

FEMALE OFFICIALS IN THE FEMINIST CAPITAL: THE CASE OF SANTA CLARA COUNTY

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UNTIL RECENTLY, most studies of elected women in the United States have had a national or state focus,¹ in spite of the fact that most female officials serve at the county and city levels. In 1980, 15,320 out of a total of 16,136 female officeholders nationwide were in city and county governments. Furthermore, while women as a percentage of elected officials remained fairly constant between 1975 and 1980 at the congressional (3 percent) and state (10 percent) levels, their proportions doubled in county positions (from 3 to 6 percent) and tripled in municipal posts (from 4 to 13 percent) (CAWP 1981a).

Studies of women in local government began in earnest in 1975. In that year the Center for the American Woman and Politics (CAWP) conducted a national survey of women in municipal and county (along with state and congressional) offices (Johnson and Stanwick 1976). CAWP's 1977 survey included a comparison sample of male officeholders (Johnson and Carroll 1978). While there have been a few other reports from nationwide samples (e.g., Karnig and Oliver 1976; MacManus 1976; Welch and Karnig 1979), most of the literature on women in local office consists of case studies scattered throughout the country: Connecticut (Mezey 1978b, 1980a, 1980b); Westchester County, New York (Lee 1976); New York City (Van Hightower 1977); Pennsylvania (King and McAuliffe 1976); suburban Chicago (Merritt 1977, 1980); Houston (MacManus 1981); and Hawaii (Mezey 1978a, 1978c).

Enough cases and nationwide studies have been generated so that one can begin to find patterns in women's local-level officeholding and to draw comparisons with officials in higher positions. One of the most striking patterns to emerge at all levels is that, compared to men in office, women have distinctive recruitment patterns and attitudes (Johnson and Carroll 1978). While such differences do not emerge in every local study (see, for example, the mixed results in Stewart's [1980] anthology), they have been sufficiently consistent to draw scholarly attention to the precise nature of and reasons for such differences.

This article seeks to contribute to this line of inquiry through a case study of Santa Clara County, California. This area has gained media

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¹ See, for example, Chamberlin 1974, Darcy and Schramm 1977, Diamond 1977, 1979, Dubeck 1976, Frankovic 1977, Gehlen 1969, Githens 1977, Githens and Prestage 1979, Gruberg 1968, Kelly and Boutillier 1977, Kincaid 1978, Kirkpatrick 1974, Lamson 1968, Mandel 1981, Prestage 1977, Stoper 1977, Tolchin and Tolchin 1976, Welch 1978, Werner 1966, 1968, and Werner and Bachtold 1974.

attention as the "feminist capital of the nation" because of its impressive number of elected women, including San Jose's Mayor Janet Gray Hayes (1975-82) and female majorities on both the San Jose City Council and the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors (1980-present). Such majorities are extremely rare. In 1978 only *six* city councils had female majorities and only 6 percent of cities had female mayors (Welch and Karnig 1979). Because of these majorities, the area is a good test case of women's distinctive recruitment and attitudes. It is important to understand how so many women came to hold local public office and whether their majority status affected their understanding of women's doing politics differently from men.

In 1982 I conducted detailed, open-ended interviews² with local officials in order to determine women's recruitment patterns and political attitudes. As for recruitment, female candidates benefited from Santa Clara County's favorable political climate, effective women's organizations, and district elections. Confirming findings elsewhere, women were advantaged by an affluent, highly-educated and "clean government" electorate, and by effective women's groups. However, the importance of district elections for the success of female candidacies was a surprise. As will be discussed below, women have been thought to be slightly disadvantaged by such elections and advantaged by citywide races.

As for attitudes in office, women and men were equally supportive of women's issues, probably because both recognized the strong voting bloc of activist women in the county. However, female officials had distinctive conceptions of power and politics, which were voiced by feminists and non-feminists alike. Media attention to their numerical majorities caused them to reflect on women's way of doing politics differently. While a women's point of view on politics has been found in other studies, what was surprising here was the extent to which women spontaneously linked this point of view to their homemaking and childrearing experiences. The ease with which they made these connections can be attributed in part to the absence of restraints usually felt by women as token members of a social group (Kanter 1977). As majorities, they were under less pressure to conform to male norms and expectations and freer to voice a "female consciousness."

Our consideration of differences between female and male officials in Santa Clara County begins with a look at women's recruitment as a function of a favorable political climate, effective women's organizations, and district elections. We then turn to attitudinal differences: a women's point of view on politics and the significance of homemaking and child-rearing experiences.

² All direct quotes from local officials, as well as background information about them, is drawn from the following 1982 interviews, unless otherwise specified: Councilmember Blanca Alvarado (August 26), Supervisor Rod Diridon (July 21), Councilmember Nancy Ianni (August 11), Councilmember Shirley Lewis (October 6), Supervisor Zoe Lofgren (August 12), Councilmember Lu Ryden (August 18), Councilmember Pat Sausedo (September 27), Supervisor Susanne Wilson (July 22).

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THE FAVORABLE POLITICAL CLIMATE OF SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Santa Clara County, California, is located on the southwest edge of San Francisco Bay. Its over one-and-a-quarter million residents inhabit the suburbs around Stanford University, the industrial parks of Silicon Valley, the rapidly-growing metropolis of San Jose, and acres of former orchards and farmland. In recent years the national news media have referred to this area as the "self-proclaimed" feminist capital of the nation.³ This self-designation was first coined at a 1974 meeting of the San Jose chapter of the National Women's Political Caucus,⁴ in response to the election of Janet Gray Hayes as the first woman mayor of a city as large as San Jose,⁵ the election of Leona Egeland (D-San Jose) to the California Assembly, and the appointment of Geraldine Steinberg to the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors. In 1978, Mayor Hayes was reelected, Susanne Wilson won a seat on the county board, and a black woman, Iola Williams, was appointed to fill Wilson's vacant seat on the San Jose City Council.

Until 1980, the phrase "feminist capital of the nation" was used primarily for local consumption. But the area received national attention after the 1980 elections resulted in female majorities on both the city council (7-4) and the board of supervisors (3-2). In 1982, fourteen of the fifteen cities in the county had women on their councils, and four cities had female mayors (*San Jose Mercury News* 1982: 8-14). These gains are striking in a nation where women are only 6 percent of county officials and 13 percent of municipal officials. At their 1981 inauguration, Mayor Hayes welcomed the city council to "an auspicious, historic and exciting occasion" of taking over the fate of "the fastest growing city in the country and the feminist capital of the country" (Trounstine 1981b).

