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12 Social Movement "Success": A Comparative Analysis of Feminism in the United States and the United Kingdom

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The focus of this chapter is a comparative analysis of the contemporary feminist movements in Britain and the United States. The analysis demonstrates that the "political opportunity structure" (the particular context of institutions, alignments, and ideology) is crucial to an understanding of movement structure, goals, and impact. While the feminist movements in the United States and United Kingdom share many joint objectives, they differ significantly with regard to styles of political activism, leadership orientation, and organizational values (Jenson 1983). These differences interact with contrasting political opportunities to shape the success of feminist claims.

Based on the comparative research undertaken, the major conclusion of this study is that the structure and values of British politics have served to isolate feminists from the formal political system, from other feminists, and from potential allies.¹ This chapter examines feminist political activism in the U.K. in two contexts. The first is the women's liberation movement—decentralized, localized, and antielitist—sometimes described as anarcho-libertarian (Stacey and Price 1980, 180). Movement groups occasionally come together in national structures such as the National Abortion Campaign (NAC) for abortion rights or the National Women's Aid Federation (NAAF) against domestic violence. In the main, however, they engage local authorities in efforts to obtain funding and other assistance. British feminism is more "nondirected" than its "sister" movement in the United States in its emphasis on personal interaction, expression, and articulation of feminist values and the importance of internal democracy. A second set of feminist groups operates within key political and economic institutions, primarily unions and parties, which play a far more influential political role than their counterparts in the U.S. The chapter suggests the ways in which both aspects of British feminism, the locally and the institutionally based, have affected British politics as well as contrasting the British movement with its American counterpart.

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THE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

Perhaps the major distinction between the American and British systems as they affect the feminist movement and its impact is the importance in the United Kingdom of centralized government. The relatively centralized process of policy-making in the U.K. emphasizes ministerial responsibility and neutrality, and operates behind closed doors. In the U.S. there is far greater emphasis on public scrutiny and intervention in bureaucratic politics.

A core of politically neutral permanent civil servants and the relatively small size and narrow social background of the political elite present significant barriers to change-oriented policies (Ashford 1981; Sampson 1982). A system of "tripartism"—which includes the government, the Confederation of British Industries (CBI), and unions—excludes other groups from access to policy-making (Befoff and Peele 1980, 28). Unlike appointive offices in the U.S., which are often the result of "clientelism" or pressure group influence, such appointments in the U.K. are limited to "Old Boy" lists of the "Great and the Good." Confidentiality and hierarchy pervade nomination, appointment, and patronage politics. The feedback and friction generated by implementation politics in the United States is almost entirely absent in Britain, given the primacy of appointed, as opposed to elected, officials (Ashford 1981).

Grassroots lobbying, common in the U.S., has little impact in a system as centralized as that in the U.K. British courts play a far more restricted role than their American counterparts; constitutional review and the use of law to aid social reform movements, especially through class action suits, are virtually unknown. Hence, the policy-making process is organized to make exclusion from access remarkably easy. A consequence of centralization and secrecy is to limit the role of "promotional" or attitude groups seeking change—they tend to be poor in size, finances, and the ability to obtain benefits (Blondel 1974; Christoph 1974, 44).

Although political parties are, by general consensus, declining in importance, they are major agents for the resolution of key political issues (Richardson and Jordan 1979, 12). British parties, more than those in the U.S., tend to be parties of social integration rather than individual representation. Trade unions play a dominant political role, particularly in the Labour party—90 percent of the total Labour party membership and 85 percent of the funds are derived from unions (Punnett 1980, 127). In Britain, 50 percent of workers are unionized, in contrast to fewer than 20 percent in the U.S. The tradition of class-based ideology, socialism, and a strong organized Left involves many British feminists in Labour party and trade movement politics.

