetings will be

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[42]Lewis Mumford, The City in History (New York: Harcourt, Brace 1961), p. 332-333, quoted in: Hixon, The New Town Meeting Democracy, p. 6.

constructed. Focus will be drawn on feminine participation in town Meetings. Finally, we will attempt several exercises in causal model building.[43]

IV. Feminine Participation in Town Meeting: A Descriptive Overview

The towns studied had an average population of 1034. They ranged in size from a minimum of 196 to a mixiumum of 3187. The average median family income for these towns was $8087. The average town had grown by 16% between 1950 and 1970, had lost 61% of its dairy herds and had a median educational level of 10.9 years per person. In the average town, 69% of the population was born in Vermont and 18% were employed in the professions. Politically the towns had undergone substantial partisan change in the previous two decades. The gain in the Democratic vote for Governor in the average town between 1950-52 and 1970-72 was 53%. In the towns studied the Republican vote in the primary was usually for regular party candidates. These small rural villages were also more conservative than other areas in the state. The average vote against calling a constitutional convention in Vermont in 1968 was 73% in our sample of 82 towns. State-wide, the "no" vote was 61%. The average voter turnout for general elections in 1968-70 was 71%, which was slightly below the state average of 73%. The average number of registered

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[43] For a comment on this study and the "ecological fallacy" see: Appendix 1.

voters was 524.[44] The pluralism index ranged from .17 to .44 with a mean of .29. This index measures variations in the incidence of new names appearing on the lists of officers in the towns. If none of the officers changed names between 1960 and 1972, the index would register .12. If each officer had changed each time a term was up, the index would register 1.00. The Feminine Elite Index shows that the average percentage of officer positions held by women was 24%. For a statistical profile of the towns studied see Table I.

What is the pattern of participatory democracy for women which emerges in these towns? Firt of all it is clear that the

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[44] The data for these and other tables and figures which are presented in this paper is found in: M.I. Bevins and R. H. Tremblay, Dairy Farming Trends in Vermont (Burlington, Vermont: Vermont Agricultural Experiment Station, 1967); Malcolm J. Bevins and James G. Sykes, Dairy Profile--State of Vermont (Burlington, Vermont: Vermont Agricultural Experiment Station, 1963); David A. LeSourd, State and Local Taxation and Finance in Vermont (Burlington, Vermont: Vermont Agricultural Experiment Station, 1964); State of Vermont Department of Education, 1968-1969 Financial Statistics Vermont School Systems (Montpelier, Vermont: 1970); State of Vermont Department of Education, 1969-1970 Financial Statistics Vermont School Systems (Montpelier, Vermont, 1971); State of Vermont Department of Education, 1970 State Aid to Education (Montpelier, Vermont: 1971); State of Vermont Department of Highways and the Vermont State Development Department. Vermont 1970 Official Highway Map (Montpelier, Vermont: 1970); State of Vermont Secretary of State, Primary and General Elections, 1974 (Montpelier, Vermont: 1974); State of Vermont Secretary of State, Vermont Legislative Director and State Manual, 1949-1950 through 1973-1974 (Montpelier, Vermont); State of Vermont Agency of Administration, Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Taxes (Montpelier, Vermont: 1972); State of Vermont Department of Taxes, Summary of 1972 Personal Income Tax Returns Filed by Residents and Nonresidents (Montpelier, Vermont, Mimeograph, 1972); State of Vermont Planning Office, Vermont: Social and Economic Characteristics (Montpelier, Vermont: 1971); Robert O. Sinclair, Procedure for Comparing Vermont Towns in Terms of Local Tax Base, Taxes Paid, and Effort (Burlington, Vermont: Vermont Agricultural Experiment Station, 1965); Enoch H. Tompkins, Income of Families in the Minor Civil Divisions of Vermont 1959 (Burlington, Vermont: 1960); Enoch H.

Table I

Dimensional Analysis of Socio-Economic and Political Factors in 82 Rural Vermont Towns 1970-72

VARIABLES	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Standard Deviation
Socio-Economic				
Town's Population	1034	196	3,187	597
Rural Isolation (in miles)	20	5	44	9
Dairy herds loss	61%	0%	100%	17
Population increase 1950-70	16%	-33%	307%	45
Median family income	$8087	$5250	$12,437	1417
Median years of education	10.9	8.5	14.7	1.5
Vermont natives	69%	29%	98%	16
Professional employment	18%	0%	47%	9
Political				
Voter turnout	71%	53%	85%	7
Feminine Elite Index*	.24	.00	.50	.11
Gain in the Democratic vote 1950-52 - 1970-72	53%	-.38%	467%	.67
"Establishment" vote in Republican Primary 1970-72	63%	18%	87%	12
Conservatism - % voting against calling a constitutional convention in 1969	73%	17%	96%	16
Elite Pluralism Index**	.29	.17	.44	.06

*Number of women holding office between 1968-72 divided by the number of offices available.