After Hayes' public baptism of San Jose, the media investigated the appropriateness of the city's new surname. The *San Jose Mercury News* concluded that only one of the new councilmembers was a feminist (Skipitares 1980).⁶ Councilmember Nancy Ianni remembered the day after she was elected, she was barraged by phone calls from the media about this issue. "With the first call I was curt — I did not run as a woman, I ran on an anti-growth platform. By the second call I was somewhat philosophical, and by the fifth call I was an expert on the subject! It was not part of my consciousness. It had to be brought to my attention." Many different meanings of the term "feminist" were tossed around: getting elected

³ See, for example, *Time*, 20 July 1981; *New York Times*, 15 July 1981; *San Francisco Chronicle*, 7 July 1981.

⁴ Interview with Ellen Boneparth, Professor at San Jose State University, 6 October 1982.

⁵ In 1974 San Jose's population was 540,000. The second-ranking city with a woman mayor at that time was Oklahoma City (population 366,000). Chicago's Jane Byrne and San Francisco's Dianne Feinstein became mayors in 1979.

⁶ This article's headline is misleading because none of the three female county boardmembers was quoted in the article and at least two of them, Susanne Wilson and Zoe Lofgren, did not shun the term feminist. Councilmember Shirley Lewis was the one exception mentioned as a "soft-line feminist."

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because of one's female sex, representing women only, representing honesty and integrity, forming a natural political coalition based on sex, and supporting equal rights and opportunity for women. While few observers accepted Hayes' "feminist capital" characterization at face value, many suspected that it did contain a kernel of truth. Something had to account for the impressive number of elected women, however imperfectly they embodied a feminist consciousness or agenda.

During the 1970s, female candidates in the area benefited from two trends: environmentalism and post-Watergate desire for clean government. Environmental concerns resulted from two decades of rapid, unplanned growth, which transformed the prewar agricultural "Valley of Heart's Delight" into the postwar electronic "Silicon Valley."⁷ By 1980, San Jose was the fastest growing major U.S. city. The area's economy created some 40,000 new jobs yearly. Unemployment rated well below the state average, and the county's median income, \$23,370, ranked highest in the nation. But local services — sewers, parks, schools, libraries, streets, fire protection — could not keep pace with the rapid growth, leapfrog annexation, and increasing traffic congestion and air pollution in the area.

Among those championing the environment were many women homemakers and volunteers whose husbands held secure professional jobs. Because of the association in Santa Clara County between male candidates and the growth machine of a booster political elite, which had spearheaded the postwar economic boom that benefited developers, women were able to take leadership roles in environmental issues. Economically secure, they were viewed as beyond the developers' reach, and called for managed growth. Many women first tasted electoral politics by bringing neighborhood "quality of life" concerns before their city councils. Their sense of obligation to provide safe streets, adequate schools and other services was embodied in Mayor Hayes' 1974 campaign slogan, "Let's Make San Jose Better Before We Make It Bigger" (Barnacle 1974).

A post-Watergate dissatisfaction with male politics as usual also contributed to voter willingness to give women a try. According to Supervisor Susanne Wilson, being a female candidate has gone from being a liability, to being neutral, to the point where it is now an edge in Santa Clara County. San Jose State University Professor Terry Christensen agreed that being a female candidate was an asset. He said that in a recent race, a local pollster found that female candidates had an advantage over male candidates.⁸

Voters apparently wanted a change from male politics as usual in the 1980 election, especially insofar as that change meant managed growth and less corruption. Five women joined Mayor Hayes and Councilmember Iola Williams on the San Jose City Council — Blanca Alvarado,

⁷ This discussion is drawn from Pacific Studies Center 1977, Sharpe 1983, Siegel 1982, and Trounstein and Christensen 1982.

⁸ Interview with Terry Christensen, Professor at San Jose State University, 26 August 1982. He referred to Robert Lee from Capital Data Communications, who conducted a poll for Susan Hammer's (successful) campaign against Tony Estremera for the third district seat of Tom McEnery, who won the 1982 mayoral race.

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Nancy Ianni, Shirley Lewis, Lu Ryden, and Pat Sausedo — giving women a 7-4 majority. And joining Susanne Wilson on the county board were Rebecca Morgan (who replaced retiring Geraldine Steinberg) and Zoe Lofgren, giving women a 3-2 majority.

In addition to the trends of environmentalism and clean government, female candidates also benefited from the area's affluence, political culture of risk-taking, and absence of machine politics.

There is evidence from other studies that women are more likely to be elected to city councils in affluent and well-educated communities (Karnig and Welch 1979), and that educated and affluent men are more supportive than other men of women entering roles previously closed to them (Harris 1972:18). Santa Clara County residents were among the most affluent and highly-educated in the country. The county's 1980 median income was the highest in the nation, and in the early 1980s, one out of every six Ph.D.s in California worked in Silicon Valley's more than one thousand high tech companies (Sharpe 1983).

The female officials themselves reflected this affluence. While most of them had been employed at some point, they were married to husbands with secure enough incomes that they had the option to rely on those incomes exclusively. Three women were solely homemakers; Supervisor Morgan quit her job as a vice-president at Bank of America to run for office; and Councilmember Ryden sold her talent agency just before her election. In keeping with the national profile (Johnson and Carroll 1978), these women were typically newcomers to political office; ran for their first office in their mid-forties; had teenaged children and a supportive husband; and were more likely to be Democrats than Republicans. While these women were well-remunerated relative to their counterparts nationwide, their salaries were considered to be paltry by county standards, especially given the full-time nature of the work.

The local political culture was one of experimentation and risk-taking, a "can do" climate (Trounstein and Christensen 1982), with fewer biases against women's abilities than in more traditional areas like the South (Lansing 1974). Its folk heroes were men like Bill Hewlett and David Packard, two engineers who in the late 1930s got a \$1,000 loan to produce audio oscillators in a Palo Alto garage. "Hewlett-Packard's first big order came from Disney Studios, which wanted nine oscillators to produce stereophonic sound for *Fantasia*. H-P not only grew to be the world's largest manufacturer of electronic measuring equipment, but it became a pace-setter and leader of Santa Clara County industry" (Pacific Studies Center 1977: 5).