The American party system is looser and less dominant in the political system, and the fragmented nature of power lends itself to access to a wider variety of pressure groups. The past decade has seen the further decline of political parties and the rise of single-issue pressure politics. The American political culture stresses incremental, nonradical change as well as compromise.

The scope of government differs as well. In the U.K. the role of national government intervention in the family and social welfare politics has been more firmly institutionalized, providing support for British women in a number of areas that their American counterparts lack. Examples are to be found in the National Health Service, child benefits paid to mothers, (formerly called child tax allowances), maternity grants, and maternity allowances.

Finally, in addition to its structure and institutional framework, emphasis must be placed on Britain as a nation in which only limited value change has taken place (Inglehart 1977, 44).² The traditional structure of British society as it affects women's roles includes low educational attainment for women, norms of "good" motherhood and marriage, low wages, and a stratified labor market and class structure. Marriage rates are high and divorce rates low, suggesting the persistence of the traditional family (Hills 1981). A backward, stagnant economy further constrains women's opportunities in a society that continues to be elitist and class based.

The emphasis to be placed here on distinctions related to external factors should not obscure the many similarities between feminism in the two countries. There have been parallel historical developments, including the advent of the suffrage movement, the birth control movement, and the "renaissance" of feminism in the 1960s. In addition, the Seven Demands of the Women's Liberation Movement in the U.K. are generally similar to those advocated by NOW in the U.S.:

1. equal pay;
2. equal education and job opportunities;
3. free contraception and abortion on demand;
4. free 24-hour nurseries, under community control (only the demand for community-controlled nurseries is markedly more radical);
5. legal and financial independence;
6. an end to discrimination against lesbians;
7. freedom from intervention by the threat of violence or sexual coercion, regardless of marital status—an end to the laws, assumptions, and institutions that perpetuate male dominance and men's oppression of women (Feminist Anthology Collective, 1981).

Analysis of public policy on feminist issues reveals similar trends. In the area of equal rights, the U.K. has passed an Equal Pay Act (1970) and a Sex Discrimination Act (1975)—the latter establishing the Equal Opportunities Commission to enforce the new laws. The Employment Protection Act of 1975 gave women a statutory right to paid maternity leave, protection from unfair dismissal during pregnancy, and the right to regain their jobs up to 29 weeks after giving birth.³ With regard to violence and victimization of women and the right to self-determination, the Domestic Violence Act (1976) strengthened procedures by which women could obtain injunctions to restrain violent husbands, while the Sexual Offenses (amendment) Act provided better safeguards for a rape victim's

privacy during trial (Coote and Campbell 1982, 106). The 1967 Abortion Act authorized abortion up to the twenty-eighth week of pregnancy in cases where two doctors agreed that the life of the mother or other children would be at risk or where the baby seemed likely to become handicapped (Randall 1982).

In the U.S., Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the establishment of the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission provided some equal employment protection for women. The Pregnancy Discrimination Act gave pregnant women equal access to insured maternity benefits. Abortion rights were established largely via Supreme Court decisions (in the U.K. they were enacted by legislation) and have been the subject of subsequent (primarily restrictive) congressional action. Domestic violence legislation failed at the federal level, but funding and improved procedures for victims have been the subject of considerable legislative activity at the state level.

Despite the apparently similar nature of public policy related to women, however, it is my contention that the impact of such policy has depended in large measure on systemic factors.

THE EMERGENCE OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION IN BRITAIN

Among the striking distinctions between British and American feminists are the far greater influence in Britain of socialism and Marxism on movement politics and the absence there of a liberal-equal rights organization such as the National Organization for Women (NOW).

The British suffrage movement demonstrated tendencies that are still present in British feminism today. One was an early tie between the Labour party and constitutional feminists (Evans 1977, 126). Another was militancy—perhaps related to the example of Irish nationalism, perhaps born of rage and disappointment when apparently close-at-hand victory failed.

