CHAPTER X

THE QUESTION OF EQUALITY: WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

> *If I were asked . . . to what the singular prosperity and growing strength of that people [the Americans] ought mainly to be attributed, I should reply: to the superiority of their women!*
>
> —Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

Speaking in public can be a terrifying business. As I noted earlier it tops lists of the things many people fear the most, heights, spiders, being squeezed into little places and even snakes. There is also evidence that this is especially true for minority groups and (at least until very recently) for women.[1] Even more than attendance *at* town meeting, therefore, verbal participation *in* town meeting serves as a poignant test of the degree to which real, face-to-face talk democracy discriminates against what in many ways remains one of American democracy's most important "out" groups, women. By extension it can be reasoned that if such discrimination exists for women at town meetings, it would for members of other groups whose "traits" identify them as different from the majoritarian political culture.

---

[1] Behnke and Sawyer found, for instance, that in a two-week period preceding oral presentation female speakers demonstrated higher anxiety patterns. Ralph R. Behnke and Chris R. Sawyer, "Anticipatory Anxiety Patterns for Male and Female Public Speakers," *Communication Education* 49 (April 2000): 187-195. Others have found that "females generally report more communication anxiety than males [Myron W. Lustig and Peter A. Anderson, "Generalizing About Communication Apprehension and Avoidance: Multiple Replication and Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality* 5 (Special Issue 1990): 309-340] and boys are more comfortable speaking in class than girls." [John A. Daly, Pamela O. Kriesler and L. A. Roghaar, "Question-Asking Comfort:

INTRODUCTION

When the Census count of 1990 was taken the federal government could only find 214 people living in Mount Tabor, Vermont, and local people did the counting. It is one of the state's very smallest towns and former home and headquarters of its first millionaire, lumber king Silas L. Griffith. There is only one manufacturer in town and they make wreaths. There is also a service station, a landscaper, three contractors, an electrician, and a cemetery.   In 1992 115 of the 147 registered voters (78 percent) went to the polls in the general election. Bill Clinton got 45 votes, President Bush got 41, and Ross Perot got 28. There was one write in. In 1988 the turnout was 76 percent. Two years earlier in 1986 the off year it was only 57 percent.

In between in 1987 the town held its annual town meeting on Monday night March 2. There were 28 in attendance, 21 percent of the 135 registered voters. Twenty-one percent was above average for that year. But it was remarkably below average given the size of Mt. Tabor. A town with only 135 registered voters was expected to have 36 percent of them in attendance at town meeting. It should have had 49 in attendance not 28. With just size taken into account it ranked 11th from the bottom of the list of 93 meetings studied in 1987. When all the variables that might affect attendance either way (like the fact that the meeting was held at night with officers elected by Australian ballot the next day) were controlled, Mt. Tabor gained only two notches and ranked 13th from the bottom.

The school meeting began at 7:30. The first participation was by an officer of the school district, a woman, Mrs. Hedvig E. Gaiotti.[2] She participated six times on Article 3, the school budget.[3] Next to speak was a town lister, Olaf Nielsen. He was followed by one of the town auditor's, Anne Crosby. She was followed by five men. Then came a third woman, Bea Olsen. Robert Gasperetti followed her and was the last new person to speak during the school meeting. During the town meeting four other people joined the discussion. One of these was the last woman on the list of participators, Mrs. Mabel Gaiotti. In all four of the 16 participators (25 percent) were women.

These four women participated 36 times, nine times during the school meeting and 27 times during the town meeting. The 12 men at the meeting spoke 150 times, 28 times during the school meeting and 122 times during the town meeting. Thus the women in the Mt. Tabor town meeting made up 39 percent (11 of 28) of those in attendance, they made up 25 percent (4 of 16) of the group that participated and they accounted for 19 percent (36 of 186) of the participations. This chapter is concerned primarily with this kind of verbal participation. On both measures (percent women speaking and percent of participations by women) Mt. Tabor was well below average for the year. We need to know why. To do this more precise measures will be developed. The ratio of

---

[2] Mt. Tabor is another of the very few towns that report the names of the people who attended in the minutes. This was how her name was listed. Because of reasonably good minutes, the work of Andrew Tufts, the student who went to Mt. Tabor that year and the fact that I know the town well, I was able to piece together the actual names of everyone who participated in the meeting. (I saw my first wild black bear there in the summer of 1962 while hiking up to Lost Pond to fish.) A year earlier I had married the daughter of two of the town's leading citizens Anne and Goodwin Crosby – one of the best things that ever happened to me. Accordingly I spent a lot of time in that part of Rutland County for many years. Andrew Tufts, "The 1987 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Mt. Tabor," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March, 1987); Town of Mt. Tabor, Edward D. Risdon, Town Clerk, "Proceedings Mt. Tabor Town and Town School District Meeting, March 2 & 3, 1987," (Mimeograph, 1987).

[3] The first two Warning items were for election of town officers that would take place the next day by Australian ballot.

women present who participated compared to the *ratio* of men present who participated is one of these. At the end of the chapter verbal participation will be combined with attendance (discussed in the preceding chapter) creating a new variable measuring total women's involvement at town meeting.   The dimensions of this combination and the correlates of its variance will be treated.

DIMENSIONS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

The town of Mt. Tabor's town meeting in 1987 produced one of lowest women's involvement scores of the year, -1.88 when the mean was .12, the minimum was -2.62 and the maximum was 2.31. (I'll discuss how this measure was constructed later.) The very worst town for women that year was Corinth, which bumps up against my hometown of Newbury from the west. Only 19 percent of the participa*tors* were women and they made only six percent of the participa*tions*. Up in the Kingdom that year, however, in the town of Newark (see Chapter IV) women had a majority of the participators (53 percent) and a majority of the participations (51 percent). Nearby Kirby almost did as well, falling a hair below Newark on both measures. Over on the clay bottom of Lake Champlain farm country (good hay, not so good corn) the town of Leicester's meeting had more women speaking than men and women came close on equaling men on participations too, 47 percent.

Further north in the same broad valley where Franklin County borders Canada the women at the town meetings of Sheldon and Bakersfield out participated men with less than half the participators. The town of Sandgate is in the southwest corner of the state. This is where Captain Daniel Shay of Shay's rebellion fled to live out his days as a hermit when things went poorly for him in Massachusetts. When Shay lived in Sandgate the population reached 1000. By the time they

opened the 1987 town meeting for business on March 3, 1987, it was down to less than 300. Only 36 percent of the participators were women. But they issued 58 percent of the participations more than any of the 93 towns in the 1987 sample. Making sense of these kinds of variations for about 1400 meetings in 210 different towns is the task ahead.

What the Participation Looks Like

After eliminating 45 cases with missing data, 1393 town meetings remain for which we are able to know precisely how many women participated verbally and how many times each participated. A quick scan of this array of meetings shows that on average 16 women participated once or more in town meeting. Adding up the times each woman spoke produces an average of 49 participations per meeting. For purposes of our conversation I will refer to the act of making at least one participation as "speech" and the number of times one speaks as "talk." There is wide variation in these numbers. Sometimes feminine voices were almost never heard. Other times they were in the majority. In the Massachusetts border town of Stamford, up in the hills just southeast of Bennington College, only two women participated in the 1978 town meeting; one twice and the other once. In 1986 on Vermont's northern border next to Canada two women spoke at the Swanton meeting, each but a single time. The most women speaking at a single town meeting was 44 in Warren in 1988. This group participated 254 times. Fairfax had 40 in 1990 and the Kingdom town of Burke had 38 in 1991.

How this kind of data looks for the entire sample of meetings can be seen in Figure X-A. The number of women speaking follows the track of a normal bell-shaped curve almost perfectly, although it is skewed a bit on the upper end. (See Plot 1.) There, in almost disquieting simplicity, is

the only record the world has of women's participation in direct, open, legislative democracy. The

Greeks, it will be remembered, did not consider women citizens. The two central cohorts of 255 and

252 meetings averaged between 13 and 16 women speaking. These account for over one-third of the

1393 meetings in which data were available. The numbers drop off on either side of this central

tendency in a way that would warm the heart of the most ardent statistician.

       The number of participations, women's talk at town meetings, produces a normal

distribution less well. A substantial number of meetings (almost ten percent of the total)

demonstrate a threshold level of participations that compresses the left side of the alignment. Plot 2

of Figure X-A also shows a good number of meetings with very high levels of participation that

stretch the high end of the distribution out of proportion. This often happens with data that are

closed on one end and open on the other. The central cohorts (there are three) contain 765

meetings, 55 percent of the total. These meetings average between 20 and 60 acts of open

participation by women. About one hundred meetings averaged one hundred acts. About one

hundred meetings averaged seven acts.

<div align="center">[FIGURE X-A ABOUT HERE]</div>

       Plots 3 and 4 provide a better understanding of the relationship between speech and talk

among women and add perspective to the nature of women's participation in town meeting.

Expectedly, Plot 3 demonstrates the obvious. As the number of women increases the number of

participations does too. The number of female attenders explains 46 percent of the variation in the

number of female participations. Think of the figure as a slanted histogram of the number of

participations whereby the cohorts are defined by the number of women speaking at town meeting.

fig 10 A

The slope is substantially linear. Every increase of 10 women at the meeting increases the number of female participations by 3.4.

Plot 4 graphs a random cluster of 150 meetings (about ten percent of the entire sample) which lets more light filter through the distribution and demonstrates how individual cases mark the boundaries of women's participation. There are meetings like Richford's in 1980 and Stamford's in 1978 where only a handful of women participators averaged only a few participations each and there are meetings like the one in Orange in 1986 where a lot more women chalked up a lot more participations but each women who participated averaged about the same number of participations as did the women of Richmond and Stamford. Warren, Washington, and Elmore are towns that had meetings where a large number of women spoke a lot more often than their numbers would predict and Westford, and Guildford had meetings where many more women participators averaged fewer participations than expected. Stannard in 1989 and Granville in 1987 had few women speaking but those who did talked a lot. Shoreham and Wolcott had meetings where similar numbers of women speaking talked less. In this sample of meetings participators explain 28 percent of the variance in participations. Again, the relationship between the increase in the number of speakers and the number of participations these speakers produce is reasonably linear with a slope predicting that every increase in ten participators produces about 32 more participations.

What we really want to know, of course, goes far beyond these figures. How does women's participation compare to men's? Are the numbers low for women in some meetings and high in others because participation in general is low on the one hand and high on the other? Or is it the case that women's participation is independently low in one place and independently high in the other? To answer these questions we need to compare the number of women participating to the

number of men participating and the number of men's participations to the number of women's

participations. When this is done it is obvious that women's participation does increase with men's.

But there is a lot of slack between the two. The total number of men participating in a meeting

explains only twenty percent of the variance in the total number of women participating. The same

is true for participations. As the total number of male participations increases so too does the total

number of female participations. But male participations explain only 24 percent of the variance in

female participations. (See Figure X-B.)

[FIGURE X-B ABOUT HERE]

Plotting the distributions between men and women participation in town meeting also shows

the gap between male and female activity. On average there are 28 men speaking and only 16

women. Thus the average percent of women speakers (36) is substantially lower than the average

percent of women in attendance which was 46.[4] The steep straight line in Plot 1 of Figure X-B

represents the line of perfect equality between the sexes on speech. Any meeting falling on the line

has as many women speaking as men. The Kingdom town of Bloomfield had such a meeting in

1971 with eight men and eight women speaking. The ski town of Warren had one in 1987 with 38

women and 38 men speaking at least once. Meetings above the line have more women speaking,

meetings like Plainfield and Worcester in 1997 and Holland and Elmore in 1998. Meetings below

the line have less. The huge majority of meetings fall below the line. Some meetings like

Wilmington in 1970 and 1971, Swanton in 1986 and Hyde Park in 1978 are dramatically below the

---

[4] Rosner found the same thing happening in the Israeli Kibbutz. One of the reasons he gave for this was the lack of women officeholders since officeholders generally spoke more often than rank and file attenders. Menachem Rosner, *Participatory Political and Organizational Democracy and the Experience of the Israeli Kibbutz* (Haifa: The University of Haifa, 1981): 13-14.

fig 10 B

line. The regression line summarizes the data and shows that for every ten additional men speaking at a town meeting the best prediction is that there will be about three additional women speaking.

The relationship between total male participations and female participations is a bit more complicated because the two do not vary in quite such a fashion. The ratio of women's talk to men's begins to decline a bit as participations by men increases. Nevertheless the fundamentals noted with speech reappear for talk: women talk a lot less than men and, although both increase together, if one were to use the amount of men's talk to predict the amount of women's talk for any individual meeting the error in the estimation would be large. But these kinds of displays often provide clues to the nature of and indeed even the existence of linkages between the cases they feature. Note the cluster of meetings in the town of Belvidere that rank very high on female participations compared to men's. Seven Belvidere meetings dominate an area of the scatterplot where the participations by women are not only above the line of expectation but also near or above (4 of 7 are above) the line of female/male equality. This indicates there may be instances where the town can predict feminine involvement in real democracy.

Figure X-C gives us a better look at individual meetings by focusing on the 96 meetings studied in 1985 and 1986. This two-year cluster approximates the statistical parameters of the entire sample. The steep diagonal line across each distribution represents the point at which women's participation equals that of men. In all but four of the 96 meetings in the sample there were more men participating than women. In all but six meetings there were more participations made by men than made by women. Walden, a little town in the Kingdom whose most famous pond is named

Cole's,[5] led the list for women speakers. There in 1986, 23 women participated at least once compared to only 15 men (Plot 3). A year later south of Walden about forty miles in the highlands of the eastern range of the Green Mountains women in the town of Orange outtalked men 125 participations to 101 (Plot 2). In only two meetings of the 96 were both speech and talk greater for women than for men. One was Orange in 1986. The other was Belvidere in the same year. Belvidere, discussed above, is located in northwest Vermont and through which the famous "Long Trail" of the main range of the Green Mountains snakes its way toward Hazen's Notch and the Commonwealth of Canada which lays beyond.[6]

[FIGURE X-C ABOUT HERE]

These scatterplots show that the meeting with the most women speaking (Orange in 1986 with 35) also had more women speakers than men but that the town with the most female talk (Huntington in 1986 with 145 participations) actually had less female talk than male talk, since men spoke 258 times. The comparison of Swanton and Chester also is meaningful. Swanton's low feminine speech level occurred in a meeting in which the number of men participating was far above average. There were 35 men participators in Swanton and only two women. But in Chester, where the speech and talk levels for women were, like Swanton, very low, the talk *gap* between

---

[5]Cole's Pond is known throughout the north country for its shoreline dance hall, Cole's Pond Casino. There on a dirt road north of Walden Four Corners soft summer night melodies of long ago were carried by country fiddle, piano and guitar across the still water and into the deep timber of our most precious memories. I still return to Walden from time to time. Out there in the midnight mist over Cole's Pond thoughts of my own youthful days of callused hands and perfumed nights waltz slow but clear to the rhythm and the words of yesteryear's last dance: "Let me call you sweetheart. I'm in love with you. Let me hear you whisper. That you love me too."