Affluent professionals as a group are among the most likely to vote and be otherwise active in electoral politics (Hill and Luttbeg 1983). Reflecting this fact, the county had a very high electoral turnout rate. For example, in the 1978 "off-year" election, 72 percent of county voters came to the polls (Swan 1980), well above the 46 percent national turnout that year (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1982-83:493). Also, as a group, affluent professionals are among the most likely to support clean government measures like nonpartisan elections, and to oppose urban machine politics.

At the turn of the century, Santa Clara County merchants and professionals challenged the Republican Southern Pacific Railroad machine by introducing a reform local government. And a 1911 amendment to the California Constitution made all local elections nonpartisan to reduce the power of Southern Pacific machine politics (Trounstone and Christensen 1982). While party machines have traditionally relied on women as office workers, they have rarely slated them as candidates for office (Lamson 1968; Porter and Matasar 1974). The Pacific region of the nation, which has a strong Progressive reform tradition, has a higher proportion of elected female local officials (18 percent) than the national average (13 percent) (CAWP 1981b). Unlike their counterparts in Frostbelt cities, Santa Clara County women did not have to contend with machine resistance to their candidacies.

In sum, women in local government in Santa Clara County both reflected and benefited from the area's environmentalism, desire for clean government, affluence, political culture of risk-taking, and absence of machine politics. Given this climate of minimal voter resistance to female candidacies, what organizational support did these women rely upon in their quest for political office?

EFFECTIVE WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Prior research has found that female officeholders have more organizational ties than do their male counterparts. Such affiliations provide women with the constituencies, expertise and reputations which men have characteristically gained through their professional degrees and occupational ties (Johnson and Carroll 1978:18A).

Organizational ties were extraordinarily important to female officials in Santa Clara County.⁹ Their "recruitment ladders" looked very different from those of male officials, with some exceptions: Supervisors Zoe Lofgren and Rebecca Morgan had law and business affiliations, respectively, and Lu Ryden was recruited by the local Republican party. Mayor Hayes volunteered for several civic organizations and was active in the Parent Teachers Association (PTA), League of Women Voters (LWV), American Association of University Women (AAUW), and her neighborhood association. Her first appearance before the San Jose City Council was as a mother protesting lack of traffic signs near neighborhood schools. While Supervisor Steinberg was a member of the State Bar Association, she also belonged to community and adolescent services boards, and to LWV and the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC). Supervisor Wilson was active in California Elected Women's Association for Education and Research (CEWAER), the Democratic party, LWV, AAUW and NWPC. As for council members, Iola Williams was active in school organizations; Pat Sausedo worked for her neighborhood homeowners' group; and Nancy Ianni was a former president of her neighborhood association and a former LWV boardmember.

⁹ Information on local officials' organizational affiliations is drawn from interviews and from CAWP 1978.

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These women belonged to feminist organizations in a greater proportion than the national average of 4 percent; however, they confirmed earlier findings that membership in feminist groups is more likely among Democrats in larger districts (Johnson and Carroll 1978:12A). Almost all of them were Democrats, and their city districts contained about 63,000 citizens, and county districts about 259,000. Half of the women in this study were affiliated at some time with the local NWPC chapter. Lofgren's views about the NWPC were typical: "Several people convinced me to run very late in the game. The NWPC gave me one of my biggest contributions (\$2,000). Their help made a difference. I did not run as a feminist in that race [1980 supervisorial] but I did discuss my feminism with NWPC."

In her 1974 mayoral race, Janet Gray Hayes was endorsed by NWPC, which, along with other grassroots groups, was instrumental in her narrow victory (1.3 percent of the vote) over former police officer Bart Collins, a pro-growth conservative. Then-councilmember Hayes also benefited from the fact that, beginning in 1974, local elections were held on the same day as state and federal elections. This shift to concurrent elections in San Jose resulted in a quadrupled voter turnout: in the 1973 run-offs turnout was 16 percent, in 1974 it was more than 60 percent. This increase advantaged Democrats, who outnumbered Republicans two-to-one in San Jose (*San Jose Mercury News* 1982:17). Hayes had the support of "homeowner and neighborhood association activists, environmentalists, liberals and the city's emerging feminist organizations. The minority community also rallied somewhat reluctantly to her support, appalled at the prospect of an ex-cop as mayor" (Trounstein and Christensen 1982:104). Hayes called her election "a real victory for the people. It represents over 1,000 volunteers who went walking and talking for me all over the city, representing the most massive citizen participation in a San Jose election that I know of" (Skipitares 1974).

For Councilmember Ianni, the League of Women Voters was indispensable to her political career. The League has been an important training ground for about one-fifth of female local officeholders and more than two-fifths of female state legislators (Johnson and Carroll 1978:61A). The League provides information; skills in research, debate, and public speaking; and a network of mentors, role models, and moral support. Ianni's description of the role of the League, in conjunction with her neighborhood and secretarial experiences, provides an interesting account of how the various factors discussed thus far about local women in general came together in her particular case.

Three kinds of organizational experiences prepared me for the post. (1) The League of Women Voters, which I joined rather late, only after they decided to admit men, because I was tired of all-women organizations. A former President of the League was my mentor. She never ran for office herself, but she helped many other women. To this day I ask myself, now what would Margie do in this situation? She died of cancer two months after I won the primary. The League was very active in city issues. In fact, it organized my neighborhood association. (2) The Neighborhood Association is where I got my organizing and political skills. This is an

all-volunteer organization, which is concerned with overall planning issues. (3) I was secretary to the director of Stanford Electronics Products, where I learned managerial skills dealing with professors who see themselves as little emperors. Between this and the Neighborhood Association I learned to deal with all kinds of people and personalities. There are a lot of women managers in the Valley, which is used to seeing women in this important role as decision-maker. So it is not difficult to see them in political office.

Women like Ianni were confident that their non-traditional recruitment via women's groups and neighborhood associations provided *bona fide* organizational skills for public office. Merritt (1977: 736) found the same pattern in her study of candidates in nonpartisan races in Cook County, Illinois: female civic volunteerism was the functional analogue to male occupational success.