**The ratio of different last names of persons holding office between 1960 and 1972 to the potential number of different names if each office had changed hands each term.

model of pure democracy falls short. Table II lists statistics on attendance at and participation in Town Meetings and breaks down these figures by sex. The average Town Meeting in Vermont had 117 persons in attendance, 65 of these were men and 52 were women. These figures represent average attendance throughout the day. Since attendance at these meetings fluxuates, a count was made four times during the meeting and the average taken. The highest attendance recorded during the meeting averaged for the 82 towns in the study was 135. There is no way of knowing exactly how many persons attended but we can say that at least an average of 135 did make an appearance, although at any given time during the meeting, the average attendance was 117. These Town Meeting attendants represent an average of 25% of the registered voters in the towns. The town with the highest attendance relative to its voter population had a figure of 42%. The town with the lowest relative

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Tompkins, Socioeconomic Indexes for the Minor Civil Divisions of Vermont 1960 (Burlington, Vermont: Vermont Agricultural Experiment Station, 1965); R. H. Tremblay, Farming Trends in Vermont (Burlington, Vermont: Vermont Agricultural Experiment Station, 1968); R. H. Tremblay, Livestock Numbers in Vermont, 1969 (Burlington, Vermont: Vermont Agricultural Experiment Station, 1969); U.S. Department of Commerce, United States Census of Population 1960, Vermont (Final Report PC(1)-47B); U.S. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Census of Population: 1970 Number of Inhabitants (Final Report PC(1)-A47 Vermont); U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population: 1970, General Population Characteristics (Final Report PC(1)-B47); U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population: 1970, Detailed Characteristics (Final Report PC(1)-C); Vermont Agricultural Experiment Station, Dairy Profile, State of Vermont (Burlington, Vermont: 1963); State of Vermont Development Department, Directory of Manufactures (Montpelier, Vermont: 1971).

Table II

Dimensional Analysis of Participatory Factors
Relating to Town Meeting in 82 Rural Vermont Towns 1970-72

ATTENDANCE	WOMAN			MEN			BOTH		
	Min.	Max.	Aver-age	Min.	Max.	Aver-age	Min.	Max.	Aver age
Average No. in attendance at Town Meeting	13	141	52	17	150	65	30	258	117
Highest attendance recorded during the meetings	14	148	60	19	200	75	33	348	135
Average % of registered voters in attendance at Town Meetings	.07	.41	.22	.09	.45	.27	.08	.42	.25
Crowdedness - no. of empty seats available for each person in attendance	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.00	2.07	.23
PARTICIPATION									
No. of persons attending who participated	3	28	11	8	56	27	16	71	38
% of persons attending who participated	5	65	25	13	98	46	11	80	37
No. of participations	3	93	33	30	313	131	40	369	164
Participations per person who participated	1	9.6	3.0	1.5	9.8	4.8	1.3	5.3	4.3
Length of Meeting in Minutes	--	--	--	--	--	--	60	435	207
Average length of each participation in minutes	--	--	--	--	--	--	.52	5.2	1.4

attendance had 8% of its registered voters come to the meeting. These figures indicate that although a smaller percentage of women who register to vote come to Town Meeting than men, the difference is small and, for the most part, participation defined as attendance is fairly equal between the sexes. The town with the lowest number of women in attendance compared to men was Plainfield with a total town population of 1399. The men outnumbered the women 114 to 40. In Norwich, however, a town of 1966, the women outnumbered the men 112 to 88.

Of those attending Town Meeting an average of 37% actually participated. This figure varied from 11% in one town to 80% in another. Participation was not evenly spread throughout the attendants of the meeting. The average participator participated 4.3 times. The average length of each participation was 1.4 minutes.[45] While women shared almost equally in the

[45]We defined "participation" in the instructions to the research teams as follows: "You are to record everyone that speaks, except the moderator, as a participator. As each speaker arises identify him and place an "X" beside the identification. If they speak again at any time, place another "X" beside the identification and so forth . . . Do not record the second of a motion as participation on the part of the seconder. When two persons are in a dialogue you are to count this as one participation for each. If the dialogue is broken by a third person (who receives an "X" for doing so) and then resumes, give each participant in the dialogue another score . . . An individual is said to have participated when he is recognized by the moderator to do so. However, record the impromptu speaker if you believe he has commanded the attention of the meeting. A person need not stand to participate. Do not record wise cracks or grumblings, etc. Remember to record the sex of the speaker with the identification." It is also important to point out that the length of each participation in minutes was arrived at by dividing the total number of minutes the meeting was actually in session by the number of participations. Since much time is taken up by reading of town reports, instructions on the part of the moderator, and actual voting, this statistic is a relative indicator and does not accurately measure the actual length of the participatory acts.

attendance at Town Meetings, their participatory activity during the meeting was far from equal to that of men. While an average of 46% of the men in attendance participated, only one quarter of the women in attendance did so. Moreover, men held an even larger share of the participations than women since they were more apt to participate more than once. The group of men who participated shared an average of 4.8 participations per man. However, those women who participated only had 3.0 acts of participation per woman. It seems clear that in Town Meetings in rural Vermont towns, women are not left at home but they are apt to remain silent during the meeting itself, leaving the great majority of the participations to men. In raw totals, the facts appear this way: The average Town Meeting in Vermont had 164 acts of participation. 131 of these were by men and only 33 were by women. Men controlled 80% of the verbal activity of the meetings. Describing this state of affairs in a single but typical Vermont town, I have said elsewhere:

> Moreover, in this time of revitalization of woman's role in society, it is interesting to note that although 45% of those in attendance were women, only 34% of the total set of participators were women and only 26% of the acts of participation were made by women. In other words men were more likely than women to find their way to Town Meeting. Once there, they were more likely to rise to speak. And, finally, having spoken once, they were more apt to feel free to speak again. What this means is that as civic participation becomes more and more visable (going to Town Meeting, speaking out at Town Meeting,

repeating oneself) women were less and less likely to take part.[46]

