SOCIAL MOVEMENT CONTINUITY: THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN ABEYANCE*

VERTA TAYLOR
The Ohio State University

This article uses social movement and organization theory to develop a set of concepts that help explain social movement continuity. The theory is grounded in new data on women's rights activism from 1945 to the 1960s that challenge the traditional view that the American women's movement died after the suffrage victory in 1920 and was reborn in the 1960s. This case delineates a process in social movements that allows challenging groups to continue in nonreceptive political climates through social movement abeyance structures. Five characteristics of movement abeyance structures are identified and elaborated: temporality, purposive commitment, exclusiveness, centralization, and culture. Thus, social movement abeyance structures provide organizational and ideological bridges between different upsurges of activism by the same challenging group.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars of the social movements of the 1960s have by and large held an "immaculate conception" view of their origins. These "new social movements" (Klandermans 1986) seemingly emerged out of nowhere and represented a sudden shift from the quiescent 1940s and 1950s (Flacks 1971; Touraine 1971; McCarthy and Zald 1973; Jenkins 1987). Recent empirical work, however, challenges this view, suggesting that the break between the sixties movements and earlier waves of political activism was not as sharp as previously assumed (e.g., Isserman 1987; McAdam 1988). The overemphasis on movement origins and on new elements in the sixties movements has blinded students of social movements to the "carry-overs and carry-ons" between movements (Gusfield 1981, p. 324). What scholars have taken for "births" were in fact breakthroughs or turning points in movement mobilization.

This paper develops a framework that specifies the processes of movement continuity. The framework is grounded in research on the American women's rights movement from 1945 to the mid-1960s. Most accounts trace its origins to the civil rights movement (Freeman 1975; Evans 1979). Yet the women's movement, like the other movements that blossomed in the 1960s, can also be viewed as a resurgent challenge with roots in an earlier cycle of feminist activism that presumably ended when suffrage was won. My approach relies heavily on the central premises of resource mobilization theory: political opportunities and an indigenous organizational base are major factors in the rise and decline of movements (e.g., Oberschall 1973; McCarthy and Zald 1977; McAdam 1982; Jenkins 1983). The paper makes a new contribution by elaborating certain abeyance processes in social movements and by specifying features of social movement abeyance organizations. The term "abeyance" depicts a holding process by which movements sustain themselves in nonreceptive political environments and provide continuity from one stage of mobilization to another.

After discussing data sources, the analysis briefly describes the history of the American women's movement and the persistence of a small band of feminists who, in the 1940s and 1950s, continued to remain faithful to the political vision that had originally drawn them

* Direct all correspondence to Verta Taylor, Department of Sociology, The Ohio State University, 190 N. Oval Mall, Columbus, OH 43210.

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into the suffrage movement nearly a half century earlier. Because the cultural and political climate had changed, these women found that their ideals and commitment to feminism marginalized and isolated them from the mainstream of American women. I argue that their form of activism is best understood as a social movement abeyance structure. Finally, I delineate the features of abeyance structures that were a source of movement continuity by tracing the consequences of postwar activism for the contemporary women's movement. I conclude by exploring the implications of the abeyance hypothesis for understanding the organizational and ideological bridges between earlier activism and the development of other movements of the 1960s.

ABEYANCE PROCESSES IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The term "abeyance" is borrowed from Mizruchi (1983) and is central to a theory of social control. Abeyance structures emerge when society lacks sufficient status vacancies to integrate surpluses of marginal and dissident people. The structures that absorb marginal groups are abeyance organizations. They temporarily retain potential challengers to the status quo, thereby reducing threats to the larger social systems. Abeyance organizations have certain properties that allow them to absorb, control, and expel personnel according to the number of status positions available in the larger society (Mizruchi 1983, p. 17).

Although Mizruchi recognizes the social change potential of abeyance organizations, he does not address this aspect systematically (Kimmel 1984). I both challenge and extend Mizruchi's thesis to hypothesize that social movement abeyance organizations, by providing a measure of continuity for challenging groups, also contribute to social change. I hold that the abeyance process characterizes mass movements that succeed in building a support base and achieving a measure of influence, but are confronted with a nonreceptive political and social environment. A central tenet of resource mobilization theory concerns the role that changing opportunity structures play in the emergence and the attenuation of collective action (McCarthy and Zald 1973; Barkan 1984; Jenkins 1983). As a movement loses support, activists who had been most intensely committed to its aims become increasingly marginal and socially isolated. If insufficient opportunities exist to channel their commitment into routine statuses, then alternative structures emerge to absorb the surplus of people. These structures both restrain them from potentially more disruptive activities and channel them into certain forms of activism. In short, a movement in abeyance becomes a cadre of activists who create or find a niche for themselves. Such groups may have little impact in their own time and may contribute, however unwillingly, to maintenance of the status quo. But, by providing a legitimating base to challenge the status quo, such groups can be sources of protest and change.