However, this assessment was not universally shared in the case of Santa Clara County politics. Some felt that female officials were seen by the public and by local economic elites as "naïve housewives" lacking competence and professionalism. For example, Trounstine and Christensen's (1982:116) study of the San Jose power structure quoted a local influential who referred to councilmembers as "housewives who get the political bug." And Supervisor Rod Diridon connected women's competence problem to their lack of business experience.

The industrial community feels it can "run the housewives." They feel they can play on the housewife elected official's lack of experience in the business world. They can dominate and impose their wills, both through sweet-talking and through coercion and veiled threats. I have seen it happen. The women are impressed and intimidated by wealthy individuals. But this is due more to their lack of exposure to the world of commerce and business than to their being women. Women with business backgrounds are less intimidated. Men in the business world have more opportunities for policy experience prior to officeholding than do women who are housewives with little organizational experience.

In sum, virtually every woman interviewed in this study took umbrage at being characterized as naïve and inexperienced. Even though they, like most female officials nationwide, were new to elective office, they were confident that their organizational affiliations provided sufficient training for political office. These women were more likely than their counterparts nationwide to belong to feminist organizations, which may have contributed to their belief that male organizations were not the only ones to provide *bona fide* political skills. They felt they had prepared for political office in a different, but equally legitimate way. Throughout the 1970s, these organizations were training grounds which created a pool of women eligible for office. What tipped the scales in their decisions to seek public office in San Jose was the advent of district elections in 1980.

DISTRICT ELECTIONS

Studies of local elections have determined that electoral structures (i.e., district vs. citywide elections) affect the likelihood of minority group

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representation in local posts. For example, blacks do better in district elections than in citywide races (Karnig 1976; Karnig and Welch 1978). In fact, where there are district elections, blacks are represented in office almost proportionately to their numbers in the electorate (Karnig and Welch 1978). Given the concentration of minority groups in certain neighborhoods in most cities, and given the lower cost and easier candidate visibility in district elections, minorities stand a much greater chance of being elected in district elections, which reward community organizing and downplay the need for expensive citywide media exposure.

Given these findings, one would expect that women as a group would also be advantaged by district elections' relatively low cost, greater candidate visibility, and rewarding of grassroots organizing. However, it has been found that electoral structure has only a negligible impact on women's election to city councils, and, if anything, women do slightly better in citywide races (MacManus 1976; Welch and Karnig 1979). Karnig and Walter (1976) speculate that voters might be more likely to support women in a multi-member race because it is not a zero-sum choice for the voter (i.e., voting for a woman is not perceived as voting against a man). By contrast, electing a single member from a district is a zero-sum choice: voting for a woman is not choosing a man. Thus, voter sex discrimination is more likely to surface in district elections than in citywide ones, where voters might be more willing to allow a token woman in a field of a half-dozen or so candidates.

It is not clear exactly why female officials are slightly more likely to be found in cities with citywide races. It is also puzzling why female candidates do not benefit from districting. One explanation is that, unlike minority groups, women's constituency is not concentrated in discrete urban districts, but rather spread evenly throughout the city. However, it would seem that this fact would be far outweighed by the combined effects of neighborhood and women's organizations, and districting's reduced costs and greater name recognition without extensive reliance on the mass media.

These latter effects benefited the women who ran for the San Jose City Council in 1980. Throughout the 1970s, a coalition of minority, feminist and labor groups tried to convince voters that the high cost of citywide campaigns had resulted in the two most affluent neighborhoods producing 78 percent of all councilmembers between 1950 and 1975. Some neighborhoods, like the Hispanic east side, had never had a councilmember reside in their area. By 1978 many of the city's 118 neighborhoods and homeowner groups joined the coalition's efforts and, in that year, voters approved district elections beginning in 1980 (Trounstine and Christensen 1982:105).

In 1978 it cost over \$100,000 to run for a citywide council seat. Dividing San Jose into ten districts of 63,000 each was expected to reduce this cost considerably. In 1980 primary campaigns were run for \$5,000 and less, and the general races were in the \$20,000 to \$40,000 range. Three incumbent councilmembers — Jerry Estruth, Tom McEnery and Iola Williams — won sizable majorities in the primaries. There were

runoffs in the remaining seven districts, each of which featured a woman running against a man (Trounistine 1980).

Each of the five women who joined the San Jose City Council for the first time in 1980 said that she would not have run in citywide elections, which were seen as too costly and time-consuming. While these women were not comfortable appealing to the 630,000 citizens of San Jose, they felt they had something to say to their own districts. District elections enabled neighborhoods to be heard, and most neighborhoods chose women to represent them. Several officials noted that if the voters had been presented with a list of all the council candidates, odds are that they would not have elected a majority of women to the council. But with each district voting on a separate pair of candidates, electors did not express a preference for a desired composition of the overall council. While no one voter was attuned to the possibility of electing a female majority, it is also true that five of the seven districts chose a woman over a man.

The neighborhoods electing women included those with: two of the highest median incomes (Ryden's and Lewis'); a record for producing more city councilmembers than any other (Ianni's); the highest ethnic concentration in the city — 43 percent Hispanic and twelve percent black (Alvarado's); and the city's biggest proportion of open space (Sausedo's). For each of these women, districting dovetailed with her perception of representing her neighborhood, in such a way that she was encouraged to make her first bid for elective office.

For Councilmember Pat Sausedo, the key neighborhood concern was planning its remaining open space.

District elections had a considerable effect on my decision to run this early. I was president of the homeowners association when the planning commission seat opened up and I went through the trauma of public interviews and got the appointment. I was on the commission two and one-half years. Without districting I would not have run so soon. I knew the district, and I knew increasingly more about the city from being on the planning commission. But I might not have run at all without districting.

She did not feel she was elected to represent women per se.

I feel strongly that those women who were elected won because they worked hard and because they convinced the voters they were serious about issues and representing everybody, not just women. We're there to represent everybody. I'm not a feminist. I'm a woman and I don't need titles.

Councilmember Blanca Alvarado was concerned with representing the Chicano community. She was the first Hispanic woman and second Hispanic to be elected to a council seat in San Jose. While acknowledging that the feminist movement had contributed to the acceptance of women in professional careers and enabled women to come out from working behind the scenes for men, she felt more excited to be the first Chicana on the council than to be part of the feminist capital. She saw her victory as an extension of the political goals of the Chicano community. She had been active in community politics since 1948, beginning with voter registration

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drives and including eight years in the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA). "I was a member of the Charter Review Committee which spent two years studying districting. I would not be here if it weren't for district elections. I would not have run at-large because it is too intimidating and too costly." While seeing herself as an advocate of the Hispanic community in general, she took particular pride in educating young Chicanas about local politics. And she pointed out how her campaign for the council was conducted by Hispanic women volunteers and aided by the Chicana Coalition, a group of local Chicana activists (with some Anglo members).