To summarize, it seems as if the participatory act of going to the polls and casting a ballot on the part of women in the United States is matched by the participatory act of going to Town Meetings in rural towns. In both instances women are likely to participate at a slightly reduced rate in comparison to men. However, when we supply a different operational definition for participation, the act of vocally entering into the discussion at an open political meeting, we find that participation on the part of women is drastically reduced. This is an important finding in that it pinpoints, more than other studies are able, the precise point at which participation is linked to sex. It also substantiates in some fashion the fact that bothers many feminists: That under the cover of most findings which indicate differences but not major ones between men and women in terms of political involvement, there is a profound inequality which may be measured in terms of percentages of offices held by women.[47] This "split-level" model seems to hold in rural towns. Inequality is not only masked by ballot box figures in towns with Town Meetings, it is also camouflaged by attendance ratios at

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[46]Frank M. Bryan, "The Pete Rafferty Syndrome," (Unpublished Essay, Saint Michael's College, Winooski, Vermont, Spring, 1974), pp. 14-15.

[47]Judith Stiehm and Ruth Scott, "Female and Male: Voluntary and Chosen Participation, Sex, SES, and Participation," pp. 2-6.

Town Meetings. It is only when one measures actual verbal participation that disproportionate participation based on sex is uncovered.[48]

V. Feminine Participation in Town Meeting: An Attempt to Build a Model

As in ballot box measurements, there is variation in the political participation on the part of women in Town Meetings. What accounts for these variations? In attempting to answer this question we will deal with three hypotheses: (1) Women will participate more in those towns where many women hold officer's posts than in those towns where the governmental elites are for the most part controlled by men. This is essentially a reinforcement model. (2) In those towns where the participation levels in politics are generally high, participation on the part of women will be relatively higher than in those towns where participation is generally low. That is to say where participation is at a premium--it is a scarce commodity--it will be dominated by men. Where participation is inexpensive, women will be "allowed" to indulge in it. (3) Towns with relatively high ratios of feminine participation will be "modernizing" towns. Towns

[48]Participation in politics by women in Vermont has been traditionally high. This was true especially for the State Legislature prior to reapportionment. See: Alfred P. Fengler, "Women in State Politics: Why so Few," (Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont, Unpublished Monograph, 1974), pp. 1-5; Frank M. Bryan, "Who is Legislating," The National Civic Review (December, 1967).

which score low on modernization and reflect to a large extent the traditional, Yankee, agricultural hill town, will depress the participation of women in politics. Before we begin this exercise we will define our variables and the relationships between them.

Dependent Variables

(1) Feminine Attendance. The ratio of female attendants to male attendants. As this ratio approaches 1.0, women are approaching attendance equality with men.

(2) Feminine Participation I. The ratio of the percent of the women in attendance who participated to the percent of men in attendance who participated. As this ratio approaches 1.0, it means that those women who attend are as apt to participate as those men who attend.

(3) Feminine Participation II. The ratio of the number of participations per woman who participated to the number of participations per man who participated. As this ratio approaches 1.0, it means that those women who participate are as ready to repeat the act as those men who participate.

Independent Variables

(Hypothesis I)

(1) Women Elite. The ratio of women holding offices to the number of offices available, 1968-71.

(Hypothesis II)

(2) Pluralism Index. The ratio of different last names of persons holding office between 1960 and 1972 to the potential number of different names if each office had changed hands each term. As this ratio approaches 1.0, the elite is said to be more pluralistic.

(3) Participation Inequality. This statistic is the basic tool (used principally by economists) to measure inequalities of distribution of a factor among different segments of the population. In our case it tells us how equally the participations in the Town Meeting were spread among the attendants of the meeting. It ranges from 0 (perfect equality) to 1.0 (perfect inequality). The statistic is called the "Gini Index."

(4) Voter Turnout. The percent of the town's registered voters who voted, averaged for the 1968, 1970, and 1972 general elections.

(5) Town Meeting Attendance. The percent of the town's registered voters who attended Town Meeting.

(Hypothesis III)

SES Variables

(6) Feminine Education. The percent of the town's women over 25 years of age who have graduated from college.

(7) Median Family Income.

(8) Professionalism. The percent of the town's work force which was listed as "professional" by the census.

Growth Variables

(9) Population Increase. Percent population increased between 1950 and 1970.

(10) Population Influx. Percent of the population that lived in another state five years ago (before the census was taken).

(11) Vermont Natives. Percent of the population which was born in the state of Vermont.

(12) Dairy Herd Gain. The percent gain in dairy herds in the town. Since nearly all towns lost herds, the "gain" really means minimization of losses.

Rural Farm Variables

(13) Family Farms. Per capita dairy herds located in town.

(14) Isolation. Road miles to the nearest town of 5000 population or more by any road classified as a Class 2 town highway or higher.

(15) Town Size. Number of inhabitants of the town.

(16) School Transportation Cost. Per pupil cost of school transportation.