The contemporary British feminist movement received its impetus from radical and New Left politics, especially the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and anti-Vietnam campaigns (Randall 1982, 172; Wilson 1980, 184). Working-class women as well organized in the 1960s: at Hull in 1968 for better conditions for their fishermen husbands, and at Ford's auto machine works in Dagenham, where the demands for equal pay and equal work resulted in the creation of a short-lived Joint Action Committee for Women's Rights (Wandor 1971, 96–97). The revived movement in the U.S. provided the immediate spark for much women's liberation activity in the U.K., which early on developed strength among socialist and university women. A London-based women's liberation workshop-coordinated 70-odd local groups and published a journal called *Shrew* (Randall 1982; Wandor 1972). In 1970 the national women's liberation movement held its first national conference at Oxford. The demands that emerged from the conference—24-hour child care, equal pay and education, free contraception and abortion on demand—reflected a practical orientation, new to some move-

ment activists. The British movement developed numerous factions. One chart listed at least 14 different "tendencies" within it (Sebestyen 1979, 16); the resulting conflicts—largely between radical and socialist feminists—have prevented the holding of a national conference since 1978. The conflicts centered largely on whether to scrap the first six of the Women's Liberation demands listed above in favor of concentrating on the seventh, the demand for the cessation of male violence (Randall 1982, 154).

Like the so-called "younger," more radical branch of American women's liberation, the British movement lacked a coordinating structure other than national, regional, or issue-oriented conferences. At the time of this writing, *Spare Rib*, a monthly publication produced by a feminist collective, and the Women's Research and Resource Center (WRRC) in London provide the only organized focus relating to different elements within the movement. (A Woman's Place, also in London, is similarly run by a collective of women and operates a book-shop and reference facility, as well as publishing a weekly newsletter.) The once active WIRES—the Women's Information, Reference and Enquiry Service—has been severely circumscribed.

Despite the absence of a focal point, feminist activities in the U.K. continue energetically. *Spare Rib* and other publications advertise a whole host of feminist activities, and there are numerous groups listed under Women's Liberation in the London and regional phone directories. However, unlike the mass membership-equal rights focus of the visible American movement, the major locus of activity is the small local group, which, eschewing formal rules and leadership, prefers to arrive at decisions by consensus. The movement's character is also defined by the proliferation of small groups, each with a single-issue orientation. It should be noted that even more "traditional" women's groups such as Women in Media and the National Housewives Register (founded in the early 1960s by liberal-minded housewives) operate on the basis of principles of participatory democracy and minimization of hierarchy and rigid structure (Stott 1981).

Feminists have developed legal groups such as Rights of Women (ROW), day nurseries, health and lesbian groups, rape crisis centers, Black and Asian women's organizations, battered women's shelters, and pro-abortion groups. Within specific issue areas such as abortion and domestic violence, national coordinating structures have evolved, but their scope is limited. Women's Aid, established in London in 1972 by Erin Pizzey, was able to attract government and charitable funding. Since breaking with its founder, the Women's Aid movement has proliferated greatly—with 99 groups and 200 refuges in 1980. These organizations operate on feminist principles, with an emphasis on autonomy and self-determination for women (Coote and Campbell 1982, 141, 42).

Local women support the National Woman's Aid Federation (NAAF) through adherence to its aims and attendance at meetings (NAAF 1982). Within the national and half-dozen regional offices, jobs change every two to three years to provide varied experience for all and prevent domination by any one person.

Everyone shares in work, and there is no status distinction among the few staff members. Fund raising is virtually nonexistent because of fear of creating strong central power, although resources from the DHSS (Department of Health and Social Security) help to pay staff salaries.