Both Lu Ryden and Nancy Ianni decided to run for office after reading in the newspapers about who was running in their districts. Ryden was upset at the thought of a young leftist representing her district, and Ianni was put off by the idea of "developer pawns" representing her neighborhood. Councilmember Ryden gave her response to districting as follows:

The Republican Party was trying for two months to convince me to run and I was hesitant. Finally in January 1980 I read in the newspaper who was running in my district and I said, "I don't feel represented by these people." One was a college kid about the age of my son. The other was a young Jane Fonda-type. My opponents got all the group endorsements and they had been running for over a year. I owe my election victory to the power of prayer, a slick brochure I put out, the postcards I sent out to constituents the day before the election, and my getting out and talking.

Councilmember Ianni's response to districting was also coupled with her reaction to who would be representing her:

Name recognition and money determine who gets elected. You can't get name recognition in a city this big. I decided to run when I realized that districting would wipe out all I had worked for because the two other candidates were pawns of the developers. One had been on the council for years and was pro-growth, and the other candidate got \$30,000 from the developers in the primary. I ran on \$15,000.

Finally, Councilmember Shirley Lewis saw crime and traffic as the major concerns of her neighborhood. She had worked as an aide to the city council, where she gained specific knowledge, skills and awareness. She said that she had always loved city government but was too intimidated to run until districting reduced the venture to a more accessible scale.

District elections played a big role. I would not have run in city-wide elections. I wasn't ready for that. The district has 63,000, and the city has 630,000 residents. City-wide elections are too costly, take too much time, and campaigning is difficult. I will probably run again. People have talked about grooming me for state-wide elections. But I like San Jose and would like to see a lot more happen here. At this point I see no need to go on to Sacramento or Washington, D.C. I am a native, addicted to San Jose and family, and I like that accessibility.

While Lewis was the only self-described feminist of this group, by the time she joined feminists like Iola Williams and Janet Gray Hayes on the council, there was a critical mass of feminists for the council, the public and the media to reckon with. District elections in San Jose did not help feminists per se, but they were indispensable to the election of a female majority to the council. How did the female majorities on the city council and the board of supervisors affect male politics as usual?

A WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW ON POLITICS

Given the favorable political climate and their numerical majorities, female officeholders were free from the problems which typically beset token women. Most female officials find themselves in what Kanter (1977) calls a "skewed group," consisting of numerical "dominants" and rare "tokens" in roughly an 85-15 ratio. She argues that, in such groups, tokens' visibility generates performance pressure; their polarization causes dominants to heighten their group boundaries; and their assimilation leads to their role entrapment. For example, tokens frequently downplay their visibility by tolerating self-deprecating male humor and performing the gate-keeping function of excluding other women. Compared to dominants, tokens typically work twice as hard, spend more time resolving problematic interactions, and experience more stress.

These pressures were felt much more acutely by local women when they numbered only one or two among their male colleagues. According to Supervisor Rod Diridon, when Geraldine Steinberg first joined the all-male county board, she was initially dismissed as "just a woman" and not taken very seriously. She had to earn the respect of male boardmembers and eventually she succeeded in "reeducating" them to undo their traditional expectations about women. Mayor Hayes constantly referred to her "historic" precedent-setting, and Supervisor Wilson spoke at length about the implications of being the "second woman" on both the San Jose City Council and the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors (to be elaborated upon below). Relieved of these pressures, how did local women engage in a politics different from men?

Prior research has revealed the existence of a women's point of view on politics that has two aspects: distinctive issue positions and a different way of doing politics. The 1977 CAWP survey described female officials as having more liberal and more feminist issue positions when compared to male officials (Johnson and Carroll 1978: 35A, 39A). As for a different way of doing politics, many female officials described themselves as more approachable, trusted, responsive to constituent needs, persistent, committed, knowledgeable about the community, seeking of information, understanding, patient, skilled in effecting compromises, sensitized to the needs of women and children in the community, empathetic, and humanizing. Women saw these characteristics of women in office as equal or superior to those of men in office (pp. 40A-42A).

To begin with issues, whether one is studying male or female politicians, it is difficult to determine how a professed support of women's

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issues translates into particular cases of policy-making. One such attempt was Mezey's (1978c) case study of women and men who held or ran for office in Hawaii in 1974. She found that more women were feminist (i.e., more sympathetic to a political role for women), but that they did not show greater support for feminist policy positions when asked to rank order issues. She concluded from this that "simply counting female noses in political decisionmaking institutions does not provide a barometer of support for women's policy issues" (p. 384). But she qualified this conclusion with the observation that perhaps because at the time of her study many of these women were newly elected or appointed, they did not want to stand out as advocates of women without more support from their constituencies.

The importance of constituency support was born out in the Santa Clara County case, where politicians perceived an activist female voting bloc. According to local NWPC activists, that group's endorsement was sought by both radical and mainstream candidates. "They have bought the idea that 'feminist capital' means that there is a bloc of women voters out there."¹⁰ "We were surprised. Someone in a recent election did a poll and in fact an endorsement from women's groups came out very high in the poll."¹¹

Newly elected women are also probably more likely to speak out on women's issues if they sense support from their female colleagues on the board or council. For example, Supervisor Zoe Lofgren noted that women on the board of supervisors formulated issues as women's issues during board meetings. She said that women reminded their male colleagues that poverty was a woman's issue (especially older women), and so was the effectiveness of the District Attorney's Family Support Office.

In this supportive climate, local male officials as well took leadership roles in women's issues. For example, beginning in 1975, Supervisor Rod Diridon convened annual Women's Congresses of local feminists to assess the policy needs of women. Such efforts resulted in policy improvements for victims of sexual assault; in equal rights for rental housing for families; and in job sharing and flexible hours in county government. The major issues raised at the 1982 Congress were abortion rights, child care, child support collection, and comparable worth.¹² Councilmember Jerry Estruth was on the advisory board of WOMA, a battered women's shelter, and both he and councilmember (now Mayor) Tom McEnery were NWPC members.