Table III presents the relationships among the independent variables in the form of a correlation matrix using zero-order product moment correlation coefficients. The participation

Table III

Intercorrelation Matrix for Sixteen Independent Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Women Elite																
2. Pluralism	.03															
3. Participation Inequality	-.12	.24														
4. Voter Turnout	-.23	-.07	.14													
5. Town Meeting Attendance	.24	.04	.02	-.15												
6. Feminine Education	-.14	.07	-.04	.28	.04											
7. Median Family Income	-.02	.13	.08	.25	-.12	.48										
8. Professionalism	-.30	.16	.16	.30	-.08	.53	.57									
9. Population Increase	-.06	.17	.01	.20	-.04	.42	.55	.49								
10. Population Influx	.26	-.05	-.09	.18	.13	.34	.43	.24	.25							
11. Vermont Natives	-.04	.04	.02	-.10	.02	-.38	-.17	-.37	-.20	-.42						
12. Dairy Herd Gain	-.19	-.23	-.11	.06	-.11	-.17	-.21	-.27	-.20	-.15	.29					
13. Family Farms	-.11	-.47	-.17	.07	-.04	-.30	-.45	-.33	-.32	-.24	.33	.58				
14. Isolation	.03	-.21	-.10	-.09	.05	.02	-.28	-.36	-.40	.10	.02	.12	-.24			
15. Town Size	-.44	.26	.48	.27	-.27	.20	.40	.32	.24	-.06	.14	.08	-.20	-.27		
16. School Transportation Cost	.12	-.02	-.14	-.14	.28	.03	-.09	.05	-.18	-.03	-.30	-.25	-.11	.15	.31	

variables listed in the matrix intercorrelate in no structured pattern. Those towns with higher ratios of women in town offices were apt to have lower turnout in general elections and higher levels of turnout at Town Meeting. Towns with a more pluralistic officer corps in general were apt to have much less equality of participation in Town Meeting. Voter turnout at Town Meetings was positively related to Participation Inequality and negatively associated with Town Meeting attendance.[49] The conclusion seems obvious. Acts of participation do not represent a unidimensional construct. Moreover, measures of "pluralism" of elites are not related in any predictable fashion to levels of general participation in the towns. Given the fact that many survey research vehicles use unidimensional scales of political participation and seem to produce "scalable" batteries of questions, these findings are bothersome. Evidently in rural communities, there is no hierarchy of participation. The fact that some towns held Town Meetings with much equality of participation does not mean attendance at those meetings was also high. Towns with high levels of attendance were not those towns with particularly strong turnout at the polls. The non-

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[49]The eighty-two towns selected for this study might be called a "sample" of all Vermont towns with populations of under 2500, since 204 of Vermont's 246 cities and towns are of this size. If we consider the town as a "sample" then significance tests are appropriate. As a rule of thumb correlation $\geq .18$ are significant at the .05 level.

interrelatedness of participatory acts in these rural towns was not predicted and becomes one of the more interesting findings of the study.

The other variables in the matrix behave as predicted. The SES variables are strongly linked together and, to a lesser extent, so are the growth and rural-farm variables. Moreover, these variable clusters are intercorrelated to each other in the expected fashion--SES factors are negatively associated with rural-farm factors and positively related to growth factors.

The main concern, however, is with the variation between these variables individually and our three measures of feminine participation. Table IV shows how these independent variables are associated with feminine participation at Town Meetings. First of all, we hypothesized that towns with higher numbers of women holding posts as town officers would have higher levels of feminine participation in Town Meeting. The figures indicate that this was simply not the case, although there was a weak (and statistically insignificant) relationship between an equality of participation for women and women holding posts as town officers. Our second hypothesis held that as participation in general increased, participation equality for women would increase. The figures show that none of our measures of political participation (pluralism in the elite of the town, a Town Meeting where general participation was more equalized, Town Meeting attendance in general, or turnout at the polls) had any impact on the equalization

Table IV

Correlations Between Three Measures of Feminine Participation at Town Meeting and Selected Independent Variables

	Measures of Equalized Feminine Participation*		
Independent Variables	Attendance	Participation I	Participation
Women Elite	.00	.13	-.05
Pluralism	-.08	.04	-.03
Participation Inequality	-.05	-.21	-.16
Voter Turnout	-.07	-.12	-.02
Town Meeting Attendance	-.07	.09	.08
Feminine Education	-.03	.04	-.09
Median Family Income	.12	-.02	-.17
Professionalism	.15	-.02	-.17
Population Increase	.07	.25	-.12
Population Influx	.16	.08	-.25
Vermont Natives	-.12	-.16	.16
Dairy Herd Gain	-.09	-.19	.14
Family Farms	-.06	-.16	.13
Isolation	-.20	.04	.06
Town Size	-.03	-.25	-.10
School Transportation Cost	-.07	.05	-.06

*It is important to bear in mind that these measures are relative ones. They measure feminine participation against male participation. When we say that feminine attendance at Town Meeting is high, we mean the ratio of men to women is nearly 1.0 or in fact favors women, and so forth.

of attendance at or participation in Town Meetings for women. In those towns where attendance was generally higher, the ratio of men to women at the meetings was no more equal than in those towns where attendance was low, and so on. However, in terms of the first measure of actual participation used, at least one of the independent variables was important and verifies the hypothesis. Women's numerical share of the participant group at Town Meeting increased as the general level of participation increased and was more equally spread throughout all the attendants. In other words, as Participation Inequality increased (measured by the Gini Index), the ratio of percentage of women attendants who spoke up to men attendants who spoke up decreased. This seems to support our hypothesis that when participation is at a premium women will be less apt to participate.