The following factors are relevant to the abeyance process. First, certain factors external to a movement create a pool of marginal potential activists. These include *changes in opportunity structures* that support and constrain the movement and an *absence of status vacancies* to absorb dissident and excluded groups. Second, there are internal factors or organizational *dimensions of social movement abeyance structures: temporality, commitment, exclusiveness, centralization,* and *culture*. Since these dimensions were inductively derived, I elaborate them with the case at hand. The significance of abeyance lies in its linkages between one upsurge in activism and another. I delineate three ways that social movement abeyance structures perform this linkage function: through promoting the survival of *activist networks,* sustaining a repertoire of *goals and tactics,* and promoting a *collective identity* that offers participants a sense of mission and moral purpose.

DATA

Most accounts describe the American women's movement as peaking in two periods (Chafe 1972; Freeman 1975; Klein 1984). The first wave, generally referred to as the suffrage movement, grew out of the abolitionist struggle of the 1830s, reached a stage of mass mobilization between 1900 and 1920, and declined after the passage of the suffrage amendment. The second wave emerged in the mid-1960s, reached a stage of mass mobilization around 1970, and continued into the 1980s (Carden 1974; Evans 1979; Ferree and Hess 1985).

Curiosity about what happened to the

organizations and networks of women who participated in the suffrage campaign led to the research described here. There are two reasons for focusing on the period from 1945 to the mid-1960s. First, other researchers have explored the period from 1920 to 1940 (Lemons 1973; Becker 1981; Cott 1987). Second, most researchers see the civil rights movement as the major predecessor to the contemporary women's movement (e.g., Freeman 1975; Evans 1979; McAdam 1988). By examining feminist activity in the decades just prior to the resurgence of feminism as a mass movement, I hoped to shed light on the accuracy of this view.

The data for this study come from documentary material in public and private archival collections and interviews with women who were activists from 1945 to the 1960s. Fuller description of the movement in this period and complete documentation are available in Rupp and Taylor (1987).

(1) Archival data included the papers of the National Woman's Party and the League of Women Voters, the two major factions of the suffrage movement, and the papers of the President's Commission on the Status of Women (1961–63), whose activities facilitated the resurgence of the contemporary women's movement. Other material examined were unofficial and official organizational documents, publications, personal letters, and memos in public and private collections, most of which are housed at the Schlesinger Library at Radcliff College or the Library of Congress. The papers of individual women provided an important source of information, not only about their organizational careers, but also about the activities of diverse women's organizations.

(2) The second source of data was 57 open-ended, semistructured, tape-recorded interviews, conducted between 1979 and 1983, with leaders and core members of the most central groups involved in women's rights activities. Twelve of the women were active at the national level and thirty-three at the local level. Twelve other transcribed interviews conducted by other researchers and available in archival collections were used.

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN THE POSTSUFFRAGE DECADES: THE TRANSFORMATION OF FEMINIST ACTIVISM

Feminism activism continued in the years after the suffrage victory but was transformed as a result of organizational success, internal conflict, and social changes that altered women's common interests (Lemons 1973; Becker 1981; Buechler 1986; Cott 1987). Deradicalization and decline of the women's movement left militant feminists limited avenues through which to pursue their political philosophy.

In 1920, with the vote won, the women's movement was left with no unifying goal. Moreover, tactical and ideological differences divided militant from moderate suffragists and those who saw winning the vote as a means from those who viewed it as an end. As a result, the major social movement organizations of the suffrage movement evolved in two opposing directions.

The militant branch of the movement, the National Woman's Party (NWP), launched a relentless campaign to pass an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the constitution. The NWP was never a mass organization but saw itself as a feminist vanguard or elite (Lunardini 1986). Hoping to enlist the support of former suffragists, NWP leader Alice Paul instead alienated both socialists and moderate feminists by her dictatorial style and the decision to focus on the ERA. The vast majority of suffragists feared that the ERA would eliminate the protective labor legislation that women reformers had earlier struggled to achieve (Balser 1987).

The mainstream branch of the movement, the National American Woman Suffrage Association, formed the nonpartisan League of Women Voters. It spearheaded the opposition to the ERA, educated women for their new citizenship responsibilities, and advocated a broad range of reforms. Other activists in the suffrage campaign channeled their efforts into new or growing organizations that did not have an explicitly feminist agenda but promoted a vast range of specific causes that, in part, grew out of the expanded role options available to women (Cott 1987). Thus, even though the women's movement was rapidly fragmenting, feminist activism continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s. But in the face of increasing hostility between the two camps of the suffrage movement, cooperation developed on only a few issues.

In addition to goal attainment and internal conflict, a third factor contributed to the dissipation of the mass base of the women's movement. Ironically, the role expansion for

which the movement had fought fractured the bonds on which the solidarity of the movement had been built. As women's lives grew increasingly diverse, the definition of what would benefit women grew less clear.

As a result, the NWP—which alone continued to claim the title "feminist"—had become increasingly isolated from the mainstream of American women and even from women's organizations. With the demise of the large mass-based organizations that propelled the suffrage movement, the more radical feminists sought out the NWP. When the NWP captured the feminist agenda, however, the broad program of emancipation narrowed to limited goals and tactics pursued by an elite group of women (Cott 1987). This spelled the final demise of feminism as a mass movement.