[6]Belvidere is known by Vermonters as the last town in the state to have an unpaved state highway pass through it. The little town fought desperately for years to keep it that way and finally lost the battle with the state's highway department in 1980.

fig 10 C

men and women, although far from equal, was significantly smaller (three to fourteen) than it was

for Swanton.

It is this ratio that is of most concern for it establishes the disparity between the sexes on

participation in direct, open democracy. Frequency distributions of the percent of participators that

were women and the percent of participations that were made by women are in Figure X-D. Both

statistics conform to the expectations of a normal distribution. Both emphasize the fact that while

women's attendance *at* town meeting may be approaching parity with that of men, women's

participation *in* town meeting is far from equal.[7] In only 105 of 1393 meetings were more than 50

percent of the participators women. In only 73 of these meetings were more than 50 percent of the

participations made by women. Overall women had 36 percent of the speech at town meeting and

only 28 percent of the talk. They had 46 percent of the attendance.

[FIGURE X-D ABOUT HERE]

But these data do not tell the whole story. It could be that some part of these unequal ratios

of women to men in town meeting speech and talk reflect the inequality in attendance. You can't

talk if you're not there. First of all it is true as one might expect that the greater the percentage of

women attenders the greater is the percentage of women participators and participations. But it is

evident in the bivariate distributions in Figure X-E that this relationship lacks traction. The cloud of

---

[7] In a study of over 400 respondents in Madison, Wisconsin, Jack M. McLeod and his colleagues discovered that while anticipated attendance at public issues forums in the Madison area showed no gender bias, willingness to speak out at such a forum was higher among men than among women. Jack M. McLeod, Dietram A. Scheufele, Patricia Moy, Edward m. Horowitz, R. Lance Holbert, Weiwu Zhang, Stephen Zubric, and Jessica Zubric*,* "Understanding Deliberation: The Effects of Discussion Networks on Participation in a Public Forum," *Communication Research* 26 (December 1999): 743-774.

fig 10 D

cases in Plot 1 demonstrates that for every increase in ten percentage points of attendance for women the percentage of the participators that were women increased by only about six points. For every increase in ten percentage points of attendance for women the increase in the percentage of talk was about the same. (See Plot 2.) Put another way, the regression line in Plot 1 predicts that if women attenders participate at the rate the data suggest, women would need to account for 70 percent of the attendance in order to have 50 percent of the speakers. Similarly Plot 2 shows they would have to have 80 percent of the attenders to achieve half the talk.

[FIGURE X-E ABOUT HERE]

Moreover, these slopes are strewn with feisty residuals. Female attendance accounted for only 17 percent of the variation in female speech. There is Underhill in 1996 with 30 percent of the attenders and 59 percent of the speakers. There is Newark in 1998 with 94 percent more speakers than their attendance would predict. Lunenburg in 1980, Worcester in 1997, Canaan in 1990 and Williamstown in 1984 are other examples where the women of a meeting outdid expectations generated by the regression equation. On the negative side Richford's women were vastly underrepresented at the 1980 meeting of that border town. They accounted for only 21.5 percent of the attenders. To make matters worse only eight percent of the speakers were women. This was less than half of what they should have had given the pattern between female attendance and female speakers established by the other 1392 meetings. In Norwich in 1970 women had almost 65 percent of the attendance. This means they should have had about 48 percent of the speakers but they had less than half that. In Charlotte's 1984 meeting there were enough women present (68 percent of the total) to generate half the speakers. But they produced only 38 percent. Variation above and

fig 10 E

below the slope of the relationship between attendance and talk is even worse. (See Plot 2 of Figure

X-E.)

On the other hand much more of the disparity between speech and talk (the fact that 35

percent of the speakers are women but only 29 percent of the participations are made by women)

can be accounted for by speech itself, the willingness (or unwillingness) to speak out even once.

Figure X-F demonstrates this nicely. The slope produced by the regression line when the percent of

total women participators is correlated with the percent of total participations made by women

shows that for every increase in ten percentage points of female speakers the percentage of

participations made by women increases by about nine percentage points. This suggests that the

likelihood that each woman who speaks at all will speak as much as each man who speaks at all is

greater than the likelihood that those women who attend will speak as much as men who attend.

We know that speaking out in a public meeting is harder the first time than subsequent times. Once

the ice is broken, however, women are as apt to speak a second time as are men. The problem is

breaking the ice. Also, the residuals are better behaved. There are some noteworthy outliers like the

meetings in Sandgate, Huntington, Victory, Panton and Shoreham on the positive side and

Lunenburg, St. George, and Westfield on the negative. But overall the relationship (as one would

expect) is quite tight. Almost 65 percent of the variation in women's talk is explained by their

willingness to speak at all.

[FIGURE X-F ABOUT HERE]

The final step is to combine speech and talk. The percent of women present who participate

is a good place to start. This will take women's attendance out of the equation and leave a pure

indicator of women's proclivity to speak at town meeting. But we still need to know whether or not

fig 10 F

this percentage is high or low. It might simply reflect the meeting's overall participatory inclination. This problem is solved with a ratio: dividing the percentage of female attenders who speak by the percentage of male attenders who speak. To factor in talk (the willingness of women to participate more than once compared to that of men) a ratio will also suffice: the average number of participations made by women participators divided by the average number of participations made by men participators. This tells us how many times the average woman who speaks *at* all will speak *in* all in relation to the times the average man who speaks at all speaks in all. When the ratio is greater than one those women who spoke did so more often per person than those men who spoke. If it is less than one, women who speak do so less often each than the men who speak.

Table X-A shows how these data work out for the three best and the three worst town meetings for women's participation on both measures. At town meeting in the town of Underhill in 1996 there were 46 women and 104 men present. This means that Underhill was far below average on women's attendance that year. Yet 26 of the 46 women (56 percent) spoke at least once compared to only 18 of the 104 men (18 percent). Thus the percentage of women speaking was more than three times that of men–the ratio was 3.27 in favor of women. This was the best of the of 1387 meetings. Washington and Lincoln had meetings that ranked second and third on speech for women. About twice the percentage of women in attendance spoke than men in attendance. The two worst occurred in Swanton in 1986 and in Wilmington in 1971. In Swanton only two of the 81 women in attendance spoke while 35 of the 133 men did. In Wilmington, unlike Swanton, the women outnumbered the men but very few of them spoke. The ratio for both meetings was about .11.

[TABLE X-A ABOUT HERE]

table 10 A

The town of Huntington is in a little valley at the end of Big Hollow Road which comes down from the hills of Starksboro where I live. In their meeting of 1988 twice as many men spoke as women. But those women who did speak averaged over seven participations each. The men who spoke averaged only 2.25 each. Sandgate is a little town of less than three hundred voters north of Arlington and just east of New York. Only three miles of the 30 traveled roads in town are paved. It is a place where the wild turkey do well. There in 1987 eleven women spoke 96 different times (this averages to 8.7 participations per participator) and the 19 men who spoke did so 69 times or 3.6 times per person. Thus the participations per participator score was 2.40 in favor of women. Calvin Coolidge's hometown, Plymouth, tied with Corinth for the lowest ratio of women's participations to men's participations. In 1970 in Plymouth and 1978 in Corinth the ratio was only .23 for each meeting. In Plymouth seven different women spoke only nine times, while 14 men participated 79 times. In Corinth 14 women participated 26 times while 27 men participated 217 times.

Creating a Single Participatory Indicator

This brief inspection leads to the question of how to combine the two variables (the propensity to speak at all and the propensity to speak more than once) in a score that reflects more completely the flavor of women's participation in town meeting. Certainly a meeting where only 20 percent of the women spoke at all but averaged four participations each should be scored higher than a meeting where the percentage of female participators was the same but those who spoke averaged only two each. But how much higher? Since there is no important statistical relationship

between the two variables, the temptation is to normalize each and combine them. Such an index would then credit each meeting for women participators and women's participations equally.

Figure X-G demonstrates how this works out. A careful swing through its data helps fine tune the assessment of women's participation in real democracy. Plots 1 and 2 display the distributions of the data for women's speech and talk. While not perfect, both clearly demonstrate adequate normality. Plot 3 matches the two variables one against the other for the 100 meetings held in 1983 and 1984. Jericho, which had the highest score on speech in its 1984 meeting (3.11) was a trace below average for talk, -.06. Its combined score was 3.05. On the other hand Moretown was highest on female participations (talk), 2.96, and about average on participators (speech), -.04. Its combined score was 2.92. Williamstown, like Jericho, was very high on participators (3.05) but one of the lowest on participations (-1.15), giving it a total score of 1.90. Waterville is a little town which follows the north branch of the Lamoille River up into the mountains above Cambridge. In 1992 presidential candidate Ross Perot received 29 percent of the vote there and in the town meeting of 1984 women participated more than in any of the 100 meetings we studied in 1983 or 1984. Waterville was second highest on talk to Moretown (2.53) but also scored high on speech (1.05), one full standard deviation above the mean. Its total score was 3.58.

On the lower end of the scale meetings in the southwestern Vermont town of Proctor, named for Vermont's most important political family after the Allens, anchored the distribution in both 1983 and 1984. The combined standardized scores were –2.89 in 1984 and –2.64 in 1983. Cambridge is a remarkably different town. Perched on the Lamoille River at the fulcrum of the Burlington magnetic to the south and the gateway to the Kingdom to the north, Cambridge is a

much different place than Proctor. But in its town meetings of 1983 and 1984 women were seldom heard. Their combined speech and talk scores were –2.52 in 1983 and -2.33 in 1984.

[FIGURE X-G ABOUT HERE]

Giving the two variables equal weight is theoretically worrisome, however. I have personally recorded over 3000 first acts of participation in 82 different town meetings over twenty-eight years. I have also recorded about 7000 participatory acts by people who had already spoken once. This and the thousands of student reports and essays I have read lead me to believe that it is the first participation in a meeting which is the most difficult and that subsequent participations come more easily. If one's gender adds to the psychic cost of all participations (and it is a premise of this analysis that it does) I'd bet it inhibits the first one for women more than it inhibits the first one for men. Accordingly the index of feminine participation should weight the ratio of total participators (women vs. men) more than the ratio of total participations. I recalculated the combined measure of women's participation in town meeting to allot a two-thirds weighting to the ratio of participators (speech) and one-third of the measure's weight to the ratio of participations (talk).

In figuring the statistical connections between this weighted index and the characteristics of the meetings that house them and, beyond that, the towns that house the meetings, this adjustment will have only minimal impact. The equal weight index (where participators and participations were scored evenly) explains 90 percent of the variance in the adjusted index. In fact the participators (speech) ratio alone explains 83 percent of the variance in the adjusted index. The matrix of correlations (simple "r's") among the four measures for all 1383 meetings looks as follows:

fig 10 G

		I	*II*	*III*	*IV*
I	Adjusted Index	X			
II	Equal Weight Index	.95	X		
III	Participators Ratio	.91	.74	X	
IV	Participations Ratio	.45	.70	.04	X

Nevertheless the weighted measure (which I will now refer to as the femindex) adds empirical precision to an important theoretical constant. Moreover, it does adjust the descriptive narrative when meetings are compared. Figure X-H has three plots, one each for the relationship between femindex and speech, talk, and the additive combination of speech and talk. The range of variance narrows from plots 1 through 3 as expected. It is especially appropriate to compare Plot 3 of Figure X-G, where speech was compared to talk, and Plot 3 of Figure X-H which compares the simple combination of the two with femindex.   Earlier Waterville was touted as the best of the lot for women's participation. Weighting speech more than talk drops it to third place. Jericho ranks first under femindex on the strength of its first place finish on speech and its average performance on talk. Groton is a net loser with femindex dropping from fourth place to ninth. Pomfret drops the most from a ranking of 11 to a ranking of 32. Williamstown improves from eighth to second, Franklin from 15th to seventh.

[FIGURE X-H ABOUT HERE]

THE CONTEXT OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION: STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

With the descriptive parameters of women's participation settled, it is time to chip away at the unknowns of causality.   What, if any, contextual variables are associated with changes in how

fig 10 H

women behave from meeting to meeting? Two sets of independent variables have heretofore framed this analysis. The first is the architecture (the actual legal structure) of the meeting itself. The second is the kind of community in which the meeting takes place.[8] As has been the practice throughout, the first step is to determine if levels of speech and talk by women fluctuate from one year to the next in meetings held in the same towns. If the answer is no the search for commonalties becomes more hopeful. But if women's participation varies greatly from year to year within institutional and social structures that do not, the project will be like mapping the contours of a mist-bound hillside.

Back-to-Back Meetings in the Same Town

Our sample of 1438 meetings over 28 years contains 24 instances when meetings in the same town can be compared one year to the next.[9] Towns in the sample in 1970 are matched with towns in the 1971 sample and so on through the 1997 and 1998 meetings. In 13 of these trials there were twenty or more "matches," that is the same town fell in the sample in each of two subsequent years.[10] The ratio of the percent of women in attendance who spoke to the percent of men in attendance who spoke (the variable called speech) in one year was correlated with the same variable for the matching towns and their meetings of the next year for each of the 13 trials. The average

---

[8] The search for hints as to what kinds of meetings and what kinds of towns ought to have more equal verbal participation for women led once again to the small group research where it once again ran into the problem of the size of the group studied. They were too small. An excellent example is Renée A. Meyers, Dale E. Brashers, Latonia Winston, and Lindsay Grob, "Sex Differences and Group Argument: A Theoretical Framework and Empirical Investigation," *Communication Studies* 48 (Spring 1997): 19-41.

[9] Only one town was surveyed in 1976 (Newbury) as I was in Montana and none in 1993 when I was in Mississippi.