A second organization that has developed a national structure is the National Abortion Campaign (NAC), launched in the spring of 1975 to defend the 1967 Abortion Act.⁴ NAC has a loosely organized mass base and operates from a socialist feminist perspective on principles of participatory democracy (Marsh and Chambers 1981, 1). The nonhierarchical, decentralized structure linking local groups claims a coalition of 400 organizations with membership open to all who support its aims (NAC July 1982). In contrast to the operation of abortion rights groups in the U.S., half of the groups involved in NAC are trade-union related and receive some funding from the unions. Local groups are completely autonomous, deciding their own policy and methods of campaigning. There are no elected officials, no delegated structure. National policy is decided at the annual conference, and meetings are open to all members. An annual general meeting provides a forum for discussion of issues—although there is no mechanism for the resolution of conflicts on issues such as the role of racism and the broadening of the group's agenda to include other types of reproductive freedom. A national office provides backup resources and coordinates, while a steering committee deals with day-to-day work. The staff is limited in policy-making authority, leaving most decisions to annual and regional meetings. Volunteers are heavily relied on, particularly in the absence of financial resources to pay workers.

The contrast with most American pro-abortion groups is marked; the latter (National Abortion Rights Action League [NARAL], Planned Parenthood, and others) tend to be professionalized, hierarchical in structure, and reliant on—although not necessarily directly responsible to—a dues-paying mass-membership constituency. Such groups may fit the model of reliance on a “conscience constituency,” which supplies movement resources without material benefit. Effective policy-making is in the hands of the full-time staff, as in the “funded social movement organizations” described by McCarthy and Zald (1973, 22; 1977, 1221–24). Abortion rights groups lobby extensively to prevent progressive weakening of abortion legislation and—again in marked contrast to the British experience, where courts have virtually no role in this policy area—have been active in litigation to preserve and strengthen abortion rights. NAC's strategy is largely extra-parliamentary, depending upon proselytizing through demonstrations and picketing (Marsh and Chambers 1981, 48); it has influenced parliament by showing that grassroots support for abortion rights exists, however.

In the U.K., even groups with a national focus are ambivalent about campaigning (lobbying) and the legislative process, although in fact the NAWF and NAC have intervened effectively in the political process. Because NAC's members are (radical) socialist feminists, they have ties to the Labour party and the trade union movement. The potential of this alliance was evident in 1979 when a

mass demonstration, with major participation by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) helped to stop a bill that threatened to reduce access to legal abortions.

However, the focus of most British feminist groups is interaction, emphasizing value and lifestyle changes. Consciousness-raising is an important element, and values such as self-confidence, skill attainment, and self-esteem are promoted (Randall 1982, 164). The democratic character of the movement provides flexibility and permits accommodation of all types of grassroots activity, incorporating diverse elements. As Mansbridge (1980, 230–43) has pointed out, small size allows intense interaction, and continued face-to-face contact may prevent elitism. Yet the group *process* may develop as a major focus, as opposed to the attainment of group *ends* (Freeman 1975, 143–46). Conformity to the group may be encouraged. The absence of recordkeeping and repetition of old issues may retard group development (Adlam 1980, 94). An ahistorical perspective may cause repetition of past mistakes. Decision-making may be slowed and the real administrative and political skills of some may be underutilized or ignored (Mansbridge 1980, 247). Individuals may become preoccupied with their own liberation and fail to seek more universal goals related to all women. And local, single-issue-oriented activity may reduce the possibilities for national impact and comprehensive (as opposed to ad hoc) solutions to problems.

Finally, unaccountability to a constituency may create irresponsibility and unrealistic expectations. The inability to agree on goals and to pool resources weakens opportunities for the creation of alliances. If, as suggested here, the “movement” in Britain is a “deliberately dispersed collection of groups, campaigns and political tendencies with no single ideology,” the absence of coalitional structures may make it difficult to organize around multiple issues in a continuing fashion (Bouchier 1984, 123, 128–29, 218–23).