An examination of a few key votes shows that male officials were as supportive as female officials when it came to the County Commission on the Status of Women, comparable worth, and funding battered women's shelters. These are discussed in turn.

¹⁰ Interview with Fanny Rinn, Professor at San Jose State University and NWPC member, 24 May 1983.

¹¹ Interview with Sarah Janigian, aide to Supervisor Susanne Wilson and NWPC member, 26 July 1983.

¹² This account is based on minutes provided by Supervisor Diridon's office and Stell (1982).

In response to sustained grassroots feminist pressure, an all-male board of supervisors set up the Santa Clara County Commission on the Status of Women in 1973. For nearly a decade the Commission was a powerful anti-discrimination force in the county, handling some 500 sex discrimination complaints a year. However, in 1982 a female-majority board of supervisors approved budget cuts which severely curtailed the Commission's activities. In 1982 county officials were faced with a \$57 million deficit and, as Supervisor Rebecca Morgan put it, "We are at the point where we are almost cutting mandated programs. We are morally and legally obliged" to cut the optional ones first (Meyerson 1982). The two male supervisors were as reluctant as the women to preside over the demise of the Commission.

A second important issue area was comparable worth, or equal pay for jobs of equal value in order to bring the salaries of female-dominated jobs in line with salaries of comparable male-dominated jobs. The nation's first strike over this issue took place in San Jose in July 1981.¹³ A two-year study which assigned points to city job classifications had found that male-dominated jobs averaged 8 to 15 percent *above* a "trend line" (i.e., the average pay for jobs of equal points), while female-dominated jobs averaged 2 to 10 percent *below* the trend line (some as much as 20 percent). A strike was called when the city employees union rejected the city's offer to have male jobs currently paid at or above the trend line forego a raise to fund the pay equity adjustments for female jobs below the trend line. An agreement was reached after nine days, with the city agreeing to a \$4 million general pay increase and to set aside \$1.4 million over two years to raise pay in 62 female job areas to within 10 percent of the trend line.

What difference did the female majority make in this issue? Mayor Hayes maintained that the council bargained in good faith "within our budget limitations, keeping faith with our taxpayers" (Sweeney and Trounstine 1981). She said, "I'm proud to be mayor of the city that took the first giant step toward fairness in the workplace for women. This day will go down in history as the day so-called 'women's work' was recognized for its inherent value to society" (Trounstine 1981a). As for the rest of the council, it was unanimous in its support for Plan A, which offered a general pay increase over two years, but would have put the issue of pay equity on the November ballot for voter approval. Plan B, which was the basis for the final agreement with the union and allocated city monies to redress pay inequities, split the council. The final vote was 8 to 3, with Councilmembers Claude Fletcher, Lu Ryden, and Pat Sausedo opposed. The rest of the women on the council — Shirley Lewis, Blanca Alvarado and Iola Williams — all voted in favor of the settlement, as did Mayor Hayes and three male members. So men on the council actually supported pay equity at least as strongly (3:1) as did their female colleagues (5:2).

A third issue area, county funds for battered women's shelters, had the support of both male and female boardmembers. For example, in 1982 budget considerations, the County Executive recommended terminating

¹³ This account is drawn from Bunzel 1982, McGuire 1982, and Trounstine and Swan 1981.

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county funds for two battered women's shelters — WOMA at \$25,000 and Midpeninsula Support Network at \$15,000. But the Board of Supervisors unanimously added back to the budget both amounts in full (Ellenburg 1982).

While male-female policy differences were not as strong as other studies would lead us to expect, local officials' perceptions of a distinctive women's way of doing politics were more in keeping with findings elsewhere. Other surveys have found that female officials, when asked to compare themselves with their male counterparts, said they devoted more time to the job (Johnson and Carroll 1978), were better at human relations aspects of the job (Johnson and Carroll 1978), and were more approachable, less concerned with power, and more humane (Mezey 1978a).

Some Santa Clara County officials said there were virtually no male-female differences along these lines. However, a significant number did make one or more of the following observations: women were better at constituency service (Ryden), more honest (Lofgren, Wilson, Alvarado), less likely to interrupt during meetings (Lofgren), more empathetic (Wilson), more sensitive and compassionate (Alvarado, Wilson), more idealistic (Diridon), more courteous (Lofgren), better listeners (Councilmember Jim Beall, quoted in Sharpe 1983:76), and more understanding (Sausedo).

Some officials even went so far as to describe a distinctive female understanding of power. County Executive Sally Reed characterized women's power as less authoritarian and more supportive, collaborative and respectful of intuition (Sharpe 1983:76). Councilmember Shirley Lewis said, "Male power means force and domination. Women use consensus, validation, cooperation, in a win-win direction." And Councilmember Lu Ryden described female power as softer and non-competitive.

We are softer, more compassionate, yet still firm. We can be firm without going overboard by being strident and hard. Soft does not mean weak. It means we can make things more palatable. There are advantages to being a woman in business and politics: we can get our way, not by batting eyelashes or anything like that, but by using methods men cannot use. Men always feel they have to compete with each other. Some women are just as masculine and competitive. Men relate to men on a different level. I don't compete like them.

Other studies which have found similar differences caution that such differences tend to disappear when one controls for female officials' ambition and employment. Merritt (1980a) found in her study of a matched sample of suburban Chicago city councilmembers that ambitious women were as competitive as men. Only less ambitious women had a public service, League of Women Voters approach to politics. Merritt (1980b) also found that working women spent less time with constituents than did their non-employed female colleagues. Employed women were more likely to see themselves as having modes of influence on the council similar to men (e.g., expertise, persuasiveness). And while both sexes

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agreed on major issues facing the city, nonworking women were more likely than working women to express an interest in social issues.

The implication of Merritt's findings is that as women enter the workforce and seek political careers, their attitudes and behavior are likely to become more like men's. As two-income families become the norm, the well of volunteer housewives, beyond the pale of corruption and concerned with social issues, will dry up. As one Montgomery County, Maryland, activist put it, to keep government honest, there must be a group of educated people who are wealthy enough and willing to spend hours serving the government in low-paying or volunteer jobs to prevent things from being swept under the table. "You go back to the old notion of *noblesse oblige*. . . . Who has the time to go to council meetings day and night? Only those who don't work . . . I call it the tyranny of the leisure class. Maybe it's the privilege of the middle class" (Sugawara and Richburg 1983).