[10] I selected 20 cases as the minimum on a mostly arbitrary basis. On inspection, 20 cases comfortably met tests of statistical significance for relationships that explained over ten percent of the variance.

Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient between speech at town meeting in one year and speech at the meeting of the following year for the 13 trials was .32. (The median was .30.) In other words, on average, we can account for only ten percent of the variance in women's speech compared to men's in one town's meeting by knowing what it was a year earlier.

There was substantial variation in these correlations. The coefficient between speech in the 23 meetings held in 1990 and speech in the meetings of the same towns held in 1991 was .58, the highest of the 13 trials. Those towns having meetings with strong speech in 1990 were also likely to have meetings that scored high in 1991. One year explained 34 percent of the variance in the next. On the other hand a similar test for the 20 towns having meetings in the sample for both 1995 and 1996 produced a coefficient of only .10, explaining one percent of the variance and falling far below the limits of statistical reliance. This was the lowest of the trials. Knowing how women did in one year told us next to nothing about how they did in the next.

Plot 1 of Figure X-I displays the relationship for the strongest trial. It reinforces a pair of findings already made. First, women's speech falls below that of men's. Only six of the 23 towns had meetings in which women had more participations than men in either 1990 or 1991. In only three, Belvidere, Monkton, and Canaan did a larger percent of the women speak than did men both years.[11] Over 60 percent of the towns held meetings in both years in which men outspoke women

---

[11]Canaan, where I spent the first two years of my life before my father headed for North Africa in 1943, was the home of one Beatrice Mary Eugenia Holmes, a legendary woman of the Kingdom. Born in 1898 she lived in Canaan for 94 years until her death in 1992. She ran the post office there for 48 years, then the government forced her to retire in 1968. Her memories encompass the great log drives on the Connecticut, which equaled in their passion and hardship the cattle drives of the American West continue through to the end of the cold war. One of her last acts of a citizenship so complete it defies words was the writing, editing, and publishing of a 168-page history of Canaan as a Bicentennial Project in 1976. She was 78 at the time. A decade later I was asked to speak at a memorial in her honor in Canaan in her failing years. Afterwards I went over to where she sat and said. "Do you remember me Mrs. Holmes? My mother said you used to rock me when I was a baby during the war." "I do," was all she said, her sharp old eyes locked on mine. Listen to her words from *History of Canaan, Vermont* and you'll see why that was

by a ratio of at least 10 to 8. A reminder: speech measures the proclivity of women (compared to men) to speak at least once. Since men usually outnumbered women at the meeting somewhat, the actual negative balance of participation for women is a bit worse.

Second, even within this strongest correlation there is substantial variation. Although some towns like Charlotte, Newbury, and Jericho had nearly identically low scores on speech both years and others like Monkton and Belvidere were similarly high, several towns displayed massive variations. Bolton, the little town which meets in the firehouse, led the 23 meetings on women's speech in 1991. A year earlier it had ranked 18th. The line of best fit predicts speech for 1991 based not only on what a town did the previous year but also on the general trend for women to do better in 1991 than in 1992. It too reveals substantial variation. Given the improvement in the femindex from one year to the next and Newbury's failure to match that trend, Newbury's 1990 meeting no longer predicts its 1991 meeting as accurately. Both Monkton and Belvidere also depart from the line of best fit more than the line of perfect match because they not only equal but exceed the overall improvement for women from one year to the next. These notations are emphasized in Plot 2 of Figure X-I which represents the average condition when one year's meetings are used to predict the next year's meeting in a group of towns. Note, however, that without the outlier (Underhill) the line of best fit would swing upward, providing a somewhat higher R^2 in the relationship.

[FIGURE X-I ABOUT HERE]

---

enough. "…Vermonters are still an independent and self-reliant people; probably the most self-reliant in the entire United States and will stay this way if these out-of-staters don't ruin the state and the real Vermont. They certainly are coming into the State taking over the high paying jobs, getting to be governors, judges, state officers, etc. and generally taking over and calling the real Vermonters 'Damn Fools,' which I guess we may be for letting them take over." Beatrice Schoff Holmes, *History of Canaan, Vermont*, (Colebrook, New Hampshire: A Bicentennial Project, M/S Printing & Advertising, 1976): 6. This was a woman who knew life in a very tough place. But she found time to rock me in her arms.

fig 10 I

A shift from speech to the variable that combines speech and talk (femindex) provides a more inclusive picture but the results are the same. Plot 3 is the scatterplot of the trial (the 39 towns which had meetings in the sample for both 1987 and 1988) that represents the average association between femindex in subsequent meetings in the same town. The single diagonal line represents what the position of each town would be if its town meeting produced the same intensity of feminine participation (speech and talk combined) in 1987 and 1988. If the behavior of towns like Cabot, where the femindex was low in both years (-.71 in 1987 and -.86 in 1988), and Panton, where the femindex was higher in both years (.45 in 1987 and .44 in 1988) was matched by a goodly number of other towns, it would be most reasonable to assume that there was something about the towns themselves that explain variations in women's participation in town meeting.

Although there are a number of towns on or near the line of perfect match (Swanton, Newbury, Sharon, Underhill, Starksboro and a few others) the overall picture is one where many meetings stray far and wide from year to year. There were two towns, Brownington[12] and Wolcott, that suffered a considerable loss in femindex from 1987 to 1988.   Brownington dropped from 1.09 (third in a list of 39 towns) in 1987 to -.04 (14th from the bottom) in 1998. The women of Wolcott participated at a rate that put them in the top third of the meetings in 1987. In 1988 their silence left them second from the bottom. The women of other towns,

---

[12]At their meeting in 1980 the people of Brownington provided the following example of the "free rider" problem. Article #7 read: "To see what action the town will take in reference to fire protection." The minutes of that meeting read: "Article #7: Motion made, seconded and carried to do same as in the past – call the nearest fire department." Town of Brownington, Town Clerk, "Minutes of the Town Meeting of 1980," (Mimeograph, 1980): 2. I lived for a year (1984-85) in Brownington teaching in the high school one town over in Orleans. In a "Problems of American Democracy" class in the fall of 1984 I staged (much to the consternation of several of the teachers) a school-wide mock presidential election. It was then that I learned that Vermont was about to vote for the Democratic presidential candidate for the first time in its history. Thirty-six winters have come and gone and still I remember those rugged, beautiful kids of the Kingdom even better than I remember my students from last semester. I was 23 then and they were only a few years younger. Now, suddenly, when our lives cross paths they are as knotty and as old as me.

Alburg, Shelburne and Charleston, had huge gains between 1987 and 1988. Although the variation in estimating women's participation in 1988 when one predicts from a town's performance in 1987 rather than the mean of the town's performance for 1988 is reduced by 20 percent, the message Plot 3 sends is one of variation left unexplained. Whatever it was that caused women to participate more in Charleston[13] in 1988 than in 1987 it is unlikely it is a variation in the *context* of the meeting.

To further refine the analysis I selected several towns for which data were available year after year in time chains long enough to see if patterns appeared which were not apparent in the foregoing analysis. Year-to-year femindex data from Newbury, for which I have data for the entire period, demonstrate the ambivalence of the findings. (See Figure X-J.) Although Newbury is not typical in that the improvement for women has not been as consistent there as in the average town (see below), it is typical in that variations from year to year are quite profound. Several other towns for which I was able to string together data for a series of years are similar. Newbury was certainly changing over these years but these changes were gradual not dynamic. It is doubtful they could explain the radical ups and downs in the amount of feminine participation that occurred in the town hall early every March. This is more evidence that does not portend well for the thesis that the variations in women's participation in open democracy are tied to contextual variables in the towns.

---

[13]In 1988 there were 513 voters in Charleston. 73 percent of them voted in November's general election. Earlier that year in Vermont's "beauty contest" presidential primary (it was only advisory) 123 voted (24 percent). Of the 50 voting in the Democratic primary Jesse Jackson came in second to Michael Dukakis beating out Richard Gephardt, Paul Simon, and Gary Hart. In 1992 turnout was 77 percent. Bill Clinton came in first and Ross Perot got 27 percent of the vote. Charleston is a wild Kingdom town where you can still advertise to swap a 92 John Deer snowmobile and a Winchester 12 gauge for a 1987 Cadillac Riviera "parts" car. I picked up a nice little 1987 Chevy Chevette for parts up there in the summer of 1998 for $250. Melissa and I managed to drive it the 125 miles down out of the Kingdom to Starksboro in the dark and the rain. As this book goes to print it still sits there in my yard. I have 11 Chevettes on my place, keep two on the road, and use the rest to keep them both going. When the pretty people in town, who care more about cosmetics than serious recycling, drive by, it drives them nuts. Too bad.

[FIGURE X-J ABOUT HERE]

Variations Across Time

If it is problematical that an attempt to root out the causes of verbal participation in the kinds

of towns and the kinds of meetings in which this participation takes place will be successful, it is

still important to make the attempt. At a minimum such an exercise sets the descriptive parameters

in a more meaningful framework and allows a much more precise measurement of the degree to

which generally accepted expectations do or do not hold up.   At the outset, however, it is important

to know if there has been an improvement in the femindex over time that may account for some of

the variance in the data. Has women's participation in direct democracy at town meeting increased

in step with the growing importance of women's involvement in public life in general and the

acceptance of that involvement by the public, irrespective of the kind of town in which the meeting

takes place?

In fact hints that women's participation has improved with time have already appeared in

Figure X-I where the slope of the regression line was always positive. That means that in each of the

three sets of paired years the following year always had higher participation for women. Speech was

higher in 1991 than 1990 and higher in 1980 than in 1979. In 1988 femindex was higher than it was

in 1987. When elements of women's participation are compared to men's and plotted over time the

results are clearly hopeful. (See Figure X-K.) Both components of femindex (speech and talk) have

improved over time and the femindex itself reflects this in its slow and reasonably steady rise

between 1970 and 1998. In the five-year period which includes 177 meetings in the sample held

from 1970 through 1974 the ratio of the percent of women present who spoke at least once to the

fig 10 J

percent of men present who spoke at least was .58. In other words if 100 percent of the men present

spoke then, on average, only 58 percent of the women present did. In the 256 meetings studied

between 1993 and 1998 this ratio rose to .80. At the same time the ratio of individual participations

(talk) between women and men inched ever so slowly toward 1.0. In the earlier period it was .68 in

the later it was .81. Femindex (which, remember, is a standardized measure–based on Z-score

conversions and not a ratio) rose from -.31 to .33. If the linear upward trends evident in Figure X-K

continue, it will mean that women's speech will equal men's in the year 2025 and talk will match up

eight years later in 2033.[14]

[FIGURE X-K ABOUT HERE]

Real democracy is improving for women. The question left unanswered is whether this

improvement is taking place because of the changes in the local context of town meeting or because

of national changes in the attitudinal atmosphere which have worked their way into northern New

England. The task is now to deal with the hypothetical linkages between women's participation and

things like the time and place town meeting is held, the socioeconomic structure of the town and the

town's politics. All of these items have been shifting in tandem with the passage of time. The task

here is first to describe and then attempt to disentangle these concomitant variables.

The Architecture of Democracy

Three variables associated with the structure of town meeting used in Chapter IX to explain

the number of women *present* at town meeting have received special attention throughout the book.

---

[14]There is such great variation around the mean, however, that when all the meetings are pooled the passage of time
explains only 7 percent of the variance in the femindex.

fig 10 K

One is whether meetings are held during the day or at night. Another is the presence or absence of an Australian ballot. The last is how educational matters are treated.[15]   While all three might have reasonably affected women's *attendance,* only one carries any theoretical punch for *participation.* One would be hard pressed, indeed, to make the case that women in particular would be more or less apt to engage in the verbal participation at a town meeting because it was held at night or because an Australian ballot was in use. But education is another matter. Chapter IX discussed supporting evidence in the literature and in my own studies of office holding by women in Vermont. Women take a special interest in the politics of education.

The categories of town meeting types based on how education matters were considered emphasized the degree to which they were integrated into the meeting. Were they made part of the meeting or treated alone in a special school district meeting conducted the same day and in the same place during an adjournment of the town meeting or before or after the town meeting? A final option adopted by a growing number of towns is to hold it on another day altogether. All of these distinctions have a special relevance for attendance in general and on women's attendance in particular. But only education has a strong theoretical link to women's inclination to *speak* once they are at town meeting. Femindex (the weighted combination of speech and talk) is a ratio of how willing the women present are to participate compared to the willingness of the men present. It therefore controls for women's attendance. In short if education prompts participation on the part of

---

[15] I also checked for crowdedness because, interestingly, there is substantial evidence that women react more positively to crowding than do men. [Y. M. Epstein, R. A. Karlin, "Effects of Acute Experimental Crowding," *Journal of Social Psychology* 5 (January-March 1975): 34-53; Bruce Layton, Bonnie Erickson, and John Schopler, "Affect, Facial Regard and Reaction to Crowding," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 28 (October 1973): 69-76; D. Stokols, *et al* "Physical, Social and Personal Determinants of the Perception of Crowding," *Environment and Behavior* 5 (March 1973): 87-115] by extension I hypothesized that crowded meeting halls might be associated with more verbal participation by women in attendance. This was not the case. There was no

women it should do so during any of the three variants of meetings in which educational matters are discussed.

Table X-B arrays the differences in the speech, talk and (their combination) femindex by dichotomous splits in the treatment of school issues, use of the Australian ballot and when the meeting is held. It is disquieting to discover that the relationship with the soundest theoretical credentials behaves precisely as it should not.[16] When school matters are being discussed at some point during town meeting day women participate significantly *less* than if they are not on the agenda at all.[17] Femindex is -.02 when educational issues are present and .25 when they are not. Moreover, the widest gap in women's participation is produced by the use of the Australian ballot. When in use speech is .65. When not speech is .72. This gap is statistically significant at the .001 level.[18] But it sits there theoretically naked. Femindex of course follows suit. Talk varies in the same direction but weakly.

As it turns out there is something in the mix of school issues and the Australian Ballot that may be at work. In reaching this judgment I first probed the weak relationship between night meetings and a lower femindex, since nearly all (311 of the 346) meetings held at night use the Australian ballot. Perhaps a feminine disinclination to talk in the evening depressed their score for Australian ballot meetings in general. This was not the case, however. Under controls the day/night

---

relationship (Pearson's "r" = -.03) between the "empty seats" per attender statistic and the ratio of women's speech and talk (combined) to that of men's.