FEMINIST ACTIVISM FROM 1945 TO THE 1960'S: THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN ABEYANCE

From 1945 to the 1960s, women's rights activists confronted an inhospitable political and social environment. Women who advocated equality found few outlets for their activism and became increasingly marginal and isolated from the mainstream of American women. Two social processes had this effect: first, advocates of women's rights lacked access to and support from the established political system; and, second, the cultural ideal of "the feminine mystique" that emerged after World War II affirmed the restoration of "normal family life" and discredited women who protested gender inequality.

Changing Opportunity Structure: Nonreceptive Political Elites

Despite an increase in the female labor force and the female student body in institutions of higher education, support for women's rights and opportunities declined sharply following the Second World War. By 1945, the women's movement had further fragmented into three overlapping interest groups, each with a different political agenda (Harrison 1988, p. 7). Because women's issues were not generally salient, the three groups lacked political access and influence. Just as important, when they did gain access to political elites, they often canceled out each other's influence.

One interest group consisted of a coalition of women's organizations associated with the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, this coalition sought to improve women's working conditions and defeat the ERA. Despite its governmental status, the Women's Bureau had little political clout, and the coalition used much of its influence to fight supporters of the ERA.

A second group consisted of a network of women in politics, including women active in the women's divisions of both the Democratic and Republican parties. They advocated the election and appointment of women to policy-making positions despite a dramatic decline in women's political opportunities after the Second World War. For the most part, the selection of women for policy-making positions was done by party women without regard for their position on women's issues (Harrison 1988, p. 64). Since women officials generally had no policy role and little influence on women's issues, advocating token appointments of women diverted attention from major policy questions such as the ERA.

A third group, the National Woman's Party, remained furthest outside the established political order. By 1944, the NWP had begun a major campaign to get Congress to pass the ERA and had managed to garner support from a few women's organizations. Confronted with the establishment of the National Committee to Defeat the Unequal Rights Amendment, spearheaded by the Women's Bureau, the NWP sought the support of both political parties. Presidents Truman and Eisenhower endorsed the ERA, both party platforms advocated it, and Congress considered it in 1946, 1950, and 1953. Yet such support was more a nod to women than a serious political consideration (Freeman 1987).

None of these three groups made much progress in attaining their goals in the 1940s and 1950s. Although women's organizations succeeded in having 236 bills pertaining to women's rights introduced into Congress in the 1950s, only 14 passed (Klein 1984), p. 18). This reflected not only organized women's lack of political access and their conflicts, but also the exaggerated emphasis

on sex roles that emerged on the heels of the Second World War.

Status Vacancy and Marginality

Following the war, a variety of social forces helped to reinstitutionalize traditional family life supported by rigid sex role distinctions (Friedan 1963; Breines 1985; May 1988). Women whose roles did not center on the home and family were considered deviant. In 1957, 80 percent of the respondents to a national poll believed that people who chose not to marry were sick, immoral, and neurotic (Klein 1984, p. 71). As a result of the pressure, fewer married women remained childless in the 1950s than in the 1900s—only 6.8 percent compared to 14 percent (Rupp and Taylor 1987, p. 15). Indicative of the tide, in 1945 only 18 percent of a Gallup Poll sample approved of a married woman's working if she had a husband capable of supporting her (Erskine 1971).

In addition to criticizing women who did not conform to the cultural ideal, the media denounced feminism, discredited women who continued to advocate equality, and thus thwarted the mobilization of discontented women (Rupp 1982). The most influential attack came from Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia Farnham's popular and widely quoted book, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (1947), which denounced feminists as severe neurotics responsible for the problems of American society. In the face of such criticism, only the NWP continued to claim the term "feminist." In fact, the core group of women in the NWP differed in major respects from the cultural ideal. An analysis of the 55 leaders and most active members of the NWP indicates that, by 1950, the majority were white, middle- or upper-class, well educated, employed in professional or semiprofessional occupations (especially law, government, and higher education), unmarried or widowed, and older (in their fifties, sixties, or seventies).[1] Specifically, 71 percent of the women were employed; 97 percent were over the age of 50; and 60 percent were unmarried or widowed. In short, the lifestyles of the women, while relatively advantaged, were not normative. Feminists were largely unattached women with time, money, and other resources that facilitated their activism. Yet the retreat of a broad-based women's movement left few outlets to express their views either inside or outside the established political arena.

In summary, as the political and cultural wave that had once carried feminism forward receded, members of the NWP paid for their lifelong commitment with a degree of alienation, marginality, and isolation. Nevertheless, the NWP provided a structure and status capable of absorbing these intensely committed feminists and thus functioned as an abeyance organization.

Dimensions of Social Movement Abeyance Structures

The abeyance process functions through organizations capable of sustaining collective challenges under circumstances unfavorable to mass mobilization. Properties of abeyance organizations help an organizational pattern to retain potentially dissident populations. My analysis of the women's rights movement in the postwar period suggests that the most relevant variables with respect to the abeyance process are: temporality, purposive commitment, exclusiveness, centralization, and culture. Since these variables are derived from a single case, each dimension is treated as a hypothetical continuum with respect to other cases.

Temporality. By definition, of course, an abeyance structure persists throughout time, but temporality refers to the length of time that a movement organization is able to hold personnel. Activism provides a community that is an alternative source of integration and, thus, can have an enduring effect beyond a particular period in an individual's live (Coser 1974; White 1988).