However, there are other, less class-bound, possibilities. Local offices could be remunerated sufficiently so that women could afford to live on their salaries. Shirley Lewis raised this as a campaign issue in her 1980 council race. The private sector could increase the number of flexitime jobs, making it easier for employed women to hold public office as well as work. The employed men in this case study had jobs with flexible hours, for example, stockbrokers and consultants. Finally, public offices could be altered to consist of more predictable and less erratic hours, which would facilitate office-holding for mothers with young children. Lee (1976) found in her study of political participants in Westchester County, New York, that one of the main factors keeping women from public office was the presence of young children. Children were not an obstacle to the time women devoted to party activity in general because meetings could be planned ahead and child care could be arranged. By contrast, public office involves unpredictable hours, and, in a society where child care is still seen as primarily women's responsibility, men get a head start in public office and it is hard for women who enter office in their forties to catch up to men.

Until such changes in child care, flexitime and salary structures are brought about, women will have to proceed by trial and error. A case in point was Supervisor Zoe Lofgren, who brought her infant to the office and to board meetings. Having worked as a congressional aide, law partner, and law professor, she said, "The only two weeks I have spent at home were those following the birth of my child. I have never been solely a homemaker. . . . It did not work bringing the baby to Board meetings. After one disaster, my mother took over until the baby was 3 or 4 months old. I never took my six months maternity leave because no one can vote in my place."

In sum, local officials' perception of a voting bloc of activist women in Santa Clara County enabled them — women and men alike — to take policy leadership roles on women's issues. However, some women and men maintained that there was a distinctive women's way of doing politics. It remains to be seen whether women will retain their distinctive way of

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doing politics as their ambition and employment patterns come to resemble those of men. While many of the differences between male and female officeholders mentioned in this case study have been observed elsewhere, unique to the area was the extent to which women spontaneously linked such differences to their homemaking and childrearing experiences.

HOMEMAKING AND CHILDREARING SKILLS

As mentioned above, virtually every woman interviewed took umbrage at being characterized as "housewives with little organizational experience," or "housewives who got the political bug." As Lu Ryden responded to the latter depiction:

I don't agree with that characterization, which makes it sound like women went straight from the apron in front of the stove into politics. These women were first activists in their neighborhoods who got frustrated and said, "Somebody has to do something and I will." Being a concerned housewife enabled them to get into neighborhood groups in the first place.

Running a household was seen by some as providing women not only with the motivation to become involved in community politics, but also with bona fide management skills useful in politics. Councilmember Shirley Lewis, a former adult education teacher, applied for a job as a neighborhood center superintendent in 1972, and was told that a woman with six children couldn't handle a job and family too. "Was I mad! I was one of the two finalists and at the interview they raised my having six kids. I figured that if I managed six children then I had certain management skills. Plus I was already working full time!"

Councilmember Iola Williams had seven children. In her case, her husband did most of the cooking, cleaning, and housework. But she said raising seven children gave her a keen sense of distinguishing political maneuvering from legitimate demands. As the first black on the San Jose City Council, Williams said that she had been asked for

almost everything from the black community. And I know it is important that they have access to the mainstream. I fill as many demands as I can and I don't worry about unrealistic expectations. I have to face me in the mirror and nobody else.

When people appear to attack me, I know it isn't me they are attacking but what I represent. I go out and meet the people. I hear them and I make sure they hear me too. I get frustrated with people who don't want to be confused with the facts. But I know when political maneuvering is going on. Any mother of seven will recognize that. (Boquist 1980)

One official spoke (not for attribution) of how a few years earlier Mayor Hayes was quoted in the *San Jose Mercury News* as saying that of course she could handle the job as mayor because she had experience with nine-year-olds at birthday parties. "She got criticized for that. People said she was implying that voters were like children. But I knew exactly what she meant. I understood that grown men are not that different. Women are good at solving constituent problems because they are good problem solvers at home."

Councilmember Shirley Lewis spontaneously tied women's parenting skills to women's sense of power as consensus, validation and cooperation.

I think there are positive childrearing skills. I recently heard someone negatively use the term "parenting," which I see as a complimentary process. We should give credit for parenting skills. I used to teach parent effectiveness. What is most important is to respect the child, which leads to respectful adult relations and effectiveness. There is too little respect in this world, especially the work world.

Finally, Councilmember Pat Sausedo argued that women were better than men at representing a neighborhood because they were more in touch with its day-to-day activities, while men's concerns were more far-flung and impersonal.

Women are forced to deal with down-home realities of husbands and kids, getting the dinner and the sitter; while men leave home behind when they go to work. So women have a greater ability to understand. They are not as slick. They are more personal and better at one-on-one. This is good because these qualities have been missing from politics. Male professionals provide a slick package: briefcase in hand they bustle in and out. They get into the machine mode and lose their identity. Women do not do this because they go home to laundry, cooking and necessities. They do not lose that down-home touch. Men forget how involved a neighborhood is.

What these women seemed to be saying was that household and childrearing practices gave women valuable skills which they felt deserved to be brought into the political arena: an insistence upon mutual respect, consensus decision-making, validation of the feelings of others, and non-competitive power. It is clear that these women, feminists and non-feminists alike, had reservations about imitating male politics as usual and that they took their cues for an alternative politics from their everyday life practices.

Recent scholarship has examined how women's everyday experiences in the historic sexual division of labor give rise to a distinctive female consciousness with implications for women's political activity (e.g., Ackelsberg 1984; Gilligan 1982). One such study with particular relevance to the Santa Clara County case is Kaplan's (1982) consideration of female consciousness and collective action in Barcelona in the early 1900s. She argues that the city's sexual division of labor gave rise to a female consciousness of women's responsibility to preserve life. In a parallel fashion, Santa Clara County women saw their role in the gender division of labor as one of preserving the quality of life in their neighborhoods. Concomitant with their responsibility, Barcelona women saw certain political rights accorded to them as a group. Similarly, Santa Clara County women used their quality of life responsibility as a justification for their right to represent their communities in public office. For Barcelona women, "female concerns," mediated by women's physical proximity to each other (e.g., in plazas, churches, markets, laundries, neighborhood associations, etc.), gave rise to political action.