[16] Rosner, however, in his study of the Israeli Kibbutz found that women were clearly more apt to participate verbally in the discussion at assembly meetings when the topic was education. Menachem Rosner, *Democracy, Equality and Change: The Kibbutz and Social Theory* (Darby, Pennsylvania: Norwood Editions, 1982): 53.

[17] In Volume II, the "How It Works" half of my work, I will be analyzing Warning items one by one and issue by issue; I will be precise about how many women participated on each school issues compared to other types of issues.

[18] The F-score is 16.7 and the eta coefficient .11.

difference disappears but the Australian ballot difference remains. In short the lower night score is a function of the use of the Australian ballot and not the reverse.

With that out of the way it is appropriate to ask this question. Does the failure of school issue meetings to produce higher scores a function of the fact that school issue town meetings are more apt to be those with Australian ballots which drag femindex down? Among the meetings where school and "town" meetings were held the same day more used the Australian ballot (642) than did not (528). While a majority of town meetings where school issues were absent also used the Australian ballot (118 of 208) the numbers are too small to have had a great impact on the entire distribution.

In fact of those 618 meetings where there was no Australian ballot the subset of 528 meetings where school issues were discussed scored .34 on femindex and the 90 meetings where school issues were not discussed scored .31. The advantage for women in *non*-school issue meetings is washed out. In fact the relationship is slightly reversed. But those 760 meetings that did use the Australian ballot display an even stronger relationship between no school issues and increases in the femindex. The 642 school issue meetings scored only -.38 and the 118 non-school issue meetings remained high at .36.

[TABLE X-B ABOUT HERE]

Now we have a clearer picture of what is going on. For some reason the use of the Australian ballot at town meetings where school issues *are* a part of the day's deliberation is associated with a lower level of equality in participation between the sexes. Whether this is a "real" association or an artifact of some other as yet undetermined variable remains to be seen.   At this

table 10 B

point however it takes little courage to conclude that in any event the popular notion that women

participate more when school issues are a part of the deliberative mix does not appear to be true.

Safety in Numbers and Time to Talk

The safety in numbers hypothesis was considered earlier. Here it might show that the ratio

of women in attendance to women who speak will increase with the ratio of women to men in

attendance. This notion must be explored in more depth because of its strong theoretical

foundations. The time factor, which also has a strong theoretical pedigree, is also important. It

could be the case that minorities in a group tend to participate at a relatively higher rate as their

numerical proportion of the group increases. Or it may be that in situations where time limitations

adjust the premium on participation, minorities' participation increases as the expansion of time

lessens the cost of participation for the whole group.

Safety in Numbers

A bold example of the first model suggests that a town meeting where 40 percent of the

attenders were women might have 50 percent of these women participating while a meeting where

only 20 percent of the attenders were women would have only 30 percent of this smaller proportion

participating. In the second case women were less visible and this resulted in a lower participation

rate for the women in attendance. An example of the second model would be a town meeting

lasting four hours having a ratio of the percent of women in attendance who participated to percent

of men in attendance participating of .60 and a meeting lasting two hours having a participatory

ratio of .40. Put in more precise terms what both arguments suggests is that there will be positive

relationships between the independent variables (percent of attenders who are women and time the meeting lasts) and the ratio of women's participation to men's (the dependent variable).

Consider the following real situation. In the town meeting in Hinesburg in 1978 there were 100 men and 106 women present. In Highgate in 1975 there were also 100 men but only 75 women. Similarly, there were 100 men in attendance in Stowe in 1971 but at this meeting only 54 women were present. Any woman looking over the audience for peer support in Hinesburg was surely more apt to find it than in Highgate and, upscally, in Stowe.[19] As it turns out the actual number of female speakers was exactly the same, twelve, in all three meetings. This means, of course that the percent of the women in attendance who spoke out increased as their share of the attendance went down. In other words the reinforcement model not only failed, it was in fact reversed. A more "feminine" meeting defined in terms of the ratio of women to men present at the meeting resulted in a disinclination for the women present to speak.

The only other explanation would be that there was something about the meetings that caused *both* men and women not to participate as much in Highgate as they did in Hinesburg and for both to participate still less in Stowe. In other words the decline in the percent of the women present who spoke was matched by a decline in the percent of men present who spoke. This is where our measure that compares the ratio of women present who spoke to the ratio of men present who spoke, speech, comes in handy. When we compare the ratios of the sexes speaking, we find that the meeting at Stowe where women were most outnumbered by men still had the *best* speech

---

[19] The reinforcement or peer group model for women does work in other contexts. Banazak and Plutzer found that women with lower education levels have stronger pro-feminist attitudes in communities where there are more women with strong educational backgrounds than in communities where there are fewer women with strong educational backgrounds. The context of the community, however, is unrelated to women who have higher levels of

for women, .49 and the meeting where women actually outnumbered men, the one in Hinesburg in 1978, had the lowest, .35.

The failure of the reinforcement model is aptly demonstrated when we extend the analysis to the 1378 meetings in the sample for which reliable data were available. The correlation coefficient for the relationship between speech and the percent of the attenders at the meeting who were women is -.26. As the ratio of women to men in attendance at town meeting increases the inclination for women (as compared to men) to speak goes down. Note that although the large "N" makes this connection "real" (p.<.000) in the statistical sense, it is none the less very weak, explaining only seven percent of the variance. Plot 1 of Figure X-L demonstrates this variance and the slope of the data which unfortunately suggests that in order to achieve parity in speech women will have to reduce their attendance from about 36 percent of the total to 20 percent of the total.[20] This weak association *away* from the predicted flow of the data, while incapable of making a muscled case for an alternative hypothesis clearly damns the original expectation.

[FIGURE X-L ABOUT HERE]

To bring the relationship into focus I reproduced the scatterplot for the meetings studied in 1987. (See Plot 2 of Figure X-L.) Visualizing the data in quadrants hammers home the inequalities in the participation of women in town meeting. It is much more pronounced, for instance, than the inequality of attendance. There is a large cluster of meetings that falls to the right of the vertical line representing equality of attendance and only a handful that falls above the horizontal line

---

education.   Lee Ann Banaszak and Eric Plutzer, "Contextual Determinants of Feminist Attitudes: National and Subnational Influences in Western Europe," *American Political Science Review* 87 (March 1993): 147-157.

[20] Actually the situation isn't that bad. The curve is not totally linear. It takes a mild upward swing on the lower end. Empirically matching the curve to the data without linear constraints indicates it will cross the one to one speech level for women at about 28 percent female attendance. Big deal.

figure 10 L

representing equality of speaking. Women outnumbered men in 29 of the 91 meetings. But in only ten of the 91 meetings did the ratio of women present who spoke to men present who spoke favor women. In only three of 91, Plainfield, Leicester and Newark, did they have more attenders and a positive ratio of attenders to speakers when compared to men. The four meetings with the very highest speech, Eden, Brownington, Windham and Warren, were among the cluster with an attendance deficit for women. The meeting with the very lowest speech, Berkshire, had a majority of women in attendance. These extreme cases anchor the same loose, downward sloping relationship that appeared in the cloud of cases in Plot 1.

Hartland is a Connecticut River Valley town. Its history and culture bespeak the ambiance of flowing waters and broad meadows edged by the contours of rising plateaus leading to the foothills of the mountains. It had the highest score for women's attendance in 1987 and the second lowest score for women's speech. At 9:30 a.m. (30 minutes after the school meeting began) there were 55 women at the meeting in the town's well known Damon Hall and 34 men. At 11:00 a.m. (one hour and fifteen minutes after the town meeting began) there were 58 women and 34 men. Only 13 of the 58 women present (22 percent) participated verbally compared to 29 of the 34 men. The meeting began well for women with "a woman in a purple sweater" making the motion to approve the school report. The next participator was a man and the next two were women. But things went poorly after that. This was a meeting where women strongly outnumbered the men but when it came to speaking out they tended to remain silent.[21]

---

[21] Barbara Carney, Paul Carney, and Suzanne Betz, "The 1987 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Hartland," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1987).

WITNESS

At the beginning, before the meeting even starts, you watch the people stroll into the old-fashioned meeting hall, stopping on occasion to chat with a friend or two. As the meeting starts, you notice that the majority of the people present are about 50-70 years old and you begin to wonder: Where are the people who have the young children going through the school system here in town? Where are the 18-35 year olds who will probably live here the rest of their life? Maybe they could not get the day off from work or they had an exam that day in one of their classes. Or perhaps they really do not mind what goes on because they feel that their opinion either does not count or that it is the same as their neighbor down the street so why bother going when you are not needed.

Still, it is nice to know that someone shows up to the meeting. It is a great chance to be with some people you have not seen in a while. In fact, you can even do some needlework on a potholder or finish crocheting that afghan for your grandchild. I realize that some of the issues do get boring at times, but I cannot figure out how they can keep track of what is going on. I know I have a hard time reading my political science textbook while I watch the Academy Awards on television. But I guess they at least made the effort to show up and that must count for something.[22]

Further north in the town of Eden the opposite happened. There (as Plot 2 of Figure X-L shows) it was women's attendance that was low and their participation that was high. The meeting was opened at 10:00 a.m. by the moderator. Mary Adams the town clerk spent the next five minutes reading the warning. The next four new participators were men. Jackie Longly was the sixth person to participate when she nominated Haven Bullard for selectman. Another man participated and then after Carol Burnor was reelected lister Donna Whitcomb (assistant town clerk) nominated Gloria Daige (an incumbent) for auditor. "So voted." The next new person was a man identified by his

---

[22] Paul Carney, "On a Vermont Town Meeting (Hartland 1987)," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, March 1987). Paul and his Barbara (Suzanne Betz's roommate) lived in Hartland. That day his aunt "Mona" (Ramona Lasure) defeated Miles Mushlin for school director by an Australian ballot vote of 250 to 190. Thus 440 (378 percent) more people chose representative democracy in Hartland in 1987 than chose real democracy. It supports my penchant for building up the number of "cases" as a methodological rule to note the following: had Paul attended the Hartland town meeting a year earlier in 1986 he might have written differently about citizen apathy. For that year he would have seen 351 people pack themselves into Damon Hall to vote 190 to 161 (after a "lengthy discussion") to reconsider an earlier vote to renovate space in the elementary school. Thus the attendance at town meeting in Hartland in 1986 was 281 percent higher than it was in 1987. In 1986 the Hartford town meeting lasted 285 minutes. In 1987 it lasted only 144 minutes. The people of Hartland talked almost one hundred percent more than they did in 1987. This is why I deemed it essential to look at hundreds and hundreds of town meetings. Although our sample did not pick up this particular variation, it did pick up similar ones in the 1434 meetings we studied over the three decades. Town of Hartland, "Abstract of Minutes Town and Town School District Annual Meeting March 4, 1986," *Town Report,* (Year ending December 1986).

"blue hat (cap) and jacket and glasses." Next to join the list of speakers was Carol Burnor. Four of

the next ten and seven of the following ten new speakers were women. By the end of the meeting 68

percent of the women at the meeting in the Eden Central School had participated at least once, while

only 54 percent of the men had.[23]

What about talk? Does the inclination of the women who do speak to speak again (and

perhaps again and again) improve as the likelihood of seeing other women listening improves?

Here the variable I call talk (the ratio of women's participations per participator to men's

participations per participator) is operative. There is no positive relationship between the willingness

of women to speak (speech) and the willingness of those who do speak to repeat themselves (talk).

The correlation coefficient is an insignificant .04. It is therefore at least statistically possible for the

reinforcement hypothesis to work for the number of participations if not for the number who decide

to speak in the first place.

And it does. In meetings where the percentage of women attenders is higher the ratio of

participations per woman speaker to participations per man speaker is more favorable to women.

But the relationship is frightfully weak ("r" = .08) although once again the number of town meetings

we have in the sample makes it statistically "real" (p.<.002). When combined with speech (to form

femindex--the base measure I am using here) the positive influence of women attenders on talk

tends to cancel out some (but not all) of the negative influence of attendance on speaking out at all.

But the conclusion remains the same: the percent of the total attenders who are women in an

assembly engaged in direct democracy is not positively associated with the women's verbal

---

[23] Ed Canaday, Chris Pokorski, and Steve Krupkin, "The 1987 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Eden," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1987). Town of Eden, Mary Adams, Town Clerk, "Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting, Tuesday, March 3rd, 1987," (Mimeograph, 1987).

participation. The "r" between femindex and the percentage of attenders who are women is still

negative, -.20.[24]

It was noted above that the femindex has increased slowly but surely over time. We also

know that women's attendance has increased in the same manner. This leaves us with the

observation that verbal participation (femindex) has been sailing into a wind produced by higher

attendance. In other words women participate verbally at a grater rate in recent years despite the

fact that a depressant to feminine participation, feminine attendance, has improved as well. Without

the negative influence of increased attendance participation would have been still higher.

Unless, of course, the negative association between attendance and participation has itself

changed over time. What we might be seeing in the aggregate is a negative association between

attendance and participation produced in the early years of the study that has since dissipated or

even reversed itself allowing attendance to reinforce participation in the later years of the study.

What we find is the opposite. The relationship between femindex and attendance was -.10 in the

first five years of the study and -.33 in the last five. The slope in the data increased from -.01 in the

early years to -.04 in the later years. Moreover, since the number of meetings studied in the later

years of the study was greater than the number studied in the earlier years, the overall relationship is

even more influenced by stronger negative associations in the present not the past.[25] The wind

picked up in the more recent years of the study and makes the modest increases in participation we

---

[24]This is partly because speech accounts for two-thirds of femindex and talk accounts for only one-third. But even if we weighted the willingness to repeat the act of speaking equally with the willingness to speak at all the association between femindex and women's attendance would still be negative.

[25]The correlation coefficient between femindex and the percent of women in attendance when the year of the meeting was controlled increased to -.23 and the correlation between femindex and year the meeting was held increased to .29 when the percent of women in attendance was controlled.

observed in Figure X-L look more impressive. When both variables, time and attendance, are entered into a multiple regression equation the passage of time is dominant explaining seven percent of the variance. But the percent of the attenders who are women in each meeting explains an additional five percent independently. Their standardized slopes are similar but they trend in opposite directions. Every unit of increase in the femindex associated with the passage of time is nearly negated by the increase in attendance that is also associated with the passage of time.[26]

Time to Talk

Another variable that may affect the equality of political participation for women in direct democracy is the length of time the meeting lasts. This might occur for two reasons. The first is a variation of the reinforcement model. As women observe other women speaking their fears of participating *as women* may be reduced. The longer the meeting lasts and the total of women who have participated grows the more additional women will be apt to join in. Since men presumably do not suffer from inhibitions based on their sex their rate of participation will remain more constant and by the end of longer meetings women's participation will more equal men's. The second is that the longer the meeting the lower the scarcity of time for participation and the more likely it would be that women would be "allowed" to speak.