During the 70-odd years of the first wave

[1] This analysis of the leadership and core membership is based on a careful reading of archival material, particularly correspondence, as well as research in biographical sources. For 55 women identified as leaders and core members, information was recorded about race, class, education, occupation, age, place of residence, political affiliation, political views, marital status, presence and number of children, living situation, and time of first involvement in the women's movement. In addition, any comments made by participants about the social characteristics of the membership were noted.

of the women's movement, a number of women's rights groups emerged and provided alternative status vacancies for large numbers of mainly white and middle-class women (Flexner 1959; Buechler 1986; Chafetz and Dworkin 1986). Among the 55 leaders and core activists of the NWP, 53 percent had been recruited at least four decades earlier during the suffrage campaign.

For NWP members, early participation in high-risk activism (McAdam 1986), including picketing the White House, engaging in hunger strikes while imprisoned, and burning President Wilson's speeches, kept them involved long after the suffrage victory. Lamenting the passage of that period, Florence Kitchelt asked a fellow suffragist in 1959 whether she ever felt "as I do that the modern woman is missing something very thrilling, uplifting as well as unifying in not being able to take part in a suffrage campaign? Those were the days."[2] Katharine Hepburn, mother of the actress, in a speech to women's rights activists, described her experiences in the suffrage struggle. "That whole period in my life I remember with the greatest delight," she said. "We had no doubts. Life was a great thrill from morning until night."[3] Involvement in the suffrage movement had a powerful and enduring effect on participants, so much so that they continued even into the 1950s to promote women's rights in a society antagonistic to the idea. The strong and lasting effects of participation in high-risk activism is supported by McAdam's (1988) study of participants in the 1964 Freedom Summer project.

By the 1940s and 1950s, a core of women in the NWP had devoted a major portion of their lives to feminist activity. Typical participation patterns are reflected in the comments of two members. In 1952, one woman wrote, "Since 1917 I have devoted all my spare time to feminism."[4] Another woman asked in 1950 for a "cure for giving too much of one's time to one thing," although she still continued to devote herself to passage of the ERA.[5] Not surprisingly, the most striking characteristic of the NWP membership was advanced age. Isserman (1987, p. 24) found a similar age structure in another organization that provided continuity between two stages of mass mobilization, the American Communist Party in the 1940s and 1950s. Constant numbers—even if small—are better for morale than steady turnover, so temporality enhances the likelihood that an organization will continue to endure.

Purposive commitment. Commitment refers to the willingness of people to do what must be done, regardless of personal rewards and sacrifices, to maintain a collective challenge and is essential for holding an organizational pattern alive between stages of mass mobilization. Research on social movement involvement has focused primarily on the types of incentives that induce activists to make an initial commitment to a movement (e.g., Pinard 1971; Fireman and Gamson 1979; Oliver 1983; McAdam 1986). In exploring movement continuity, we must pose a different question: why do individuals maintain radical or unpopular convictions over time?

The few studies that have explored this question suggest that the nature of and incentives for commitment depend on a movement's stage in the mobilization process. Kanter's (1972) research on American communes concludes that groups characterized by high commitment are more likely to retain participants and to endure. Other research suggests that, although individuals may become activists through solidary or material incentives, continued participation depends upon high levels of commitment to group beliefs, goals, and tactics (Hirsch 1986; White 1988).

From its inception, the NWP appealed to women with strong feminist sympathies. By the 1950s, continued participation depended largely on the singleness of members' devotion to the principle of sexual equality embodied in the Equal Rights Amendment. Rejecting all other proposals for a feminist program, NWP leaders insisted that ideological integrity and the dogged pursuit of legal equality, not membership gain, would guarantee triumph.

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[2] Florence Kitchelt to Katharine Ludington, August 14, 1950, Florence Kitchelt papers, box 6 (175), Schlesinger Library (SL), Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[3] Katharine Hepburn, speech to the Connecticut Committee, n.d.[1946], Kitchelt papers, box 6 (153), SL.

[4] Betty Gram Swing to Ethel Ernest Murrell, October 3, 1952, National Woman's Party (NWP) papers, reel 99.

[5] Mary Kennedy to Agnes Wells, July 12, 1950, NWP papers, reel 97.

A dedicated core of NWP members worked for the ERA by lobbying Congress and the President, seeking endorsements from candidates for political office and from other organizations, establishing coalitions to support the amendment, and educating the public through newspaper and magazine articles, letters to the editor, and radio and television appearances. Commenting on the persistence of feminists' lobbying efforts, one Representative from Connecticut wondered in 1945 "whether or not the Congress meets for any other purpose but to consider the Equal Rights Amendment."[6] Since the NWP depended entirely on the volunteer work of members, commitment was built on sacrifices of time, energy, and financial resources. Recognizing the impact of such high levels of commitment, one new recruit commented that "the secret of the ability of the group to do so much in the face of such odds is that it can attract just such devotion and loyalty."[7]

Commitment, then, contributes to the abeyance process by ensuring that individuals continue to do what is necessary to maintain the group and its purpose even when the odds are against immediate success. Moreover, such intense commitment functions as an obstacle to participation in alternative roles and organizations.