In Britain, the politics of personal experience, inward-looking and seeking redemptive lifestyles, has often eclipsed the overtly “political.” Women's liberation politics is fragmented, centered on single issues, and without networks in which different views may find expression and audience. The emphasis on personal politics has often, though not always, resulted in reluctance to engage in the politics of the state (Barrett 1980, 228, 245). Although feminist politics may serve as a model for other Left groups in its emphasis on autonomy, flexibility, and democracy, the lack of a coordinating mechanism presents continuing problems (Rowbotham 1979, 90).

COMPARISON WITH AMERICAN WOMEN'S LIBERATION

The structure of grassroots radical feminism in the United States is similar to that in Britain; however, even within radical feminism, recent developments have suggested somewhat different tendencies. Even in battered women's shelters and rape crisis centers that emphasize the feminist ideology discussed above, professionals have combined with feminist influences to provide services and negotiate

with bureaucracies, write funding proposals, and develop more enduring organizational structures (Schechter 1982, 38–39). Though conflicts continue over the importance of service, self-determination, and politics, there can be little doubt that such elements as networking, lobbying, and emphasis on legal changes are more evident in the American movement. Activists have mobilized around state legislation and legal change—and have often been less reluctant than their British counterparts to engage with political and bureaucratic forces and to seek legitimacy. Structures have been modified as specialization has created need for more hierarchical organization including staffs and boards. Schechter (1982, 94–95, 100) concludes that government has forced activists to modify practices and formal procedures. In some instances, “modified collectives” have sought a compromise between external imperatives and feminist principles. From local coalitions to statewide and then federal levels, efforts have been generated. There has been willingness to engage political authorities at all levels in order to gain resources and reform legal procedures.

Coalitions, reflecting a variety of influences, include traditional groups such as the YWCA, professional and service providers, radical feminists, and equal rights feminists from groups such as NOW; they emphasize the sharing of resources, access, and skills (Schechter 1982, 113, 148). In the area of aid for battered women, a National Coalition against Domestic Violence (NCADV) lobbied for passage of a Domestic Violence Act (defeated in 1980), built a large network of contacts, sought to build a dues-paying membership base, and wrote proposals to raise money from the federal government and private foundations. The coalition continues to monitor relevant public policy, disseminates information to state and local groups, and seeks to retain a nonhierarchical, multiracial approach (Morrison 1982). Unlike those in Britain, change-oriented American feminists have often been able to rely on government “insiders” to put forward issues and build support within government for movement concerns (Schechter 1982). Hence, issues relating to leadership and structure, engagement with political forces at all levels, and the need for coalition have been treated somewhat differently in the U.S. An area of congruence lies in the fact that in both countries, women’s liberation groups have tended to focus on single issues and do not necessarily coalesce with other movement activists in multiple-issue alignments. While a grassroots women’s movement still exists in the U.S., it is less visible and to a greater degree has joined forces with the more “middle-class” reformist sector of the original movement. No movement comparable to the latter really exists in the U.K.

Though never dominant, there are groups in the British feminist movement that seek to play a centrist, coordinating role. Among these are the Fawcett Society (with roots in the suffrage movement) and Women in Media. Fawcett remains small, with only about 375 members, its efforts to develop a membership base in northeast England having failed. Women in Media, organized in 1970, has engaged in active campaigning for equal pay and antidiscrimination legisla-

tion. Other groups, which do not identify with women’s liberation but do support many feminist demands and efforts to achieve them, are current manifestations of more traditional women’s activities. Among them are the Women’s Institutes (WI) with a membership base of 400,000; the Townswomen’s Guilds (TG) with 217,000; the British Federation of University Women with 14,000; and the National Council of Women (NCW) with 5,000 (Stott 1980). While these groups often support women’s rights, by and large they eschew relationships with socialist and radical feminists.