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For Santa Clara County women, women's groups and neighborhood networks catapulted them into political office, and their physical proximity to each other once in office as a majority precipitated changes in their consciousness as women. Consider the role of neighborhood networks as described by Councilmember Pat Sausedo. She attributed her election to her experiences in a local homeowner's association, working on issues such as placing a fire station on a residential street and the controversial building of a multifamily complex in her neighborhood. When she saw the latter structure, she realized that she had been lied to during her earlier inquiries about the project. "But I was just an armchair quarterback raising three kids and realized that if I complained I had to act to change things. Through the homeowners' group, I went from cause to constituency."

Once elected to office, women's proximity to each other, coupled with media attention to their majorities, led to an increased female consciousness on their part. They recognized a connection to the women's movement, which had made it easier for them to be seen as legitimate candidates, and to which they felt an obligation regarding future women candidates. The local leader in this respect was Supervisor Susanne Wilson. She was the "second woman" on both the city council and the board of supervisors, joining Janet Gray Hayes on the council in 1973 and Geraldine Steinberg on the board in 1978. She had been instrumental in Steinberg's appointment to the board in 1974; in Iola Williams' appointment to replace her on the council in 1978; and in Sally Reed's appointment as county executive in 1981.

When I was approached by women to run in 1973, my name was known because of my experiences with the YWCA but the politicians did not see me as viable. I was green and ran on energy, guts and friendships. Networking has always been important to me. I admire women's competence. I am not jealous of other women. There is a lot of room at the top. I've worked with women from the start — church, Cancer Society, YWCA — and they networked me into office.

I came to politics with a perspective and goals: to eliminate racism and sexism. I am comfortable using the term feminist to describe myself, usually in talking to people in a one-on-one basis rather than in taking on larger issues like boycotting groups that use the University Club [an all-male club]. It is important to always be clear about *why* you feel the way you do. It is a mistake when feminists do not do this. You should avoid making the other person feel wrong. I get teased all the time, but they know where I stand and a sense of humor keeps it light.

Even non-feminist Lu Ryden, who said that her being a woman was not an issue for local Republicans when they recruited her for the city council race, felt "indebted to those women who forged ahead of me. They took abuse, showed nerve and were not afraid. I admire anyone who forges new trails. While I don't agree with anything people like Friedan and Steinem say, I do admire them for coming out."

In addition to local officials who were comfortable non- or pro-feminists, were those like Councilmember Nancy Ianni, for whom media

attention to the feminist capital caused her to reflect on women's political activity in a new way.

It was not part of my consciousness. It had to be brought to my attention. I got more philosophical about the issue. I began to realize how proud I was of the women who ran against the men. I owe a lot to those who came before me. They did a good job and made it easier for me. I am not a leader in the women's movement. . . .

I have really been thinking about what you said [in an earlier talk to the local LWV chapter] about the tension between radicals and pragmatics in the women's movement. I am a pragmatic implementer who used to resent the committed ones in the spotlight. But now I recognize that the two are not incompatible. In fact, both are needed. I want to move in the issue direction. Those who give fiery speeches at council meetings, without concrete proposals or doing their homework, are at least raising and publicizing the issue so there is no going back. Maybe the women's movement will produce more women who can have both skills: issue raising and implementation. . . .

I have shifted from seeing the feminist capital as irrelevant to seeing it as a source of pride.

However, there was also the case of Mayor Janet Gray Hayes, for whom the significance of the feminist capital seemed to have altered in the opposite direction: from pride to irrelevance. As noted earlier, at the 1981 inauguration, she welcomed the women councilmembers to "an auspicious, historic and exciting occasion." She said that the time had come for women leaders after a decade of women's laying the groundwork. "The groundwork has been laid by those of us who have been given the opportunity for leadership positions and have done a creditable enough job to encourage other women to step forward" (Skipitares 1980). While this statement recognized a connection between the efforts of women, it also narrowed the meaning of feminism to getting women elected to office. Once enough women had forged the trail, feminism was irrelevant to local politics.

Very clearly this is a valley where people are willing to take a chance. They did take a chance on me as the first woman mayor of a metropolitan city. The climate here is one of tolerance, innovation, risk-taking, and uniqueness. It's gotten beyond the feminist issue now. Every one of the women on the council have had to run against several men. Clearly, they were the better candidates. . . . It's only when the men are sympathetic and supportive that we are going to make certain gains. (Sharpe 1983:75)

So women's "female consciousness" ran the gamut from viewing women's "traditional" activities as providing a unique contribution to politics; to developing an increased appreciation of the women's movement; to articulating an instrumentalist view of women's entrance into male politics as usual. While the latter two views are commonly found in studies of women elected officials, the first remains a provocative addition to an ongoing debate about the origins and value of women doing politics differently from men.

CONCLUSION

The Santa Clara County case study adds to the recent, but growing, literature about how local female officials' recruitment and attitudes differ from those of men. As for recruitment, certain factors were found to be favorable to women's candidacies: (1) the nature of the electorate (affluent, highly-educated, predominantly Democratic); (2) the area's political structure (district and concurrent elections, absence of machine politics); (3) the area's political culture (fluid, risk-taking); (4) effective organizations (both women's groups like the League of Women Voters and the National Women's Political Caucus, and neighborhood/homeowner groups); and (5) the historical period (no-growth environmentalism and a post-Watergate desire for clean government).

With regard to attitudes, while there were few policy differences between male and female officials, women spoke of their distinctive conceptions of power and politics. It remains to be seen whether such differences will persist as women's political ambitions and career patterns come to resemble those of men. Certain patterns indicate that these women may resist the temptation to imitate male politics as usual: (1) the value they placed on household experiences as bona fide preparation for public office; (2) a local tradition of women networking other women into office; and (3) the persistence of female majorities which increased officials' female, even feminist, consciousness.

This study demonstrates that women were advantaged by district elections. Perhaps in the absence of strong neighborhood associations women would not fare so well. But given that districting already benefits minority women in particular, its features of lowered campaign costs and rewarding grassroots organizing should make it an attractive electoral structure for women elsewhere.

Finally, this study has shown that when women comprise the majority on a local government board they are likely to express a sense of connection to the women who forged ahead of them and to their female colleagues. They share a common understanding of power, not as force and domination, but as cooperation based on consensus and mutual respect, features of their homemaking and childrearing experiences which challenge the practices of male politics as usual. Whether such an understanding is proffered by female majorities in local governments elsewhere around the nation is a subject worthy of future inquiry.

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