Exclusiveness. Organizations vary according to their openness to members, some having more stringent criteria than others. Mizruchi (1983, p. 44) hypothesizes that the expansion-contraction of an abeyance organization's personnel occurs in response to changes in the larger social system's requirements for absorption, mobility, or expulsion of marginal populations. To absorb large numbers of people who are unattached to other structures requires organizations to be inclusive, as happens during the peak mobilization of social movement organizations. In cycles of decline, however, when challenging groups lack widespread attitudinal support, organizations become exclusive and attempt to expel or hold constant their membership. Zald and Ash (1966) contend that exclusive movement organizations are more likely to endure than inclusive ones.

At the peak of the suffrage struggle, the NWP was inclusive across the class and political spectrum (Cott 1987, pp. 53–55). It attracted wage-earning women from a variety of occupations as well as elite women social activists. Its members had ties to political parties, government, and industry, as well as to the socialist, peace, labor, and antilynching movements. But when the NWP launched its ERA campaign, many bodies organized on occupational, religious, and racial grounds and devoted to other policy issues began to absorb women from mainstream suffrage groups and siphon off NWP members. This left the NWP with a small and relatively homogeneous permanent core of feminists.

By the end of World War II, the NWP had lost most of its members and was not attracting new ones. Compared to its 60,000 members in the last years of the suffrage campaign, the NWP had about 4000 "general" members by 1945 and only 1400 by 1952. More revealing, it listed 627 "active" members in 1947 and 200 by 1952. Although the NWP also lost members as a result of an internal conflict over whether to expand membership in 1947 and again in 1953, the leadership preferred to keep the organization a small elite vanguard. As one member put it, "no mass appeal will ever bring into the Party that type of woman who can best carry forward our particular aims. We are an 'elect body' with a single point of agreement."[8]

Just as important, the membership of the NWP also grew increasingly homogeneous and socially advantaged over the decades. Of 55 core activists, 90 percent of the employed held professional, managerial, or technical positions. Several researchers have noted that intellectuals and other privileged groups are likely to be overrepresented among the leadership and supporters of neo-liberal and communal movements. Some have attributed this to the risks and resources that participation entails (Lenin 1970; McCarthy and Zald 1973; Oberschall 1973, p. 161), while others look to the unique political culture of intellectuals and professionals (Pinard and Hamilton 1988).

Despite the fact that the NWP leaders preferred a small homogeneous membership, they recognized the significance of size and diversity for public impact. In order to give

[6] Joseph E. Talbot to Florence Kitchelt, February 12, 1945, Kitchelt papers, box 8 (234), SL.

[7] Mamie Sydney Mizen to Florence Armstrong, October 25, 1948, NWP papers, reel 94.

[8] Open letter from Ernestine Bellamy to Ethel Ernest Murrell, May 24, 1953, NWP papers, reel 99.

the appearance of a mass constituency, the NWP devised certain strategies. Members maintained multiple memberships in women's organizations in order to win endorsements for the ERA; they established coalitions to give the impression of a large membership; they financed a "front" organization to give the appearance of cooperation between feminists and labor women; and they recruited leaders of the National Association of Colored Women in order to obtain its endorsement of the ERA. Yet, despite attempts to appear inclusive, the NWP did not seriously try to build an indigenous base of support.

Organizational exclusivity is closely related to the commitment variable. Organizations that insist upon high levels of purposive commitment and make stringent demands of time and financial resources cannot absorb large numbers of people. They are, however, good at holding constant those members that they have. Thus, exclusiveness is an important characteristic of abeyance organizations because it ensures a relatively homogeneous cadre of activists suited to the limited activism undertaken.

Centralization. Organizations vary in their centralization of power. Some operate through a "single center of power," whereas decentralized groups distribute power among subunits (Gamson 1975, p. 93). Although centralization contributes to a decline in direct-action tactics (Piven and Cloward 1977; Jenkins and Eckert 1986), it has the advantage of producing the organizational stability, coordination, and technical expertise necessary for movement survival (Gamson 1975; Wehr 1986; Staggenborg 1989).

By the end of World War II, the NWP functioned almost entirely on the national level with a federated structure in which local and state chapters had little control. State branches, which had been active in the 1920s, consisted in most cases of little more than a chairman and served the organization primarily as letterheads to use in lobbying senators and representatives.[9]

A national chairman headed the NWP. The Party's founder and leading light, Alice Paul, however, directed and kept a tight reign on its activities, even though she formally occupied the chair for only a brief period from 1942 to 1945. As one member described it, Paul "gave the chairman all deference. But if you were a wise chairman, you did what Alice Paul wanted, because she knew what was needed."[10] The chairman headed a national council that met periodically at the Washington headquarters. There was also a national advisory council composed of prominent women who lent their names to the group's work.

Paul, reputedly a charismatic leader committed to the point of fanaticism, maintained tight control over the ERA campaign. She decided when it was time to press Congress and when to maintain a low profile and, according to members' reports, worked from six in the morning until midnight. On at least two occasions serious conflict erupted over the lack of democratic procedures in the Party. It focused specifically on Alice Paul's autocratic leadership style and on the refusal of the national leadership to allow state branches to expand membership. A letter, circulated in 1947, contained charges typical of those directed against Paul: "You have made it clear that you consider yourself and the small group around you an elite with superabundant intellect and talents, and consider us, in contrast, the commonfolk."[11] Thus centralization of leadership, like exclusiveness, had the potential to provoke conflict among members. But it also had advantages in a nonreceptive political environment.