Several new developments in the U.K. represent steps toward coalition building among different ideological groups in the women’s community. In November 1980 a Women’s Action Day was held in London; it involved some 67 organizations from a variety of women’s perspectives whose representatives sought to discuss and develop common policies. A “women’s agenda” was issued, dealing with issues of equal opportunity in law, education, work, politics, finances, the family, health, and the media. Groups represented included unions, the NAC and ROW, traditional women’s groups such as the NCW, and elements of the Liberal and Labour parties. A new political advocacy group—the “300 Group”—has sought to increase the number of women in the House of Commons (now 21 of 635, or about 3 percent). Like its American counterpart, the National Women’s Political Caucus (NWPC), it seeks to recruit and train women candidates for political office. The group’s membership was estimated at about 3,000 in July 1982; hence, while the group seeks an extensive dues-paying base (dues are £12 per annum), it still lacks a large constituency (Abdela 1982). The “300 Group” has encountered hostility from traditional party groups who resent external intrusion and from feminists who dislike its relatively centralized entrepreneurial style. Nonetheless, it has trained over 1,500 women and helped them to gain interest and confidence in politics. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and National Council of Civil Liberties (NCCL) also provide opportunities for discussion of specific feminist issues through conferences and forums, and help to link trade unionists with other feminist activists. The Greater London Council (GLC) Women’s Committee and other local women’s committees (discussed below) have also sought to end centrifugal politics by involving a variety of women’s groups as policy participants and recipients. The future of such efforts is unclear.

As suggested above, networking across ideological lines is still rare in the U.K., although it is a concept growing in practical, if not theoretical, adherence. Finally, while traditional women’s groups do have a mass constituency base in the U.K. (at least in comparison to other groups), except in a few instances they are reluctant to join forces with those perceived and reinforced by media coverage as lesbian and anti-male. The close relationship that has developed in terms of resource sharing, political access, and even consensus on goals between the so-called traditional women’s groups and their feminist allies in the U.S. has as yet no analogue in Britain.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PARTIES AND UNIONS

It is possible to argue that in the British political system, mass membership-equal rights feminism is not necessary or even desirable because women have historically been organized and influential as pressure groups within existing institutions, particularly political parties and trade unions.⁵ Despite feminist activism within parties and unions, however, a pattern of isolation from power and "marginalization" continues to mark the position of women, particularly through practices involving statutory seats and women's advisory committees and divisions. Available evidence suggests that while women constitute at least half the membership of the Labour and Conservative parties (Hills 1978), their role within party structures is severely circumscribed. It should be noted that although the Labour party has been close to socialist feminists on some ideological and policy issues, it has no better record on representation and power sharing than the Conservative opposition. Women are poorly represented at the Labour party's annual conferences (11 percent in 1980) and are allotted five of 29 seats on the National Executive Committee (NEC), the party's most powerful policy-making body (Hills 1981, 7). In practice, the "set aside" women's seats are union controlled, and the women selected for these positions are not independent feminists. The constituency-based Women's Section of the Labour party (founded in 1906) holds annual meetings and passes resolutions but has no power to gain acceptance for the policies it endorses.

Because the Labour party is a confederal organization, in recent years women's labor groups have grown and proliferated—from the Women's Action Committee (WAC), associated with the far-left Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD), to a Women's Rights Study group with Member of Parliament Jo Richardson as chair. A group called Fightback for Women's Rights is active at the party's fringes; it has been especially vigorous in pressing for more channels to the Labour party hierarchy—in the form of five resolutions to be automatically sent to the party's annual conference by the Women's Section—and the election of women members to the National Executive Committee by the Women's Conference. Fightback and WAC also call for an end to all-male parliamentary short lists from which potential and actual party nominees are chosen.⁶ The Women's Action Committee of the CLPD has developed a Women's Charter and has been vigorous in promoting its views. A measure of expanded interest in women's activities was evident in the increased number of women's delegates at the annual Women's Conference, from 320 in 1980 to 650 in 1981 (Lever 1982).