If longer meetings alone free up time for women to participate, it is not apparent in Plot 1 of Figure X-M which arrays femindex by the time each meeting lasted measured in minutes. The picture is one of a classic non-relationship. The combined women-to-men ratios of speech and talk

---

[26] The standardized slope (Beta) for the passage of time was .29. It was -.22 for the percent of the attenders who were women.

in a meeting that lasts one hour is not apt to be different from that in a meeting that lasts four, five or

six hours. Somehow this seems odd. Consider the meeting in Whiting in 1987. The attendance was

only 53 and it lasted only an hour and seven minutes. Women had about half the attendance and the

femindex was .47. Shift now to Roxbury's meeting a year earlier in 1986. The meeting was also

small. Only 75 were present at the highest point. Again, about half the attenders were women. But

Roxbury's meeting lasted over six times as long, seven hours and thirty-six minutes. In Roxbury

there were almost six more hours available for the women's participation to even out with men's. It

did not. The femindex there, as it was in Whiting, was exactly .47.

<div align="center">[FIGURE X-M ABOUT HERE]</div>

The length of the meeting, however, does not tell the whole story. The premium on

participation caused by the number present also counts. The minutes available per person measure

created earlier was used to control the size of the meeting. Plot 2 of Figure X-M displays the

upward tilt in the data that occurs when femindex is regressed on minutes available per attender.

The 20 meetings that had the least time available for each person to speak (they averaged less than a

minute per attender) averaged well below the mean on both speech (.48) and talk (.65) to produce an

average femindex of -.49. The 20 meetings with the most time available per person present. 2.16

minutes per attender) scored .87 on speech and .91 on talk. The mean femindex was 59. These 40

meetings were on the extremes. The entire pattern accounts for only four percent of the variation in

women's participation. But it (and the slope in the data) does indicate a mild tendency for women to

participate more when there is more time and space for them to do so. Just how problematic this

finding is, however, can be judged by noting that meetings with average attendance would have to

fig 10 M

be over sixteen hours long before the ratio of women participators to women attenders, for instance,

would equal the ratio of men participators to men attenders. [27]

THE CONTEXT OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION: COMMUNITY LIFE

There are two categories of community life on which this book has focused. The first is its

socioeconomic environment. Here variables such as town size, population dynamics and status

constraints such as education, income and occupation are used. The second is political culture.

This category features variables such as a town's voter turnout, party identity, party competition,

and ideological responses at the polls.

The SES Environment

Small Town – Large Town

The 1995 town meeting in Sheldon, Vermont, began at 10:03 a.m. with the flag salute led by

the Girl Scouts. The moderator, George O. Stebbins, Jr. read the Warning. At 10:16 the process of

electing town officers was underway. It took an hour and twenty-one minutes. The town reports

(Article 2) were then approved in less than a minute. It was thus 11:38 when Diane Crane

considered the question of whether or not to speak on Article 3 which read: "To see if the voters

will vote to appropriate the sum of $5,500 to light the streets of Sheldon."[28] She decided she would.

The only other person to participate on the issue was Thelma Stebbins, one of the three town listers

---

[27] This finding urges a more complete definition of "time and space." Some meetings may be packed with critical items. Others with a more limited agenda may operate at a more leisurely pace. Volume II will deal directly with these kinds of questions.

[28] Town of Sheldon, *Town Report*, (Year ending December 1994): 7.

and wife of George Stebbins, the moderator. Diane was the 17th participant of the day. Preceding

her were nine men and seven women. Again, it took the 125 voters in the room just one minute to

resolve the issue. The "yeas" won easily in a voice vote.

Diane would go on to participate three more times in all; twice on Article 6 (to approve the

purchase of a new grader for the town roads) and once on Article 10 (a non-binding vote on whether

or not Wal-Mart should be "allowed to construct their store in St. Albans?"[29] After a 21-minute

debate on the issue the town of Sheldon voted 63 to 28 in favor of Wal-Mart. Diane was one of 21

women who participated. Twenty-nine men also participated. During the length of the meeting

there were slightly more women in attendance than men.

Sheldon is a small town. In 1990 the Census counted only 1618 residents. In the 1992

Presidential election 71 percent of the 984 voters went to the polls. In 1996, 59 percent did.   The

probability that Diane Crane knew a great proportion of those present at town meeting was high

indeed. The question for us is whether or not living in a small town like Sheldon or any of the

dozens of even smaller towns that we studied over the last quarter century affects the rate of open

political participation for women. Do the women attending town meeting in Belvidere (176

registered voters in 1996) or Winhall (455 registered voters in 1996) or Victory (73 registered voters

in 1996) participate more or less *compared to men* than the women in the town meetings of

Shelburne, Charlotte, Bristol, or Richford?   These towns had 4546, 2550, 2199 and 1514

---

[29]St. Albans is the nearby large place. There is a St. Albans City, and a St. Albans Town surrounding it. Both are independent municipal corporations. St. Albans, not Gettysburg, was the site of the northernmost hostilities of the Civil War. A troop of Confederates solders raided the city, robbing banks and burning a good portion of the downtown. An enraged and excited band of Vermonters chased them back into Canada.

respectively. Does familiarity among members of a group embolden those who have traditionally

held secondary status positions to participate?

The first cut at the data indicates that it may. In the 27-year, 1438-meeting data base there

were 130 meetings studied in towns with 250 registered voters or less. At these meetings the

femindex averaged .53.   There were 57 meetings with 2500 or more registered voters in town.

Femindex averaged -.20 in these meetings. A breakdown of femindex into its components, speech

and talk, arrayed by seven cohorts of increasing town size reveals a huge improvement for women

in the very smallest towns. (See Plot 1 of Figure X-N.) It also demonstrates that increasing town

size continues to have a negative association with speech until towns reach about 1000 registered

voters level while the decline in talk holds steady immediately after the first 250-voter cohort has

been passed.

[FIGURE X-N ABOUT HERE]

Since speech contributes twice as much as talk to femindex the femindex curve follows

speech more than talk. Several regression models using all 1378 meetings were developed to map

femindex as it made its way across the distribution of town size from Victory with its 49 voters in

1978 meeting to Middlebury and its 4853 in 1980. Plot 2 of Figure X-N demonstrates what this

relationship looks like when the log of registered voters is used to compress the long tail of data at

the upper end of the distribution and stretch out the data points at the lower end.   While the log

breaks up the dark cloud of cases caused by the great number of meetings held in towns of under

500 registered voters, it unfortunately hides the curve in the data at that point as well.

Plots 3 and 4 focus on the 180 town meetings studied in 1979 and 1980. This increases the

number of cases which would be available for any one year while keeping the total small enough to

fig 10 N

let light seep into the distribution. These plots demonstrate a hinge point in the data at about the 500-registered voter mark. This dynamic, which was defined empirically from the entire data set, shows that as town electorates increase in size from about 50 to 450 (Plot 3), women's participation compared to men's slides precipitously downward. The slope (Plot 4) for towns of 50 to 900 is less steep, but still far different than that produced by the towns with more than 900 voters. It matters very little if a town has 2000 voters as compared to 1000. It matters a lot if it has 100 or 400. In short what we have is a classic curvilinear relationship in the data. Town size matters but only to a point. The match of this curve with the curve for the effect of town size on attendance (see Chapter IV) is so close it's eerie.

Yet this finding is subject to qualification for there is another size variable that relates to women's participation, the *absolute* number of people at the meeting. Effects of this were spotted earlier as we discussed the effect of minutes available per attender on women's participation. As attendance at town meeting increases for both sexes participation goes down for women. In the one third of the meetings at which attendance was highest (there were 477 of them and they averaged 207 in attendance) femindex averaged -.17.   In the one third (479 meetings) at which absolute attendance was the lowest (it averaged only 76) the average femindex increased to .21.[30]   This may well be related to the postulate already advanced about the effect of time available for participation: longer meetings reduce the price of participation by increasing its availability. Men are therefore more willing to give up what they think is their prerogative. Similarly, if it is obvious that the number in attendance means everyone will not have a chance to speak women will feel more

---

[30] This was not a tight relationship. The "r" for all 1378 meetings between town size in registered voters was only -.24

constrained not to. Or it may be that the fear of speaking in front of large groups is greater for those whose life experiences have not supported speaking out in public at all.

Since town size is positively associated with total attendance ("r" = .58) and both size and attendance are negatively associated with femindex it may be that one of these variables feeds off the other. Large towns, for instance, have larger numbers (even if smaller proportions) of voters at town meetings. It could be it is these larger meetings that hurt women's participation rather than the size of the town in which they are held. Compare, for instance the town of Panton's meeting with that of Isle La Motte's. Town sizes are almost exactly the same, about 250 registered voters and both meetings were held in 1980. But in Panton only 47 people went to town meeting and in Isle La Motte over twice that many did. With town size held constant the women at Panton's smaller meeting outparticipated men. The femindex was 1.42. In Isle La Motte it was -.79. On the other hand it is easier to find other meetings about the size of Panton's having much lower participation for women.

In fact both variables matter but town size matters a bit more. When all the meetings are divided into three categories of town size and three categories of meeting size as they are in Table X-C increasing town size depletes women's participation within each category of meeting size. The effect of meeting size is not as consistent. Among small towns large meetings are actually more participatory for women than middle-sized towns. The same is true for the large town meetings. Partial correlation coefficients lend precision to this finding. The simple correlation coefficient between town size and femindex is reduced from -.24 to -.14 when meeting size is controlled. The simple correlation coefficient between meeting size and femindex is reduced from -.21 to .07 when

town size is controlled. With both variables in the equation the "r" improves to (-) .25 meaning the combination explains about six percent of variance in femindex.

<div align="center">[TABLE X-C ABOUT HERE]</div>

Keeping the weakness of the association in mind it is proper to note that the best situation for women is a very small town meeting especially when attendance for both sexes is low. On the margins this can make a difference. In the 479 small town meetings for every 20 men present who spoke out at least once there were 15 women who did. In the 477 large town meetings there were only 12 women speaking for every 20 men. If the turnout were low in a small town one more woman per 20 men could be counted on to speak for a total of 16. If turnout were high at a large town meeting, the ratio of women to men speaking remained about the same. Women who live in *very* small towns speak more than women in the larger towns. Of that there is no doubt.

Socioeconomic Status

Few are the social scientists who would assume that the socioeconomic context of a town would not correlate in some way with the distribution of verbal participation between men and women in an open forum like town meeting. Yet the comparison of meetings in the same town from one year to the next (above) warned that such a connection would be hard to find. To get to the heart of the matter consider the towns of Corinth and Huntington. In 1990 both had populations of between 1200 and 1600 and were very similar on several important SES indicators. The 1990 Census showed median family income to be $28,000 in Corinth and $30,000 in Huntington. Twenty-two percent of the citizens over 25 years old had college degrees in Corinth while 19 percent had degrees in Huntington.   Yet the femindex in Corinth's town meeting in 1987 (-1.47)

table 10 C

was the lowest of the 365 meetings studied between 1987 and 1992 (when the 1990 Census data are

most accurate) while the femindex in Huntington in 1988 (.2.65) was fourth highest from the top.

In other words Corinth ranked 365th and Huntington ranked 4th on femindex. Both towns had five

meetings in the six-year sample. Corinth's average femindex for the period was -.87 and

Huntington's was .80.[31]

A bird's eye view of the separation of a town's SES characteristics from the tendency of its

women to participate verbally in town meeting debate is provided by the SES factor score "upscale"

which combines an array of variables such as income, occupation and education. What one sees (in

Plot 1 of Figure X-O) is a textbook example of a stone-dead relationship. The regression line lies

flat and quiet across the scatterplot like a fly line on a twilight trout pond. A town's SES base

explains as close to zero percent of the variance in feminine participation as is imaginable and still

register anything at all. A series of tests did reveal that within the cluster of night meetings in the

sample there was a minor tendency for upscale towns to house more participatory meetings for

women (see the dashed regression line in Plot 1 of Figure X-O). Beyond this, however, a town's

SES level does not seep into town meeting to influence women's behavior. This is hardly

surprising given what the data has so far revealed about the contextual environment of real

democracy in general.   Plus there are all manner of aggregate relationships that might explain its

[FIGURE X-O ABOUT HERE]

---

[31] Overall, income was positively associated with both the passage of time and town size. But since time and size were linked to femindex but in opposite directions, income seemed to have a relationship (although weak) with femindex when time was controlled or when size was controlled. It was reduced to near zero when both were controlled.

FIGURE 10 O

absence.[32] Still in the face of expectations generated in the literature on political behavior, Plot 1 of Figure X-O impresses.

To make certain that the aggregate SES factor score did not hide any connections based on its component variables, a variety of tests were used involving both the entire sample of meetings and subsets of meetings surrounding the 1980 and 1990 Census years. Higher percentages of managers and professionals in the work force were ambivalent. Both education variables were asleep. The percent of working women and the SES diversity index also refused to perform. The -.23 partial correlation coefficient between median family income and femindex in the 1980 cluster did whet the appetite a bit as did the -.15 partial with the education index in the 1990 cluster of meetings. But all that can be said at this point is that these glimpses of explanation, if anything, suggest only that women's participation in direct democracy may trend in the opposite direction predicted by the SES model.

Community Dynamics and Boundriness

The methodological design of this book is what I call creative description. For women's participation in town meeting the requisite theoretical energy for creative description is found in modernization literature. We are told that a fair share of political activity for women and minorities awaits the breakdown of traditional social systems where such practices are ill supported. As localism weakens more cosmopolitan attitudes diversify the mix of acceptable behavior and free women to act openly in the political process. The search for women's equality of participation in

---

[32] Such as the night meeting tendency for which I have no explanation beyond the obvious. Upscale towns have more professional women who are more willing to participate and who are more willing to attend at night when their professional obligations are not compromised.

real democracy began by contrasting towns where the people have more of the SES attributes associated with modernism with those towns where they do not.   Now it compares those communities that have undergone the most demographic change and new people and new behaviors are ascendant with those places where the pulse of rural life hangs stubborn like the October rust of high ridge oak.