Paul used her influence to direct a small group of activists with highly specialized skills—lobbying and researching, testifying, and writing about policy issues—who viewed themselves as an embattled feminist minority. The NWP was able to finance its activities with some invested funds, dues, contributions from members, and revenue from the rental of rooms in its Washington property. As a result, activists did not have to expend energy generating resources to maintain the organization.

This kind of central direction allowed the NWP to sustain the feminist challenge through the years by concentrating on a single strategy that could be carried out by a dedicated band of activists with highly

[9] I use the term "chairman" because that was the term used at the time. It seems historically inaccurate to change this usage.

[10] Interview no. 2.

[11] Laura Berrien and Doris Stevens, "An Open Letter to Miss Alice Paul," Committee on Information, Bulletin No. 4, July 30, 1947, Katharine A. Norris papers, box 2 (7), SL.

specialized skills. Thus, centralization contributes to the abeyance process by ensuring the maintenance of organization and at least minimal activity during periods when conditions do not favor mass mobilization.

Culture. The culture of a social movement organization is embodied in its collective emotions, beliefs, and actions. Although all social movements create and bear culture, movement organizations vary in the character and complexity of their cultures (Lofland 1985).

The effectiveness of an organization with respect to its abeyance function depends, in part, on its capacity to motivate persons to assume certain positions. As the larger political and cultural atmosphere becomes less hospitable to the social movement, recruitment of personnel becomes difficult. In order to make participation more attractive, organizations must elaborate alternative cultural frameworks to provide security and meaning for those who reject the established order and remain in the group. Previous research suggests that the more highly developed an organization's culture, the more it offers members the satisfaction and other resources necessary for its survival (Kanter 1972; Lofland 1985).

The NWP developed an elaborate and expressive culture through activities at the Alva Belmont House, its national headquarters in Washington, D.C. Belmont House served not only as an office for national council meetings, but also as a center where lobbying efforts were coordinated and where the monthly newsletter was published. It also created the kind of female world essential to the maintenance of feminism (Freedman 1979; Rupp 1985). A few women lived at Belmont House and in two other Party-owned houses, while lobbyists stayed there from a few days to several months. In addition, Belmont House was the site of feminist events and celebrations: teas to honor women politicians or sponsors of the ERA, victory celebrations, and parties on Susan B. Anthony's birthday or on the anniversary of the suffrage victory. The activities and relationships women formed at Belmont House provided both ideological and affective support for participation in women's rights work.

Although NWP members believed in the pervasiveness of discrimination against women, the Party did not develop and advance a well-articulated ideological and theoretical position. Rather, feminism was defined principally through a culture that promoted a feminist worldview. One member expressed her world view, complaining of "Masculinity running rampant *all over the earth!*" and rebelling at the "utter man-mindedness" she saw all around her.[12] Alice Paul characterized women's rights advocates as sharing a "feeling of loyalty to our own sex and an enthusiasm to have every degradation that was put upon our sex removed."[13] Despite occasional conflict over whether men should be brought into the movement, the NWP retained a separatist strategy. To ensure that the Party remain committed to its original vision—collective action by women for women—wealthy benefactor Alva Belmont included a clause in her bequest revoking her legacy if men ever joined or participated in the organization.

In addition to reinforcing feminist beliefs, the culture harbored at Belmont House fulfilled expressive and symbolic functions that contributed to the survival of feminism. Women who lived and worked at the house became, for some, the "Woman's Party family." Many who could not live at the house, because of family, work, and financial constraints, made regular pilgrimages in order to remain a part of the women's community. One member wrote that she was "looking forward with joy to my return home, and *Home* to me now, means the dear Alva Belmont House."[14] In fact, bringing friends to Belmont House was the primary way that women recruited new members.

Personal ties of love and friendship among members were an important cultural ideal. A willingness to shape personal relationships around the cause was, in large measure, what made possible the intense commitment of members. NWP members described their ties as mother-daughter or sororal relationships, and members' letters to one another were

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[12] Rose Arnold Powell, diary entry, Nov. 2, 1960, Powell papers, box 1, v. 8, SL; Rose Arnold Powell to Mary Beard, June 23, 1948, Powell papers, box 2 (27), SL.

[13] Alice Paul, "Conversations With Alice Paul: Woman Suffrage and the Equal Rights Amendment," an oral history conducted in 1972 and 1973 by Amelia R. Fry, Regional Oral History Office, University of California, 1976, p. 197.

[14] Mary Alice Matthews to Alice Paul, March 24, 1945, NWP papers, reel 85.

filled with expressions of intimacy and friendship. Ties among members took the form of close friendships, intense devotion to Alice Paul, and couple relationships. Having another woman as life partner seemed to facilitate feminist work because these women's personal lives meshed well with their political commitments.