The Labour party hierarchy has responded to feminist pressure by appointing a National Women's Officer and more recently designating a Shadow Minister for Women's Affairs. The NEC has appointed a subcommittee on Women's Rights as well. While the extent of feminist participation within the Labour party is impressive and often channels socialist feminist energy into party activities, any victory at the present time (because of the party's disarray) may be a pyrrhic one. In addition, there is some suspicion that groups seeking dominance within the

party may be using the women's issues to build their own power base—with little actual regard for feminist concerns.

While women are better represented at the Conservative party's annual conference (38 percent of the delegates were women in 1977–78), this body lacks the policy-making powers of its Labour party counterpart (Hills 1978, 4, 8; Randall 1982, 74). Women constitute about 20 percent of the membership of the Executive Committee of the National Union, which is the highest level in the party hierarchy; its policy-making and administrative powers are limited by the primacy of parliamentary leadership, however.

As in the Labour party, there is a women's national advisory organization with its own annual conference (now called the Conservative Women's National Committee), which often discusses women's issues in the guise of such concerns as education (Hooper 1982). Another group affiliated with the Conservative party, the British section of the European Union of Women, is active on behalf of women's issues as well; it was instrumental in stopping the cuts in Social Security proposed under Margaret Thatcher's government (Rogers 1983, 34) and has pressed for a party rule to include at least one woman candidate on final short lists and for mandated interviews of women by candidate selection committees. In 1982 it also recommended that women's groups within the party undertake candidate education and training for women.

Finally, with regard to women standing for election, women have consistently been underrepresented as candidates in both parties. In the Labour party the union-dominated "A" list nominated only two of 100 women candidates in 1972 and three of 103 in 1977. The constituency-based "B" list contained 9 percent women's names in 1976, and selection for marginal or losing seats is common, as is often the case in the U.S. (Hills 1978). In 1982, Labour with 11 women M.P.s had 25 women on a list of 250 candidates and four new female Labour M.P.s were elected; the Conservative Party, though it attracts more women candidates (largely as a function of class), nominated only 10 percent women, down from 15 percent in 1977 (*Guardian*, 16 April 1982). Only the new Social Democratic party has met women's demands for better representation within the party hierarchy and on party short lists (for nomination). At least two of nine names on every short list are to be women and representational equity for women on the party's National Steering Committee is required (Toynbee 1982).

As most obstacles to women's selection appear to exist at the local level, women activists have sought to mandate positive action with regard to candidate selection. To date, while parties have moved toward expressions of greater concern for nomination of women, in response to pressure, they have not insisted on equality of representation in the final selection process. The success of the "300 Group" in attracting large numbers of women to training sessions for political activism points to the continuing gap between rhetoric and reality in much of British party politics.

COMPARISON WITH WOMEN IN U.S. PARTIES

Political parties are less central to the political process in the U.S. than the U.K., and feminist interest groups such as the National Women's Political Caucus, NOW, and others have played an important role in recruiting women for political office, providing training and some campaign support, and actively campaigning for key political issues such as abortion rights and the ERA. In the U.S., in the main, the tradition of separate women's groups and the principle of numerical reservation of seats for women in party hierarchies have been viewed as anachronistic. However, within the Democratic party, women did move to mandate equal representation of male and female convention delegates in the 1972 McGovern-Fraser guidelines. The 1972 Democratic convention had 40 percent female delegates; the Republican convention in that year had 30 percent (up from 17 percent in 1968). Since then, Republican and Democratic women's task forces have pressed for women's concerns within the parties and provided some funding and training for women candidates (Mandel 1982, 211-13). The Democratic party after 1980 successfully moved to equalize convention representation by men and women and to provide support for such key feminist concerns as the ERA, election of more women to state and local offices, and even abortion rights, as well as nominating the first female vice-presidential candidate, Geraldine Ferraro, in 1984, at least in part due to feminist pressure. At this time, the Reaganite Republican party moved further to the right and away from commitment to feminist concerns.