Are women more active in towns where population growth is highest, where the percent of native Vermonters in the population is lowest and where the combination of the loss of the traditional agricultural lifestyle and the growth of population are most pronounced? Is it higher where people travel longer distances to work outside town, where the population is less isolated from the influences of larger towns and the sense of the community as a boundried place is less obvious?   These variables are not closely linked to places where SES measures are high. In fact none of the nine variables of community dynamics and boundriness explain more than 30 percent of the variance in the summary upscale variable.[33] This means it is easier to judge the independent effect of community dynamics and boundriness variables on women's participation.

Only two of these variables register relationships that are statistically significant and these carry little authority. The percent of the work force employed outside town and the time it takes for those who do work outside town to get to work both vary positively with increased verbal participation on the part of women at town meeting. But the coefficients are only .22 and .12 respectively (for the full sample of 1193 meetings) explaining less than five percent of the variance in either case. Only out-of-town employment survives when controls are applied for the other eight measures. The rest remain helpless. Both population increase variables were motionless. The

---

[33] Upscale and stability correlated at "r" = -.01.

percent of the population moving into town in the last five years and the percent living in the same

house for at least five years didn't budge. The native-born Vermonter variable was hard frozen. So

were the rural isolation and community boundriness measures. All in all if these nine statistics are

accurate indicators of modernization then modernization in a community is a poor predictor of just

how egalitarian a community's town meeting will be on the question of women's involvement.

This is best demonstrated by matching a town's position on the culture shock variable with

femindex. Culture shock, it will be remembered, combines a town's 20-year population *gain* with

its *loss* of farmers in the work force and its *loss* of native born Vermonters in the population. These

are the three phenomena that have most dramatically altered both the face of Vermont's landscape

and the way that its people live in that landscape.[34]   The Kingdom towns of Brighton and Burke[35]

help anchor the index at its lower end; where culture shock has been the lowest. Both towns'

agricultural component has remained stable (small in both 1980 and 1990). Population increases in

these towns were relatively weak and the native-born population changed very little. Of the 150

towns in which the 353 town meetings studied between 1987 and 1992 were held Brighton was next

to the bottom on culture shock and Burke ranked 14th . Brighton's three meetings averaged -.22 on

femindex, and Burke's two meetings averaged .25.

---

[34]Many may object to the preposition here. It is my sense of the matter, however, that the old way of life in Vermont did in fact involve living *in* the landscape while the newer pattern involves simple living *on* it. Vermonters used to be part (and I mean this quite literally) of their piece of the planet and the shift from living *with* Vermont--its dirt under one's fingernails--to living on it (and making a big deal of looking *at* it) has a major impact on the direction the state's unfolding culture will take.

[35]Burke is the home of one of Vermont's smallest and poorest ski areas and one of America's toughest ski schools; headed for years by the legendary Warren Weatheral. It is also home of the ancestors of the largest buck I have ever seen on the hoof in Vermont. He paused momentarily in my headlights after lumbering out onto Route #105 about 4 a.m. on a November morning in 1964. I was hurrying to hunt in one of my own haunts about 50 miles south. He was as big as I was dumb.

On the other end of the scale there were towns like Sharon and Corinth where culture shock was quite profound, indeed. One understands this from the data itself. In Sharon the farming community was small in 1980 and remained that way over the decade. But the population more than doubled between 1970 and 1990 and the native Vermont population was cut nearly in half. In Corinth a stronger agricultural base was reduced by 44 percent and the percent of native Vermonters in town dropped from 55 percent to 34 percent while the population itself grew from 683 to 1244. But change can also be seen from the back roads. Stark are the contrasts these places intone to the time traveler of their hills and dales. I know these towns well. The differences between Brighton and Burke up in the Kingdom and Corinth and Sharon further south bespeak Vermont's struggle to survive, a heartache of loss etched deep in my passage from boyhood to manhood and beyond.

But in their town meetings the women of Corinth and Sharon did not participate at a rate reflective of the expectations of modernization theory. The demographic profiles of these towns have been changed by the influx of newcomers and the decline of traditional rural folkways more than in all but one of the 150 towns in the 1987-1992 cluster.[36] Yet the average femindex for the three meetings studied in Sharon for the period was only a tad above average (.04) and the average femindex for the five meetings we studied in Corinth was well below average, -87. Plot 2 of Figure X-O displays all 353 meetings of the 1987-1992 cluster arranged by culture shock and femindex. Culture shock clearly lacks the predictive energy needed to fuel a search for the link between community and women's participation.[37] In fact the only variable that showed any life at

---

[36]The town with the greatest culture shock was West Fairlee. There the population doubled and the percentage of native Vermonters was cut by almost two-thirds. But only one of West Fairlee's meetings fell in the 1987-1992 cluster.

[37] The stable community factor score was also ineffectual.

all was community size. Note in Plot 2 that the women's participation was consistently higher in

towns with less than 450 registered voters. This difference runs straight and true when the

regression lines based on town size are disentangled from the mean and plotted independently.

The Political Environment

Women's participation in direct democracy is also estranged from the political character of

the community. Theoretically the expectations were the same as those used in the analysis of

women's attendance at town meeting. They generated hypothesized links between community

politics and verbal participation as theoretically thin or thinner than they were for attendance. A

series of statistical screening tests were employed to discover if any of the specific variables used in

earlier analyses displayed any hopeful tendencies. By now these variables are familiar. They are

the turnout base for electoral politics in Presidential and "off" years, the liberalism factor score, the

vote for socialist Congressperson Bernie Sanders, the Democrat base vote (the average percent of

the vote cast for Democratic candidates for governor in the three elections held closest to the year

the town meeting was held), the percent "yes" vote for the ERA to the Vermont Constitution and the

intensity of the town's liberal/conservative ideological posture.

With the exception of the Sanders' vote the attempt to establish a connection between these

political characteristics and women's verbal involvement at town meeting was a wash. The Sanders'

factor score correlated at .23 with femindex. This finding makes sense. Communities with strong

voter turnout for Sanders ought to have women who dare to speak up. But I had supposed the

linkage would be even stronger. This relationship is displayed in Figure X-O, Plot 3. Although it is

by far the strongest association generated by the political variables, it explains only five percent of

the variance in women's participation. Remembering the variables used here are defined by the ballot box, one of the fundamental findings of this book is once more reinforced: if there is a linkage between real democracy and indirect democracy it is hidden in the underbrush and I have not been able to chase it out.

Putting the Variables Together

After establishing that there has been an increase in femindex over time, the structural, socioeconomic, and political environments of the meetings were searched for specific clues that might explain variations in women's verbal participation. Structural variables such as holding meetings at night and using the Australian ballot, two changes offered by progressive forces over the last half century, did not have an important impact. Yet a faint negative association between the Australian ballot and femindex remained a puzzle since there seemed to be no reason for it. A second conundrum was a negative association between increases in women's attendance and more egalitarian speech and talk. Theories of peer support predict otherwise. A third was higher feminine participation in towns that do not include educational matters on the town meeting day agenda. The negative coefficient is too weak (-.08) to be independently significant. It is interesting, however, because it contradicts the accepted assumption that women have always been *more* involved with educational issues.[38]

---

[38] I explored several models of verbal participation of women that included the availability of daycare in the post 1994 set of meetings. I discovered no context in which it was significant. The availability of daycare is, of course, theoretically important for women's participation only marginally, although parents do bring their children to town meeting now and then and one might suppose they would be less apt to speak if they were watching the kids. In the 1998 meeting in the town of Washington, for instance, (one of the five meetings for which I recorded the data that year) a man brought two of his own kids and two of their playmates into town meeting and sat them down in the very front row. I sensed trouble immediately. These were all boys in the five-to-eight age range. They'd raise hell for sure. But for close to an hour they sat there like little angles; a bit of fidgeting now and then but that was about

A simple probe of the positive relationship between town size and ballot type solves the Australian ballot problem. Femindex goes down as town size goes up. Larger towns in turn are more apt to use the Australian ballot. Plot 1 of Figure X-P establishes an approximation of the dynamics at work among the two variables. The meetings held in the smaller towns are much less apt to use the Australian ballot than are the meetings in the larger towns. But that isn't why feminine participation is higher in these meetings. The lines of best fit for the meetings in towns with and without the Australian ballot tend downward. Larger non-ballot towns tend to have lower women's participation and smaller ballot towns tend to have higher. At any point along the line of best fit for size (which in effect holds the size variable constant) use of the Australian ballot does not predict whether or not meetings will fall below or above the line. Non-ballot towns seem to be better for women because they are small not because they do not use the Australian ballot.

Similarly Plot 2 shows that the same kind of dynamic is working on the presence of educational issues and its negative association with femindex. Women's participation has increased between 1970 and 1996. So has the separation of education from its democratic moorings in town

---

all. At the right moment (when it seemed the boys' attention spans had about had it) the father leaned over and whispered to them. They got up and marched out in unison to play in the schoolyard. Two of them were suppressing grins on the way out. I interviewed the father after the meeting. "How'd you do it?" I wanted to know. "Home schooling," he said. Their mother worked in the afternoon. He was the teacher and he had brought these kids to school, literally, and in a more profound way as well. There were a lot of children at that meeting which was held in the "all purpose room" of the K-6 schoolhouse. De Tocqueville and Jefferson would have been pleased. I wrote the following note to myself in the margin of the town report. "This was a great meeting in that there were a lot of kids here." The father participated once during the meeting. It was while the kids he brought were present. Frank and Melissa Bryan, "The 1998 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Washington," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1998). The town of Washington was first named Kingsland, when in 1770 New York colony claimed the land, "patented" it, gave it to King's College, now Columbia University, and then named it county seat of a new New York county named Gloucester deep in the hills of what is now eastern Vermont. The trouble was it was hard to find the place as no one lived there. In 1777 three members of the Court "of common pleas" tried to hold session in Washington, got lost in a snowstorm and gave up. The record reports, "we traveled some ways and held a council when it was concluded it was best to open the court, as we saw no line to tell whether in Kingsland or not. . . . All causes continued or adjourned over to next term." Esther Munroe Swift, *Vermont Place-Names*, (Brattleboro, Vermont: The Stephen Greene Press, 1977): 329-330.

meeting. Towns that do not discuss education issues on town meeting day are no more apt to have high than low femindexes. They are, however, more apt to fall in the sample in the later years when the participatory records of meetings have generally improved for women.[39] The effect of the passage of time on women's participation is greater in those meetings held with no educational issues at stake than it is on those meetings with educational matters included in town meeting day deliberations. But this is a minor specification and doesn't upset the conclusion that the earlier finding that women participated more with educational issues absent was, indeed, spurious.

[FIGURE X-P ABOUT HERE]

Aside from town size, socioeconomic variables proved to inform very little. The exception is a persistent and unexplainable Census variable, percent of the work force working out of town, which survived a wide range of controls to register a partial correlation coefficient of .18 with femindex. The median family income in the towns registered a whisper with declining femindex. Moreover for the meetings clustered around the 1980 Census it produced the strongest coefficient of any of the socioeconomic and political variables analyzed, -.23. But once again the size variable intervened. Incomes are higher in the larger towns and femindex is lower. When the negative relationship between femindex and income was placed under controls for town size it was cut in half to -.11. While statistically significant, this is still a very weak association. The important point is that it precludes any link between community income levels and *higher* participation, a finding of substantial reputation when individual level data are used.

---

[39]When dummy variables for educational issues and ballot type are correlated under controls the following results occur. The correlation between femindex and use of the Australian ballot (controlling for town size) is reduced from -.14 to .00. The correlation between femindex and educational issues increases from -.08 to -.12 when town size is controlled. When the year the meeting is held is also controlled in decreases to -.02.

FIG 10 P

Political variables were equally anemic except for the Sanders' factor score. Years of watching participation in town meetings fed an inclination to believe that the Democratic Party in Vermont and the Sanders' organization had indeed contributed a cadre of female activists at the grass roots that might well be responsible for a slight boost in femindex. Since the base Democratic vote contributed heavily to the Sanders' factor, this line of thought seemed especially promising. When I controlled for town size, a necessary precaution since Democrats have traditionally done better in Vermont in the larger towns where femindex was lower, the correlation coefficient actually increased from .15 to .20. This was more like it. Yet we also know that both Sanders and the Democrats have done better in Vermont in recent years and in recent years femindex has improved as well. In fact the link between the Sanders' factor and the equality of participation for women in town meetings did turn out to be a function of the passage of the years. When this was controlled the partial between femindex and Sanders dove to .06. So ended the only hope for a connection between a town's electoral politics and its disposition to sex equality in town meeting democracy.

After experimenting with several additional models designed to filter out statistical overlaps, the five variables that remained in play plus education, the Sanders factor score and ballot type (just to be sure) were entered into a stepwise multiple regression routine to help summarize the findings. The results are reported in Table X-D. The logged size of the town in registered voters and the passage of time were the most important predictors of women's participation. Each contributes about seven percentage points of explained variance to the equation. Within the context of an overall increase in femindex over time, small town women are more apt to have a say in direct democratic settings than women who live in larger towns. Earlier analysis showed the tendency of increasing town size to be a depressant to feminine participation happens early in the range of

increases. The annoying tendency for meetings where the ratio of women to men in attendance is more equal to undermine feminine verbal participation remains intact and jacks up the explained variance from 14 to 19 percent. Two other variables are weaker but remain statistically significant. A positive association between femindex and the percent of workers employed out of town, which would not go away (despite my persistent efforts to make it), added another perplexing two percent.

[TABLE X-D ABOUT HERE]

"INVOLVEMENT": COMBINING ATTENDANCE WITH PARTICIPATION

Real democracy, of course, involves both *presence* and *participation* in combination. The ideal situation will occur when both are as natural for women as they are for men. So far women's attendance *at* town meeting and their participation *in* town meetings have been treated in separate chapters as independent maps of direct democracy's capacity to integrate traditional minority groups into the political process. It was discovered that the relationship between women's share of the attenders *at* town meeting was (strangely) negatively associated with their share of participation *in* town meeting. Participation was defined as women's share of the speakers (the variable called speech) in combination with their share of the participations (the variable called talk). The mildness of the connection between attendance and participation, however, ("r" = -.13) allows the creation of a combination variable for attendance and participation by simply adding the Z-scores for each together.