The third and central hypothesis of this paper is that feminine participation will increase as general SES factors in the community rise. We predict that as educational levels, medium family income, and those employed in the professions increase that the ratio of feminine participation to male participation will equalize.[50] In terms of feminine attendance

[50]The figures show that when a town's SES factors increase, generally the gap between men and women on these factors decreases, therefore, feminine participation ought to increase at a faster rate than male participation and the gap between the two should decrease as well. However, it is possible to argue (and perhaps it is wise to argue, given the problems of ecological interpretation) that towns with higher SES factors generally emit as towns a more conducive atmosphere for the participation of women even if the SES gap between the sexes is not altered in favor of women by general SES growth.

at Town Meetings, education is not an important variable. Median family income and professionalism produce weak (and statistically insignificant) correlations, although they do vary in the predicted manner. Looking at the act of speaking out during the meeting we find that the inequality between men and women is not reduced in those towns with more educated women, higher income levels, and more people employed in the professions. Finally, it is interesting to note that those towns which are more likely to have women in Town Meetings who are apt to repeat the act of verbal participation at an equal rate to men are the towns where median family income and professionalism are down. Both of these correlations, however, also fail to reach levels of statistical significance. In short, it seems that SES has little to do with feminine participation in Town Meetings. Towns that score high on items linked to higher SES environments do not have significantly more "participant" Town Meetings as far as women are concerned. Towns in Vermont with more advanced ratios of college graduates, higher income families, and professionals in the work force, would be predicted to have more equality between the sexes in political participation since increasing SES factors tend to close the gap between men and women on these SES variables. Remembering that the great portion of the literature suggested that as SES factors leveled out participation on the part of women would increase, these findings do appear to have import.

It was showed earlier that the "decline of community" model suggests that as communities lose their identity, political

participation should decline. Since the interest here is on the relationship of feminine participation to male participation and not on levels of participation as such, it is meaningful to ask whether or not growth has an impact on the relationship between sex and participation. It is perfectly conceivable, for instance, that a growing community might have decreasing participation levels in general while the influx of new ideas and modes of behavior from outside was actually decreasing the gap between men and women by providing an atmosphere which breaks down traditional norms that frowned on feminine participation. The four measures of community growth used in this study; population increase, population influx, native-born Vermonters, and dairy herd gain, all failed to produce strong coefficients with attendance at Town Meeting, although all varied in the predicted direction. Population increase, however, played a more important role in identifying those towns in which women participated at Town Meetings at a rate more equal to that of men. Towns which had experienced high levels of population growth over the 20-year period showed a tendency to have meetings with more equalized feminine participation. Population increase and Participation I correlated at .25. Looking at our final measure of participation, (Participation II--the tendency of women to repeat the initial act of participation at a rate equal to men) we find that the relationships are exactly the reverse of the other two measures of participation. Participation II correlated negatively with population increase and population influx and positively with dairy herd gain and native-born Vermonters. If we inspect the

original correlation matrix of independent variables we find that population influx and population gain are not as strongly correlated (.25) as one might expect. Population influx measures the more immediate impact of newcomers to town while population increase covers the long range and also includes indigenous growth. Population influx has a negative correlation with Participation II. This may reflect the tendency of female newcomers to limit their participations to one, while male newcomers are more apt to speak more than once.

Finally, we predicted that the more isolated rural, farming towns would have lower feminine participation than towns with less of the qualities of the traditional, rural, farming town. Feminine attendance at Town Meeting was down in those towns which were relatively distant from small cities of over 5000 population ($r = -.20$). The larger the town, however, the lower feminine participation. Town population and Participation I correlated at $r = -.25$. In the larger towns, men were much more apt to participate at least once than were women. In sum, the isolated towns discouraged women from attending Town Meeting but the larger towns discouraged them from initiating acts of verbal participation. None of the four measures of traditional, rural, farming towns correlated strongly with Participation II.

The exercise of establishing independent variables which "predict" feminine participation in Town Meetings has been relatively unsuccessful. None of the measures employed produce powerful correlation coefficients, although several are