Movement organizations that cultivate and sustain rich symbolic lives, then, enhance the abeyance function by helping to hold members. This finding is consistent with other research that demonstrates that commitment to peers and to a shared political community promotes sustained involvement in social movements (Rosenthal and Schwartz forthcoming; McAdam 1988; White 1988).

In summary, I have described the NWP in the post-1945 period as an organizational pattern characterized by high longevity of attachment; intense levels of individual commitment to movement goals and tactics; high exclusiveness in terms of membership; high centralization that ensures a relatively advanced level of specialized skills among core activists; and a rich political culture that promotes continued involvement in the movement. This appears to be the ideal combination of factors necessary to hold a movement in abeyance until the external forces make it possible to resume a more mass-based challenge.

CONSEQUENCES FOR THE RESURGENT WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

However movement success is measured, the women's rights movement from 1945 to the mid-1960s was not successful in its own time. But a more important question is: what consequences, if any, did the actions of feminists in this period have for the revitalized movement for gender equality in the late 1960s? The founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 serves as a useful signpost marking the rise of the contemporary women's movement. NOW brought together labor union activists, government employees, and longtime feminist activists and took leadership of the liberal branch of the movement (Freeman 1975). At about the same time, younger women involved in the civil rights and New Left movement formed the more locally organized radical branch.

Studies have not generally recognized connections between the existing women's rights movement and the resurgent one. My analysis suggests three ways in which the activism of the NWP shaped the feminist challenge that followed. It provided preexisting *activist networks,* an existing repertoire of *goals and tactics,* and a *collective identity* that justified feminist opposition. These elements constitute the most important consequences of abeyance structures for future mobilization around persistent discontents.

Activist Networks

A substantial body of research documents the significance of preexisting links and organizational ties among individuals for the rise of collective action (e.g., Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson 1980; Freeman 1979, 1983; Rosenthal et al. 1985). The feminist network of the 1940s and 1950s affected the resurgent movement of the 1960s in two ways. First, activism by NWP members played a crucial role in two key events: the establishment of the President's Commission on the Status of Women, convened by President Kennedy in 1961, and the inclusion of sex in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which forbade discrimination in employment. Second, many women who participated in the struggle for women's rights in the 1940s and 1950s became active in the resurgent women's movement, especially the liberal branch. NWP members were among the founders and charter members of NOW. Of the 10 individuals who signed NOW's original Statement of Purpose, 4 were members of the NWP (Friedan 1976). In her account of the early years of NOW, founder Betty Friedan (1976, pp. 110–17) describes an "underground network" of longtime committed feminists who provided crucial resources necessary for the formation of NOW. Even Alice Paul joined NOW, although she criticized NOW members for acting "as if they've discovered the whole idea."[15]

Although less common, a few NWP members established ties to the radical branch. One member met with the women's caucus of the National Conference on New Politics in Chicago in 1967, a conference that helped spark the formation of the radical branch. Another member attended a speech

[15] Interview no. 12.

by Kate Millett at Purdue University in the early 1970s and handed out ERA literature to the crowd. Contrasting vividly the feminists of her generation with those of the 1970s, she noted that she was the only one there in a hat and that everyone else, including Millett, had long hair.[16] Thus a committed core of activists helped to provide resources for a resurgent more mass-based movement.

Goals and Tactical Choices

Tilly's (1979) concept of repertoires of collective action provides the greatest insight into the ways that actions of a challenging group at a given point in time can affect actions of a subsequent group. Thus, the forms of action available to a group are not unlimited but are restricted by time, place, and group characteristics. Movement goals and strategies are learned, and they change slowly. Extending Tilly's hypothesis, the array of collective actions that a movement develops to sustain itself should influence the goals and tactics adopted by the same movement in subsequent mass mobilizations.

This is indeed the case with respect to the American women's rights movement. Although the NWP abandoned disruptive and militant strategies after the suffrage victory, it retained the same goal—a constitutional amendment. Largely as a result of NWP pressure, NOW voted at its second conference in 1967 to endorse the ERA, which became the most unifying goal of the movement by the 1970s (Ferree and Hess 1985; Taylor 1989). Further, NOW adopted many of the NWP's institutionalized tactics, such as lobbying, letter writing, and pressuring the political parties. NOW even made use of the NWP's political connections and its list of ERA sponsors.

The ERA example illustrates the ways that existing repertoires of action can both facilitate and constrain a movement. The final campaign for the ERA in the late 1970s and early 1980s mobilized massive numbers of participants, swelling the ranks of NOW to almost 200,000 and its budget to nearly 3 million dollars (Gelb and Palley 1982; Mueller unpublished). During its early years, with its equal rights emphasis which appealed mainly to white and middle-class women, NOW alienated black and union women (Giddings 1984). Thus, the liberal branch of the contemporary women's movement, by adopting the goals and strategies of earlier feminists, found it difficult to shake the class and race limitations of its predecessors.

For a movement to survive periods of relative hiatus, it must develop a battery of specialized tactics that can be carried out by an activist cadre without the support of a mass base (Oliver and Marwell 1988). These become a part of a group's repertoire of collective action and influence the subsequent range of actions available to future challenges.