TABLE 10 D

The Parameters of the Combined Variable

This new variable is called involvement and it gives attendance at town meeting and participation in town meeting equal weight. The statistical parameters are healthy as the histogram in Figure X-Q, Plot 1 demonstrates. Plot 2 of the Figure X-Q adds to the visual appreciation of the fence lines of the distribution by placing all the meetings of the study in a scatterplot that matches involvement with the size of the town in which the meeting is held. Town size was one of the few variables even modestly capable identifying places where women were more active on town meeting day. On the face of it smaller towns seem to advantage women's political involvement in real democracy when involvement is defined both in terms of presence and participation.

[FIGURE X-Q ABOUT HERE]

Some of the meetings earn top democracy scores for women with very high scores on one measure and only average scores on the other. A random sample of 200 meetings was selected to demonstrate this. Their attendance and participation scores are matched in Plot 3 of Figure X-Q. Here the weak connection ($R^2 = .04$) between participation and attendance is emphasized. The tendency for more female attendance to be associated with lower female participation is demonstrated by the regression line. Some meetings like those of Canaan (1990) and Shelburne (1988) had meetings with very strong women's participation combined with very low attendance. Others like Georgia's (1991) and Pomfret's (1978) had remarkably high attendance in combination with low participation. Two meetings in 1970 (in Wallingford and Calais) were very low on both attendance and participation. No meetings had scores above 1.0 for each for both attendance and participation, although Starksboro came close in 1979. The gentle, downward drift in participation as attendance increased makes very strong scores in both areas difficult.

FIG 10 Q

To judge the possibility that total feminine activity in town meeting (the combination of these attendance and participation levels) which is called involvement, might be predictable from the kind of community in which the town meeting was held, I returned to the 14 instances when at least 20 towns had back-to-back yearly meetings in the sample. In each of these instances the involvement score in a town's meeting for one year was matched up with their involvement score for the following year. For instance there were exactly 20 towns in the 1983 sample that reappeared again in the 1984 sample. When the involvement scores in 1983 are correlated with counterparts for 1984 across this 20-town sample the correlation coefficient is .75. Fifty-six percent of the variance in involvement for 1984 can be explained from the 1983 involvement score. This was the strongest relationship for any of the 14 trials. The lowest "r" was .31. It appeared twice; in the 31-town trial of 1991-1992 and the 26-town trial of 1996-1997. The median "r" was .57.

Figure X-R (Plot 1) portrays the case closest to the median, the meetings of 1987 and 1988. Only 14 towns of the 39 towns that had meetings in the sample both years did better in 1988 than 1987. Given this some towns like Corinth, Richmond, Charlotte and Starksboro could be said to have met expectations from one year to the next almost perfectly in that they fell near or on the line identifying the fall in involvement from 1987 to 1988. Other towns like Shelburne, Georgia, and North Hero matched their feminine involvement of 1988 almost perfectly with what they had in 1987. Yet a town like Craftsbury was a better predictor town than a town like Addison. Craftsbury, while not matching its involvement 1987 score with its involvement 1988 score as well as Addison, was closer to what one would predict given the overall decline in involvement from one year to the next than was Addison. Other towns like Newbury and Grand Isle bucked the downward trend between 1987 and 1988 and had substantially higher scores in 1988 while towns like Bradford

(which shares a union high school with Newbury), Cabot and Johnson were much lower in 1988 than in 1987.

Overall the linkages between meetings in back-to-back years within the same town are tighter for the involvement (they averaged .57) than they were for either variable that went to make it up. The average "r" for the attendance measure was .40 and .46 for participation. What this means is that the possibility of identifying reasons for women's activity in the nature of the towns themselves or the structure of the meetings these towns hold is better for our overall measure than it was for its components. On average close to one third of the variance in women's role in town meeting can be explained by what their role was the previous year. Evidently some towns have consistently more friendly meetings for women than others.[40]

[FIGURE X-R ABOUT HERE]

Still, it is the variation that is striking. If one third of the variance is explained, two-thirds remains in the puckerbrush. Comparing meetings in individual towns across a number of years adds additional emphasis. Consider my hometown of Newbury (Plot 2 in Figure X-R). The women's involvement measure fluctuates wildly. In fact it is usually more accurate to predict what Newbury's women's involvement will be in a following year from what the average town's score was in the current year than from Newbury's score in the current year. In other words the average town is a better predictor for Newbury than Newbury itself. The mean of all the meetings is produced by variations in meetings *within* towns more than it is produced by variations in the

---

[40] This relationship may be disappearing, however. There seems to be a downward trend in the coefficients. Prior to 1985 the average "r" was .67. After 1985 it was .47. In the last three cases where I had at least 20 towns having meetings in the sample on back-to-back years (1996-1998) it averaged only .38.

FIG 10 R

meetings *of* individual towns. Other towns for which many years of data are available demonstrate similar findings.

The Correlates of Women's Involvement

Women's involvement is a combination of being there (attendance) and participating (speaking out), which itself is a combination of a willingness to speak at least once (speech) and to speak more than once (talk). Chapter IX told us that when the analysis begins in 1977 (when SES data are available) only a single variable, holding meetings during the day rather than in the evening, could be found that seriously improved women's attendance. It explained seven percent of the variance. Women's attendance was about 3.7 percentage points lower at evening meetings. Beyond that, upscale towns accounted for another percent improvement in prediction (increasing women's attendance a tad) and larger towns added a final percent by lowering attendance a fraction. The entire equation reduced the uncertainty in what women's attendance will be in any given town in any given meeting by only 9.3 percent. When the analysis begins in 1970 minus the SES variables, an early increase in women's attendance between 1970 and 1975 allows the passage of time to replace upscale as the second variable in the equation.

Participation, however, is far more predictable than attendance. In the equation using meetings studied after 1976, 20.57 percent of the variance was accounted for. Three variables, the size of the town (negatively), the passage of time (positively) and the percent of women in attendance (negatively) contributed almost all (18.8 percent) of the explanatory power. One other variable, the percent of the work force employed out of town, kicked in two percentage points. Since both attendance and participation were assigned equal weight in the combined variable, the

variables associated with participation take the lead in predicting involvement. In the final stepwise

multiple regression model town size and the passage of time led with 15.2 percent of the variance

explained. When the meeting was held added 3.7 percentage points (this is where attendance

mattered) and the percent employed out of town added 2.5, upscale tiptoed past the test for

statistical significance to add another .07 percentage points. (A statistical summary of the model is

found in Table X-E.)

[TABLE X-E ABOUT HERE]

Thus nearly all of the capacity of the context of community to explain variations in the

involvement rate in real democracy on the part of women is reduced to three factors: the passing of

the years, the size of the community, and when the meetings are held. So many fine variables,

oozing with potential died on the trail to this discovery. Unfortunately for women's involvement

the surviving variables share a fundamentally negative alliance. As time has passed involvement has

increased independent of the fact that town size has grown. This product of the years, bigger

communities, has had its own negative, independent and therefore countervailing impact on

women's involvement. Meanwhile as the atmosphere for women's involvement in Vermont and

around the country has improved and the context of the community has declined (towns have grown

larger), the people of Vermont have voted to hold more and more of their meetings in the evening,

which has had its own independent and negative impact on women's involvement. To watch this

metamorphosis unfold take a final look at these little towns of the hills as they are arrayed in the

scatterplots in Figure X-S. The view there tells much about women in direct democracy.

Note first that each plot represents a two-year cluster of meetings; one at the beginning of

the study in 1970 and 1971, one during the middle (1984 and 1985) and one for the final two years

TABLE 10 E

of data available for this volume, 1997 and 1998. The dashed line across each plot represents the

mean value of women's involvement (attendance and participation) for each period. This line

inches upward from Plot 1 to Plot 3 representing the independent positive effect the passage of time

has had on women's involvement score over the years. In 1970 and 1971 it was -.89. By 1997 and

1998 it had reached +.69. If this seems discouragingly slow, consider the twin tides against which

women struggle.

The first is the tendency for larger towns to depress women's involvement. In each plot the

line of best fit for women's involvement slopes downward as the size of the town increases. This

negative association appears in each cluster signaling its freedom from the passage of time. But as

time has passed the mean size of the towns has increased. This dynamic is represented by the

vertical line. In 1970 and 1971 there was an average of only 577 registered voters in the towns we

studied. This translates to a logged value of 2.7. By 1984 and 1985 the log of town size had

increased to 2.8 since there were then an average of 872 voters in the sample of towns. In the last

two years (1997 and 1998) average town size had increased to 1104 and the log of that number is

2.9.

The second negative tide is produced by holding meetings at night. These scatterplots (1, 2,

and 3 of Figure X-S) demonstrate that as time has passed the percentage of meetings held at night

has steadily increased from 10 percent in 1970 and 1971 to 31 percent in 1997 and 1998. In each

period, moreover, night meetings had lower feminine involvement scores than day meetings. This

indicates the relationship is independent of the passage of time. It is also, however, independent of

town size. In each scatterplot night meetings are apt to fall below the line of best fit no matter where

on the town size axis they reside. This independence is far from complete but it is remarkably substantial given the complexities of the relationships.

Plot 4 provides a summary showing that throughout the period from 1970 to 1998 women's involvement increased in tandem in day and night meetings. But day meetings continued to advantage women significantly until 1990. After that the linkage went eschew for a few years before it reappeared in 1997 and 1998. In short both night meetings and larger towns depress women's attendance and both have increased over time. But despite this, women's involvement has managed to improve steadily. A lot of this is most likely due to the increasingly positive views on the matter that have improved steadily in the nation and certainly in Vermont ever since the 1960's. A much smaller portion of the causation may be tied to increasing levels of socioeconomic status in the towns.

[FIGURE X-S ABOUT HERE]

VISITING THE TOWNS

Aggregating the meetings of those towns that have ten or more in the sample provides a simpler if less agile data set with which to view these dynamics. It also moves the analytical beam away from the meetings and shines it directly on the towns. Finally it removes two variables from the process. One is the issues that come and go with the meetings. If issues draw women to town meeting unevenly from year to year, it increases the amount of variance in the meeting-based women's involvement statistic. Averaging women's involvement over a series of meetings for each town eliminates that source of potential variation. If some towns habitually have more issues that

FIG 10 S

urge women to participate than other towns, variation will still remain, of course, *between* towns and appear in the town-based sample. But it will be much less significant than variation between meetings within towns, the condition that obtains in the data set of pooled meetings.

The other variable that is rendered close to impotent by aggregating meetings to the town level is the passage of time. The time variable (I call it "time gain") ranges from 1 for meetings held in 1970 to 29 for meetings held in 1998. The "average" time gain for the meetings held in the 51 towns in the sample was 18 with a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 21. This was the only variable in the meeting-based data set that did not vary in any given year. Thus if the sample was random its variation will be reduced dramatically when the data is averaged by town for the twenty-nine-year period under scrutiny. For instance town size, which of course varies significantly between meetings *within* years, ranged from 40 to 4853 in the 1434-pooled meeting sample. It was reduced to 147 to 3815 in the 51-town sample, a loss of only 24 percent of its range. The range of the time gain variable, however, was reduced by 79 percent, from 1 to 29 in the meeting-based sample to 15 to 21 in the town-based sample.

With these caveats in mind we can now identify the most feminine-friendly towns for real democracy and the least. The best town for women, that is the place where the ratios of women's attendance and verbal participation were most competitive with men's was the little town of Belvidere. This is a rugged place in a rugged region of a very rugged state. It has cropped up often in the preceding meeting-to-meeting treatment of women's attendance at and participation in town meetings. Belvidere's name tells a lot about it. The best source says the town was named by an Irishman after the beautiful Lake Belvidere in County Westmeath, Ireland. The name itself comes

from the Italian, a beautiful view.[41] One source says in Vermont it became to mean "a place a long

way off."[42] You get the picture. Belvidere will be treated in more depth in the final chapter. For now

understand this: on the face of it Belvidere is one of the last places in Vermont those who subscribe

to the modernist's view of progress would go to find a modern, progressive atmosphere for full and

equitable political participation for women.

The worst place for women was Proctor. Proctor was for a century the bailiwick of the most

powerful political dynasty in Vermont (see above page ___). Redfield Proctor, the first of four

Proctors to become governor formed the Vermont Marble Company in 1880, which soon became

the largest in the world. This happened the year he completed his term as governor.[43] Two years

---

[41] Swift, *Vermont Place-Names,* 273-275. Monroe's is a remarkable book, the result of prodigious effort. I first met her at a plowing contest (oxen) at the famous Billings Farm in Woodstock where she worked. But *really* met her over dinner with seven or eight others (some I didn't know) at the yearly awards banquet for the Center for Research on Vermont. I had just finished a self-effacing story to (I must say) the general amusement of the table. The story involved a disastrous attempt on my part to raise sheep down on my place in Starksboro – ending in the death of one sheep that was (you had to be there) terribly comical. Esther chuckled (a somewhat dangerous little chuckle), waited for the mirth to subside, leaned forward in my direction and said: "Sheep *are* dumber than oxen, Frank, and that makes anyone who doesn't know enough to take care of them a horse's ass." I don't tell that story anymore.

[42] National Survey, Inc., *The Vermont Yearbook 1998-99,* (Chester, Vermont: National Survey, Inc.): 145.

[43] In those days the governor's office was doled out to distinguished citizens by the Republican Party for one two-year term after which it was offered to another deserving party member. One governor, one term was the rule. The only other catch was that each new governor had to live on the opposite side of the Green Mountains from the outgoing one. This was called "the mountain rule." It was put in place by the GOP to protect its hegemony from the potentially devastative effects created and then protected by the Green Mountains which cut the state asunder south to north. The one term only tradition was broken in 1928 after the state's road and railroad system had been washed away by the flood of 1927, Vermont's greatest natural disaster. The mountain rule, America's most impressive geographical electoral pattern ever, ticked along like clockwork "east/west/east/west/east/west" from 1870 to 1944 when Mortimer Proctor, the last of the Proctor dynasty (who lived on the Lake Champlain side of the mountains) got impatient and broke it. The result was his defeat in a primary by a Connecticut valley liberal Republican, Ernest Gibson, in 1946. This was the first time an incumbent governor had been defeated since before the Civil War. Within ten years the Republican grip on Vermont politics was dramatically loosened (1952) by insurgent Democrats. Ten years after that liberal, Kennedy-like Philip Hoff became the first Democrat ever to win the governorship. By a razor's edge Hoff defeated the last clear "Proctor man" F. Ray Keyser, Jr., who became the second and last incumbent governor to be thrown out of office. He also is the only incumbent ever to be denied another term in a general election. Hoff received a lot of help in his defeat of Keyser in the North*east* Kingdom from a dissident Republican dairy farmer, Arthur Simpson. Simpson had been the heir apparent when Proctor ran out of turn from the wrong side (the *west* side) of the mountains in 1944. Thus it was that the curse of breaking the

later they named the village where he lived after him. Four years after that the state of Vermont

added another 2000 acres to the village and incorporated it as a full-fledged town. The Proctor name

went with it. Following World War II and the coming of the Democrats the Proctor influence

disappeared. The Proctor Marble Company changed hands. The Proctor family faded from public

view with the death of the last Proctor governor, Mortimer.