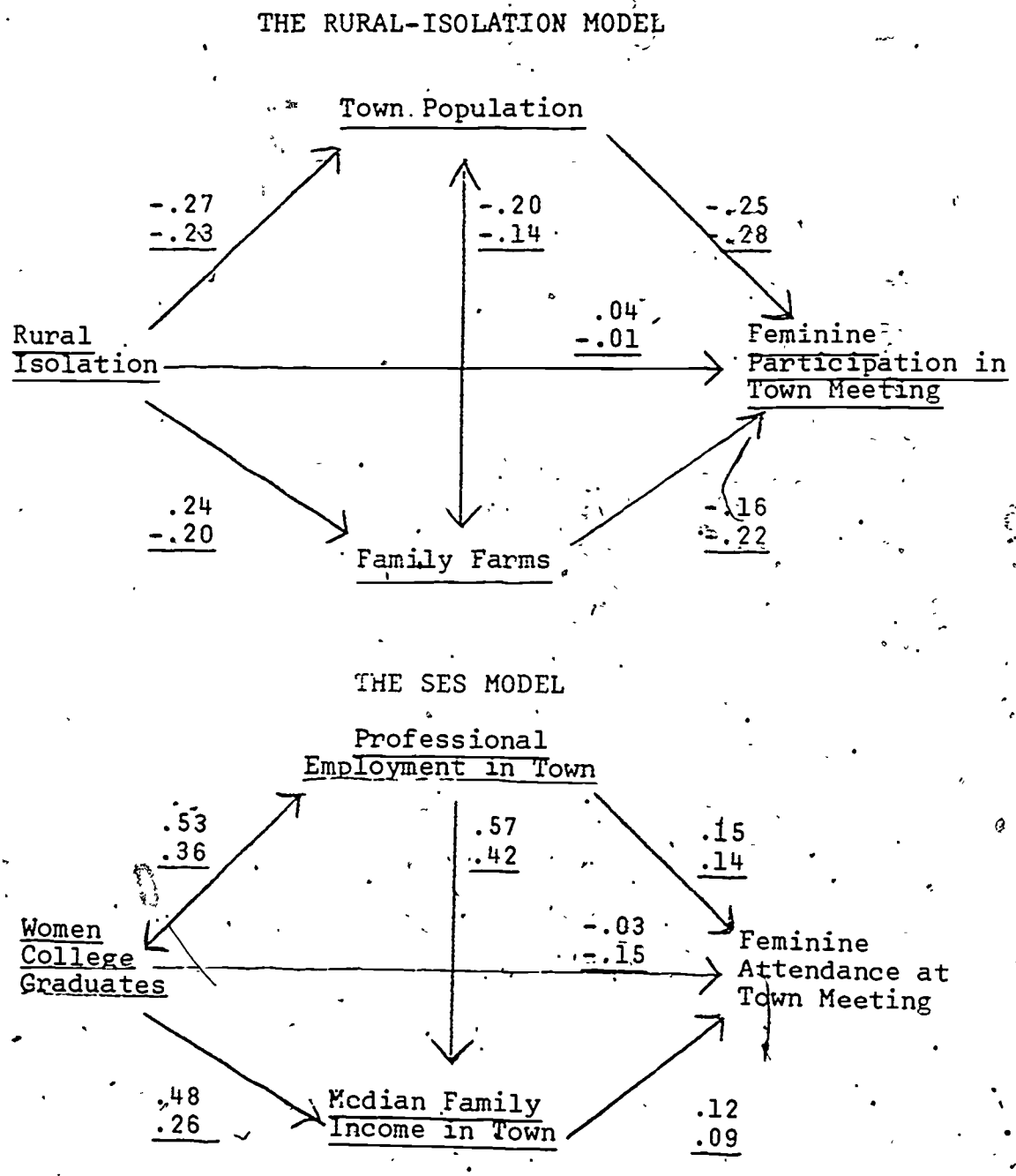
"statistically significant." "Rural Isolation" was the best predictor of feminine attendance, indicating a negative association. As towns were further and further away from small cities of 5000 population or more, the ratio of women to men at Town Meetings decreased, "r" = -.20. Both population increase between 1950 and 1970 and town size were correlated with Participation I (the ratio of women attendants who participated at least once to men attendants who participated at least once) at the same degree of strength, "r" = .25 and "r" = -.25 respectively. The willingness of women to repeat the first act of participation (in comparison to men) was lowest in those towns with a large amount of population influx from the outside. Although none of these correlations are very strong and only a few are statistically significant, the data does reveal certain suggestive patterns. First of all the indicators of equality of feminine attendance ran in predicted directions and clustered as was expected. Feminine attendance was more equalized in those towns with a large number of professionals in the work force, with high median family incomes, and with a large amount of population influx. It was more unequal in isolated towns with higher proportions of Vermont native population. The equality of participation (Participation I) was higher in towns with larger population increases and it was lower in towns that had maintained family farms and more native Vermonters. Larger towns, however, correlated negatively with Participation I. Women repeating themselves at an equal rate with men seemed to occur, however, not in the modernizing

towns, but in the traditional rural-farm towns. It is in these kinds of towns that a few women are apt to speak out repeatedly. Thus the statistic (which is based on the average number of times persons who spoke at least once spoke in all) can show equality between the sexes even though the ratio of women who spoke at all to men who spoke at all favors men heavily. One or two highly vocal women could equalize this statistic. This points to another important finding of the data: There is almost no correlation among the three dependent variables measuring feminine participation. The strongest is between Attendance and Participation I. Here we find that as equality of feminine attendance increases, the equality of the participation in the meeting itself decreases slightly, "r" = -.15. There is no relationship between Attendance and Participation II or between Participation I and Participation II.

Several simplistic models were constructed from the data in an attempt to explain variations in feminine involvement in politics in small Vermont towns. For the most part these exercises were unrewarding. Two of the more interesting exceptions are illustrated below. (See Figure III) Since town size and family farms are inversely related, yet both cause Participation I to vary in a similar direction, it was considered worthwhile to test the relationships under controlled conditions. Both variables hold their predictive capacities when controlling for the other and both are strengthened somewhat. Since isolation was negatively associated to town size

Figure III

Two Models of Feminine Involvement in Town Meetings*



*Partial correlation coefficients are underlined, zero-order coefficients are not.