Collective Identity

Collective identity is the shared definition of a group that derives from its members common interests and solidarity. Although resource mobilization theorists minimize the importance of group identity and consciousness in the rise of social movements (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; Jenkins and Perrow 1977), these factors are central to theorists of the "new social movements" (e.g., Pizzorno 1978; Cohen 1985; Melucci 1985; Klandermans 1986). They suggest that, by definition, social movements create a collective oppositional consciousness. Mueller's (1987, p. 90) research on the women's movement suggests that changes in consciousness can have long-term significance because they can serve as a resource for future mobilization.

The creation of a shared collective identity requires the group to revise its history and develop symbols to reinforce movement goals and strategies (Gusfield 1970, p. 309–13). For the 1960s women's movement, the NWP, because of its ties to suffrage, became an important symbol of the long history of women's oppression and resistance. As a result of its historical significance and prime location, Belmont House was used throughout the 1970s for celebrations of women's movement history, as a temporary residence for scholars and students engaged in feminist research, and as a place for ERA lobbyists to meet. Moreover, Alice Paul, who earlier had sparked so many conflicts, became the quintessential symbol of feminist commitment. In 1977, NOW sponsored a birthday benefit for her at Belmont House that was attended by members of a wide range of

[16] Mary Kennedy to Alice Paul, February 11, 1971, NWP papers, reel 112.

feminist organizations. Even after Paul's death in 1977, the NWP continued to list her as founder on its letterhead and to advertise "Alice Paul Jail Jewelry," a replica of the famous jailhouse door pin proudly worn by imprisoned suffragists.

The significance of the NWP grew as younger and more radical women discovered the legacy of militant feminism. Even in 1981, the NWP's symbolic importance remained great enough to inspire an attempted takeover by a group of younger feminists, led by Sonia Johnson, who claimed the militants who first formed the NWP as their foremothers and even adopted the original name of the Party. Ironically, as the contemporary women's movement grew stronger and more militant, the actual heirs of the early militants grew increasingly isolated and less central in the struggle for women's rights.

In an abeyance phase, a social movement organization uses internally oriented activities to build a structure through which it can maintain its identity, ideals, and political vision. The collective identity that it constructs and maintains within a shared political community can become an important symbolic resource for subsequent mobilizations.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents new data that challenge the traditional view that no organized feminist challenge survived in the 1940s and 1950s. I have used the NWP case to highlight the processes by which social movements maintain continuity between different cycles of peak activity. I analyze the factors associated with adaptations of Mizruchi's (1983) abeyance process. Abeyance is essentially a holding pattern of a group which continues to mount some type of challenge even in a nonreceptive political environment. Factors that contribute to abeyance are both external and internal to the movement. Externally, a discrepancy between a surplus of activists and a lack of status opportunities for integrating them into the mainstream creates conditions for abeyance. Internally, structures arise that permit organizations to absorb and hold a committed cadre of activists. These abeyance structures, in turn, promote movement continuity and are employed in later rounds of mass mobilization.

Although any theory based on a single case is open to challenge, recent research points to the utility of the abeyance model for understanding other movements of the 1960s, particularly the civil rights (McAdam 1988), New Left (Gittlin 1987; Isserman 1987; Hayden 1988), and gay rights (D'Emilio 1983) movements. But this work has not yet had major impact on revising theory about the sixties movements or on social movement theory in general.

Why have scholars of social movements neglected sources of continuity between cycles of movement activity and, instead, preferred an "immaculate conception" interpretation of social movements? First, scholars generally are more interested in movements undergoing cycles of mass mobilization and have done little research on movements in decline and equilibrium. Second, the limited conceptualization of movement organization in the literature has perpetuated classical conceptions of social movements as numerically large and mass-based. Research on a variety of organizational forms, including becalmed movements (Zald and Ash 1966), professional movements (McCarthy and Zald 1973), movement halfway houses (Morris 1984), elite-sustained movements (Rupp and Taylor 1987), and consensus movements (McCarthy and Wolfson unpublished), is now challenging the classical view by suggesting that these types of movements are capable of sustained activism in nonreceptive political climates (Staggenborg 1988). Third, existing approaches overlook social movement continuity by neglecting to think about outcomes (Gamson 1975). Focusing on sort-term gains ignores the possibility that social reform proceeds in a ratchetlike fashion, where the gains of one struggle become the resources for later challenges by the same aggrieved group (Tarrow 1983).

The research presented above specifies the ways that organizational and ideological bridges span different stages of mobilization. Most movements have thresholds or turning points in mobilization which scholars have taken for "births" and "deaths." This research suggests that movements do not die, but scale down and retrench to adapt to changes in the political climate. Perhaps movements are never really born anew. Rather, they contract and hibernate, sustaining the totally dedicated and devising strategies appropriate to the external environment. If this is the case, our task as sociologists shifts from refining theories of movement emergence to account-

ing for fluctuations in the nature and scope of omnipresent challenges.

VERTA TAYLOR is Associate Professor of Sociology at The Ohio State University. She is coauthor with Leila Rupp of *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) and coeditor with Laurel Richardson of *Feminist Frontiers II: Rethinking Sex, Gender, and Society* (New York: Random House, 1988). In addition to her continuing interest in historical and contemporary aspects of the American women's movement, gender, and social movements and collective behavior, she is currently analyzing the emotional norms and experiences of early motherhood.

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