In 1935 the marble workers struck the company. What followed was one of Vermont's most

bitter and violent labor disputes, drawing a good deal of national attention including New England

college students who entered the fray to collect money and clothes for the workers. Vermont writer

and historian Peter S. Jennison says the Proctor "company's feudal structure was severely shaken"

and the "bitter strike polarized the Rutland area and drew an unusual degree of national attention,

partly because labor strife contrasted sharply with Vermont's pastoral image, and because several

prominent left wing activists made it a cause." [44] There was also an ethnic factor involved. Striking

workers tended to be Italian and non-striking workers Swedish. Thus Proctor became in reputation

and lore Vermont's "company" town and this image (and the accompanying rhetoric from left and

right) stuck like glue for decades.

The Proctor that had the lowest level of women's town meeting involvement of the 51

towns in the sample between 1970 and 1998 (we visited Proctor ten times during the period)

seemed to exhibit residues from its past. It tended to vote for Republican candidates more than

Democrats. But there were many towns (12 of the 50) more Republican than Proctor. It was more

---

mountain rule was in strong measure responsible for the defeats of the only two incumbent governors ever to be denied a second term since before the Civil War.

[44] Peter S. Jennison, *Roadside History of Vermont*, (Missoula, Montana: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1989): 186-188.

conservative than most of the towns. But there were ten that scored below Proctor on the liberal factor score. It was hostile to Vermont's ERA. Still there were nine of the 50 more hostile. Yet Proctor has supported Bernie Sanders at a higher rate than the average town. Proctor is clearly not a wealthy town. Its upscale factor score was somewhat below average. Its participation at the polls in fall statewide elections also dips below the mean.   All this matches a place where workers and owners compete each precluding the other from dominating the statistic.

Only two things clearly distinguished Proctor from the pack, its population density and its population stability. It has more people per road mile than any but two of the other towns, Shelburne and St. George. This is because Proctor is above the mean on size and at the same time the second smallest town geographically, only 4800 acres. It is also the only town of the 51 that on average actually lost population in the 20-year period that preceded the year in which each town meeting we studied was held. In short Proctor seems to be blandly conservative, populated by a bi-modal middleclass, and tired. Its support for Sanders is a residue from its union days, so too the below average SES indicators. Its support for Republicans (nowhere outstanding) could be a residue of the Proctor dynasty.

Nowhere moreover does it score high on the variables associated with feminine involvement. Bigger than average on size which hurts considerably and lower than average on status, which hurts a little, it also holds its meetings at night, which doesn't help either. But the most important reason is its history. Its government was family-based and supported by a network of intelligent and public-spirited men. The antithesis was blue-collar, union-based, often ethnic and socially conservative too. The men of quarries were interested in making a living not governance. Besides, they had their own government. The union. This cultural infrastructure was cocooned by

geography. It lacked the topsoil for the seeds of change to take root and grow. There were few places in Vermont in which two male-dominated institutions, the Family and the Union, sucked up as much energy from the commonweal as in Proctor. Up north in the deep hills of Belvidere society was fixed not by *man*-made institutions but by nature. Women there found the sledding better.

WITNESS

Two Roommates: Two Views of Proctor

In 1987 two roommates from my "American Political Systems" class went to the Proctor town meeting. What follows are excerpts from the short essays which accompanied their empirical report.[45]

The Proctor High School gym, where the meeting was held, was the first shock. When I saw it, all I could think of was how tiny it was compared to the one in my high school back home. About the only thing the same size in both gyms were the courts, and I even had doubts about whether Proctor's wasn't in fact scaled down, like everything else in the gym. The bleachers, rising in three mighty rows on either side of the court, would be hard-pressed to hold the cheerleaders in my school, where I was one of 1200 students. But, then again, Proctor High, where my roommate was Valedictorian of a graduating class of 37 isn't exactly the big time.

In short, the meeting was enlightening. Besides being stocked with enough prototype New Englanders to fill Pepperidge Farm commercials from now until Armageddon, it summed up Vermont nicely: lots of hunting jackets, a little preppiness intermingled, some down-to-earth talk, very democratic, about some not-so-important issues, and cakes and cookies.

* * *

It is always difficult to appreciate something that you take for granted, and it is especially difficult to put that appreciation in writing, but after reading my roommate's rendition of Proctor's town meeting the words began to flow. Some background may be needed to illustrate where our differences may lie. First of all I was born twenty years ago in that quaint

---

[45] Kevin Jones and Alex Nemerov, "The 1983 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Proctor," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1983). The last time Proctor made the sample was 1998. On that occasion the student reported in part: "The town meeting in Proctor was discouraging. It took only one hour for the town and school meetings to do their business. The Pledge of Allegiance began at seven o'clock...The school meeting then began...The recessed town meeting then continued and the moderator announced the resignation of Charles Nichols, Jr. The 80-year-old selectman had been active in Proctor for many years and was given a round of applause for his contributions. Ironically he responded by putting down the community for its lack of political interest. His spirited speech was the highlight of the evening...The Proctor town meeting was a joke...With time I anticipate and hope that the powers that be will make appropriate changes." _____ "Town Meeting in Proctor 1998," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, March 1998). I have omitted the names of students when some of their remarks might prove controversial.

little town of Proctor and have lived there since, except for my short tours of duty here at the University. On the other hand my roommate although born in Vermont has spent most of his days in one of those metropolitan havens known as St. Louis. . .   Our contrasting backgrounds may be illustrated in yet another way, how our families used to earn their living. My roommate's grandfather was a very successful businessman in another urban landmark, New York City, while my grandfather was a blacksmith in a quaint, Vermont village known as Dorset. . .

My roommate in his essay highlighted all of those quaint things about that quaint little town's town meeting. He wrote about those typical Vermonters wearing their red hunting jackets (it's funny how I don't recall them), the informality, the ladies selling home cooked food in the lobby (for one of those down to earth Vermont benefits), and the gym with only three rows of bleachers (they must have removed a few rows while I wasn't looking).

. . . I find this quaintness claim rather repugnant. Town meetings are more than their quaintness. They are examples of true democracy. It is true that town folk discussing how much money they want to spend on plowing roads is rather down to earth and that some of the people may be garbed in red hunting coats but let's not get stuck on their quaintness and overlook the true beauty of town meetings, the fact that the people who are affected most by the decisions are the ones who get a chance to make them. This is truly beautiful especially today when you often feel that the only person who does not have a say in your life is you. . .

In no way though do I mean to belittle my roommate. He may feel the same way about me when he shows me a Piet Mondrian and I reply that all I see are a bunch of lines anyone could have drawn. Is there beauty that my parochial mind can't comprehend? They say "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Unfortunately in this case it isn't that simple...

Figure X-T (Plot 1) shows Proctor and Belvidere arrayed with the other 49 towns in the town-based sample according to their average women's involvement scores and their average size in registered voters. Of all the variables tested below to determine the correlates of women's involvement at the town level, size was the most powerful and the most independent. The curved relationship between town size and women's involvement is clear. Somewhere after a town reaches 1250 registered voters further increases in size do not hurt women's involvement at all. Prior to that, however the downward slope is severe. The relationship is sloppy, however, indicating that small towns are no guarantee that women's involvement will improve in them. Still by and large the relationship between size and women's involvement found at the meeting level is supported by the town level data.

[FIGURE X-T ABOUT HERE]

FIG 10 T

Plot 2 features the meetings in Belvidere and Proctor that formed the high and low averages

these towns demonstrated in Plot 1 and thereby provides a look inside the time frame collapsed by

the town data set. None of the 14 meetings in Belvidere ever had a woman's involvement score as

low as the best of the meetings in Proctor. None of Belvidere's 14 meetings dips below the average

established by all the towns. None of Proctor's meetings rises above the norm. Note also how

Proctor's low average was exacerbated by three disastrous meetings in a row beginning in 1982. I

haven't been able to determine if they are an artifact of the sample or represent an independent

cause altogether. One of the reasons Proctor is so low over all is because it does not seem to have

improved with time. While Belvidere's line of best fit among the meetings across the years slopes

upward, Proctor's is fundamentally flat.

All 51 towns with their accompanying statistical indicators were entered into regression

equations to test the solidity of the meeting-based findings. The result is summarized in Table X-F.

The only dissonance between the two is caused by the fact the passage of time is out of the picture

(see above) and upscale co-varies with it (.37). Under these conditions upscale becomes a surrogate

for the passage of time becoming the second most important variable in the stepwise regression

procedure and bumping "When the Meeting was Held" and "Out-of-Town Workers" down into

third and fourth place respectively.[46] Upscale's surrogate status for time became apparent in the

meeting-based analysis that showed when upscale competes with the passage of time head to head it

---

[46] The relationship between women and "out of town workers" remains a puzzle. I tried all manner of control strategies to see if it would go away. But it didn't. There is evidence that women in neighborhoods where *men* leave the neighborhood for work have more attachment and involvement with the neighborhood than men. Lawrence H. Fuchs, "American Jews and the Presidential Vote," *American Political Science Review* 49 (June 1955): 385-401 cited in Robert Huckfeldt, Paul Allen Beck, Russell J. Dalton, and Jeffrey Levine, "Political Environments, Cohesive Social Groups and the Communication of Public Opinion," *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (November 1995): 1025-1054.

loses.[47] This is not an unimportant finding in that it suggests favorable public opinion is more important for the integration of "out" groups into the democratic process than rising socioeconomic levels. As we have seen in town-based checks on meeting-based equations for other dependant variables (like attendance) the coefficients seem to be stronger and the slopes steeper in the town-based results. But because the "Ns" are so much smaller (reduced from 1434 to 51) the statistical significance of the relationship is reduced, although they all make muster by accepted standards.

[TABLE X-F ABOUT HERE]

With the passage of time held constant the opportunity to probe the relationship between women's involvement in real democracy and status and town size is improved. Collapsing the meetings into the towns that held them is in some ways more conceptually pleasing since it directs the attention to 51 of the towns most often appearing in the meeting-based analysis. Plots 1 and 2 of Figure X-U demonstrate for instance the advantage town size has over upscale in predicting women's involvement. Both matter but size matters considerably more. All along the range of town size (Plot 1) the top and moderate upscale towns tend to have higher women's involvement than the towns at the bottom of the upscale variable. Pomfret tops Bakersfield. Warren tops Sheldon. Other upscale towns like St. George, Underhill, Charlotte and Norwich hold the high ground on the scatterplot irrespective of their size. Roxbury, Bolton, Corinth and Proctor are examples of low scale towns that take up positions at the bottom of the distribution even though they vary considerably in size. But note also that as towns get bigger women's involvement drops for *all* SES

---

[47] (See above page_____.) Analysis of the partial correlation coefficients shows that when upscale is matched with women's involvement controlling for time passage and town size its linkage to involvement is .12. When the passage of time is matched with involvement controlling for upscale and town size it correlates with involvement at .24.

TABLE 10 F

status levels but the drop is precipitous *especially* in low status towns. Moreover moderately high upscale towns actually have on average a little higher involvement than the towns in the highest upscale cohort.

Similarly all along the range of upscale (Plot 2) small towns tend to have more involvement than medium- or large-sized towns. Small town and upscale Pomfret performs better on women's town meeting involvement than big and even more upscale towns like Underhill, Charlotte and Norwich. Nine of the ten lowest performers are moderate or big towns. The gap in the means of the size cohorts is also more substantial for categories of town size than it is for categories of upscale. And it is uniform. The poorest involvement towns are the big ones. The best are the small ones and moderate-sized towns are in between. Once again the slopes of the lines representing categories of towns are interesting. The increase in women's involvement association with upscale is sharpest for the large town cohort.

[FIGURE X-U ABOUT HERE]

This is important for it demonstrates that in a small downscale town women's involvement is not disadvantaged to the same degree it is in large downscale towns. The small community displays a more supportive environment for women's political activity than the large community especially if the citizens of the community score lower on upscale attributes. Larger towns are more apt to ignore the relationship between size and support for women's involvement if they are upscale. If they are not they are more apt to show lower involvement.

As a check on this relationship I plotted town size and women's involvement for three two-year sets of meetings (1977 and 1978, 1987 and 1988, and 1997 and 1998) and flagged each meeting by three categories of the upscale variable. Since each plot looked at the relationship at a

FIG 10 U

discrete time, near the beginning of the study (as soon as Census data were available), in the middle

and at the end, in none of them could the passage of time matter. In each case the negative slope for

the downscale towns was much steeper that it was for upscale towns. The pattern revealed by the

town-based analysis was duplicated during each period.

Plot 3 of Figure X-U has the data for the 1997-1998 set of meetings and emphasizes three

things. The first is that women's involvement has improved overall with time. The range of

variation in the 1997-1998 set of meetings for women's involvement (the Y axis) extends much

higher than it does in Plot 1 which can be seen as a rough average for the entire period. The second

is upscale mattered very little in the 1997-1998 set of meetings. The means for women's

involvement for each cohort of upscale are almost identical. Third is a repeat of the sharp tendency

for women's involvement to suffer as communities get bigger *especially if* they are downscale

instead of upscale. The aggregate trap (attaching findings at the group level to assertions about

individual behavior) precludes claims like: "Low status women in small communities have a better

chance for political equality than low status women in large communities." But clearly the burden

of proof is shifted and a compelling hypothesis advanced.[48]

---

[48] It might be tempting to conclude that it is the mild relationship between upscale and town size (r = .34) that is at fault since low status people have been found to participate less in high income environments. But this would be working only if low status women are more apt to be hurt by high status environments than low status men, since the women's involvement measure specifies women's involvement in contrast to men's. To my knowledge no such findings exist.