(therefore, isolated towns ought to have high participation) but positively associated with family farms (therefore, isolated towns ought to have low participation) it was felt that the lack of an association between isolation and feminine participation might be a function of the cancellation effect of the two intervening variables, town population and family farms. This was not the case, however. For when these two variables were controlled, the relationship of isolation to participation did not change. Both town population and family farming have independent effects of the participatory nature of these towns concerning women. One ie negative, the other positive. Isolation has no affect whatsoever.

Since the SES model is so important to the study of political participation, this aspect was also probed more carefully. The interesting result is this: Under control conditions the two weak positive associations between professional employment and Attendance and median family income and Attendance are essentially unchanged, while a non-association between education and Attendance is strengthened considerably--in the opposite direction predicted. In short, under controlled con itions education is the strongest variable and it is associated with a decrease in attendance of women at Town Meeting. It must be emphasized of course that these "conclusions" are purely illustrative and perhaps suggestive in nature. We are dealing with critically weak coefficients, many of which are well below the level of statistical significance. Nevertheless, given the wide acceptance of the SES model in predicting

feminine involvement in politics, they seem to be strong enough to bear thought.

Stepwise multiple regression is the final procedure used for the analysis. Here the attempt was made to see if variables in combination would produce predictive hints as to the causal forces behind variations in women's share of political participation. Several models were explored without marked success. Once again, we were most interested in the combined effects of the SES factors, since the literature in their favor is so abundant. What would be the combined effects of education, occupation, and income on the participatory nature of a town's Town Meeting? Would towns that scored high on all three aspects of "modernization" show marked differences in the way women participated in Town Meeting? The figures indicate that these variables do little better in tandum than they did individually, leaving the great portion of the variance in the feminine participation variables left unexplained. As in other tests those variables that had the greatest predictive power were linked more to the "setting" of the town in terms of its place in Vermont's developmental, cultural matrix than to the SES characteristics of the people in the town, although these constructs are hardly as self-contained as we make them sound. In short, however, the variables which are important are ones which are less tightly sewn to characteristics of the people as individuals. How fast the population as a whole has been increasing, how large the town is, how far it is from a small city, and the rate of

population influx from outside are generally more important than income levels, occupation, and educational levels.

Table V contains data showing the two strongest variable sets uncovered. These variable sets were empirically derived, although they do bear on one of the central hypotheses of this paper, the effect of population dynamics and the breakdown on the rural-farm culture on participation of women. The two dependent variables of most concern, Attendance and Participation I, are involved.

Table V

Data Describing the Findings of Step-wise Multiple Regression on Selected Independent Variables and Measures of Feminine Attendance at and Participation in Town Meeting

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	Simple "r"	Multiple "R"	R^2
ATTENDANCE	Isolation	-.20	.20	.04
	Influx	.16	.25	.06
	Vermont Natives	-.12	.25	.06
	Professional Employment	.15	.25	.06
PARTICIPATION I	Population Increase 1950-1979	.25	.25	.06
	Town Population	-.25	.40	.16
	Family Farms	-.16	.43	.18

Simply stated it seems impossible to wring more than a sprinkling of predictive power from the variables arrayed to explain why some towns have Town Meetings where the ratio of men to women present is fairly equal and others have Town Meetings where attendance is heavily biased towards men. The best possible arrangement of variables explains only 4% of the variance in attendance. The two variables involved are isolation and influx. If considerable caution is forewarned, we can say that women's share of the attendance at Town Meetings will be a trifle higher in towns nearer small cities of 5000 population or more which have had a greater influx of outsiders.

The explanation of why women do or do not participate in Town Meetings as much as men once they have arrived there is a bit more satisfying but still very far from complete. In this case, we are able to explain 18% of the variance in the dependent variable (Participation I) when the three independent variables, population increase, town population, and family farms, are considered jointly. Women are most apt to rise and speak at an equal rate with men in those towns which have had substantial population growth between 1950 and 1970, have smaller populations, and have fewer family farms.

VI. Discussion

As America's political history moves through the bicentennial year and on towards what has seemed to many

an even more symbolic date, 1984, we will more and more be asking the question: What remains of the role of civic participation in the age of techno-politics? We argue in this paper that this question is critical and that the upheaveals of the 1960's hammer the point home: The political system which promises participation, articulates activist norms, and yet denies both in practice is flirting with danger. Political scientists are trying to come to grips with the problem by providing the core, descriptive analysis that must be had before we can ever hope to rationally discuss the future of the concept in a manner that involves policy. Simply stated, we are still wrestling with two questions: Who participates in the modern, developed polity and why? Lester Milbrath and Verba and Nie have provided the best insights to date and have provided a coherence of conceptual framework that has served to isolate the issues and focus the debate. Moreover, the range of questions answered especially by Verba and Nie is impressive and represents a giant step forward in the literature.

The debate now seems to center on the relative merits of the SES or "standard" model of political participation or the "decline in community" model of participation. In their work, Verba and Nie establish the "standard" model as a base line and in effect hold the factor constant while testing other hypotheses throughout their book. But, if I am reading them correctly, they have not made a case for the <u>independent</u> effect of the SES model as such. When discussing the effect

of community type on participation, the authors conclude that even given the lower SES levels in "boundried" communities, these communities have higher participation levels than suburban places where SES factors are higher but boundriedness is lower. The conclusion seems to be that "type of community" variables are more important than SES variables.

It is in this context that this paper has been developed. Methodologically, we sought to contribute in several ways. These are:

(1) By investigating participation in a completely different context--the small, rural town with its Town Meeting form of government. This, we believe, is important since it offers data from systems that ought to optimize the participant atmosphere.

(2) By adding a new set of dependent variables to the literature. Traditionally, the voting act itself or the individual's self perception of their role in political life have provided the only measures of participation. We seek to test the nature of political participation using the act of attending a Town Meeting, or speaking before a Town Meeting as our base measure. In doing so we are properly measuring the participant level of towns and using individual discrete acts of participation as indicators of the participant culture of the town.

(3) By focusing on the way in which a disadvantaged group is treated by these towns. Women have traditionally been under-participators and it seemed important to ask under

what kinds of conditions is this state of affairs less critical and under what set of conditions is it pronounced.

The paper offers a battery of conclusions dealing with the descriptive aspects of participation in Town Meetings and in particular the behavior of the sexes in this participation. We claim that this data is unique and valuable since it gives us more precise handles on the nature of participatory democracy in American's most important participant, political institution. It would have been a shame to let Town Meetings fade into history (if indeed they are to do that--and there is reason to believe they may not) without being more precise than we have been about the dimensions of their participant activity. We also tested several hypotheses about the causal forces behind feminine involvement in Town Meeting democracy. We learned that towns which admitted women to positions as town officers had no higher involvement of women in Town Meetings than those towns where women town officers were scarce. We also discovered that political cultures which were generally participant did not produce more women at Town Meetings. The ratios of women to men at Town Meetings did not vary with changes in the overall participant posture of the town. However, we did discover that Town Meetings which had little equality of participation in general (the verbal acts of participation were controlled by a small segment of the Town Meeting attendants) disproportionately discriminated against women. When participation is scarce in the Town Meeting itself, the ratio of silence swings in the direction of women.

The most important consideration, however, was to consider feminine participation in politics in view of the two major models of participation in general. There is massive evidence to suggest that an equalization of SES levels between men and women will "level out" lower participatory scores for women. Moreover, it is reasonable to believe that the atmosphere created in "modernizing" towns as opposed to "traditionalist" towns would be conducive to increased participatory behavior on the part of women. In their lucid analysis of model building using the variables; sex, education, and community involvement, and data from the Verba and Nie study, Arterton and Hahn conclude:

> . . . in the high education group women participate more than men, while at the lowest educational level they participate less. Education has a profound impact upon the political behavior of women: those with high education overcome the effects of the 'sex model of participation' and out-participate men; those with low education, primarily, we suspect, individuals in the low SES range, participate far less than their male counterparts. It is frequently observed, although rarely documented, that lower status groups tend to be comparatively more sexist in their attitudes toward women. Certainly in those groups women appear to have a lower probability of exercising political power.[51]

Given these kinds of clear assessment of the probable impact of SES factors on feminine participation, the SES model became the central hypothesis of this research. It is, therefore, the central conclusion of this research that the SES model is ineffective for purposes of explaining feminine

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[51] F. Christopher Arterton and Harlan Hahn, "Setups 3 Political Participation," DEA News (Winter, 1975), pp. 52-54.

involvement in Town Meetings. Whether employed singularly or in unison, the variables identifying those towns with higher SES levels in the population did not identify those towns with higher feminine participation in Town Meeting. However, "modernization" variables did have more of an impact We found rural isolation and Vermont natives in the population to be negatively associated with feminine attendance and a high influx of new people to be positively related. We found feminine verbal participation to be more equal than that of men in those towns with fewer family farms and a larger population increase. It is also noteworthy that this phenomenon occurs in small towns, rather than larger ones.

While these conclusions may seem to confound both the "decline of community" model and the SES model, when taken in the context of the small Vermont town and its confrontation with the 20th Century over the last two decades, the findings can be read to substantiate the "decline of the community" model and to clarify the SES model. What we see is a tendency of Town Meetings in small but swiftly growing towns to have more equalized participation between the sexes. Growth in this context may actually foster a sense of community and an awareness of community boundriness. The population influx in these small Vermont towns is not composed of those seeking modernization. It has been by those seeking quite the opposite--seeking in fact a "sense of community." In short, it is the very alienation from the lack of participatory avenues described by Verba and Nie that has sent them into these little

hill towns of Vermont. It is a completely different migratory thrust from that which stands at the base of the "decline of community" model. This conclusion fits the observation of many students of Town Meeting government in recent years that it is the "outsiders" who feast most happily on the participatory potentials of Town Meeting government. We have no clear understanding of why women as such participate more in these kinds of towns. However, it is reasonable to speculate that the impact of population growth carries with it a reinforcing atmosphere for the political participation of women--this atmosphere is more pervasive in a small town than in a large one. Also, it should be remembered that women participate more where the premium on participation is low and that is the case in these smaller, swiftly growing towns. That SES variables do not play an important role is not as bothersome as it might seem, given so much research which indicates that variables linked to "sense of community" prevail in any contest between the two. What this study indicates (albeit very cautiously) is that if one reverses the "modernization" spectrum and views participation not in large communities, but in tiny ones and not with rural to urban migrants, but urban to rural migrants, one may find that "growth" variables are not associated negatively at all with "decline in community" variables, and that "modernization" may actually be associated with increased political participation--especially among groups that have been traditionaly shut out of the participatory process.

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