Despite real gains in representation and support for women's issues (at least in the contemporary Democratic party), the role of convention politics in the American policy-making process is limited and at best marginal. In addition, numerous (if not most) women seeking political office at all levels in the United States have bypassed traditional centers of candidate support and sought other routes to elective offices (Mandel 1982, 49). And for those elected, partisanship is only one influence that defines political behavior in the U.S. Hence, the model of the "300 Group," an all-party organization that trains and recruits women who wish to run for political office, is far closer to the American than to the British pattern.

UNIONS

In the U.S., only about 15 percent of women are unionized; the proportion in the U.K. is 40 percent, with a dramatic increase in the last decade (Hills 1981, 12; Randall 1982, 40). Of 12 million Trades Union Congress (TUC) members in 1980, about 4 million were women (TGWU 1980, 2). From 1961 to 1980 female union membership increased by 110 percent, male membership by only 17.6 percent (Coote and Campbell 1982, 173). Perhaps to a greater degree than in the U.S., the concept of a "family wage" for the breadwinning man has been en-

trenched and has limited equal job access for women in the labor market (Land 1979).

Socialist feminists have sought to reach women through participation in trade union politics. While a number of unions have a majority of women workers, men remain in control of top positions in individual unions and the TUC. Union women lack representation in key committees, among full-time officers, and at the local shop level as stewards and district committee members. For example, the National Union of Education, with 70 percent female membership, had only four women on its executive committee of 44 in 1980 (Coote and Campbell 1982, 167). The 1981 TUC annual meeting had 116 women among the 1,188 delegates present (TUC 1981-82, 1).

Feminists have sought greater influence in two ways. As in parties, they have advocated "positive action/discrimination," retaining or establishing "set aside" or "statutory" seats on executive committees and seeking other types of special representation through advisory committees, women's conferences, and the like. (In some instances, such efforts do not represent a "new" approach; the TUC Women's Advisory Committee and annual Women's Conference date back to the 1920s and 1930s respectively; Randall 1982, 93). As is true for parties, advisory committees have a solely consultative role and depend on the (often lacking) sympathy of general councils and other policy-making bodies for acceptance. The TUC, with which most British unions are affiliated, responded to a Women's Conference demand by increasing the number of statutory delegate places reserved for women in the TUC Executive Committee from two to five (out of 41) in 1981 (Coote and Campbell 1982, 45-67).

Several major unions—including the two largest, the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) and General and Municipal Workers Union (GMWU)—have not a single female executive member among them. However, in white-collar unions whose female membership is growing especially rapidly there have been efforts to create special opportunities for women. These include appointment of a national women's officer (the engineers' union AEUW, or TASS); statutory executive council seats for women (the National Union of Public Employees, or NUPE); establishment of women's advisory committees (GMWU and ASTMS, the technical-managerial union); and creation of equal opportunities or women's rights groups at the district level (NALGO, the local government employees' union). Even consciousness-raising and special training sessions for women have been introduced into several unions—including GMWU and TASS—and the TUC.

The second approach feminists have taken is to seek union support for feminist-related issues. Prompted in part by the 1974 Working Women's Charter—a London-based effort to promote a minimum set of feminist demands in trade unions—the TUC set about revamping its own "Aims for Women at Work." Even before this time it had lobbied for the Equal Pay Act in the 1960s, and the femi-

nist campaign for child care found expression in the TUC's Charter for under Fives (1978), calling for comprehensive and universal child care and flex-time for parents. The TUC has recognized the "outdated" concept of the "family wage" and has called for positive action in employment and education. A TUC ten-point "Charter for Equality" for trade union women (1979) advocated special efforts to include women on decision-making bodies and suggested child care and awareness training programs to aid in increasing women's union participation. In addition, the TUC has held conferences on women's issues, has established guidelines for positive action in employment, and has taken an active role in supporting amendments to the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination acts.

A dramatic and impressive instance of union support for feminist issues came in a massive demonstration—a joint TUC-feminist march in 1979—to protest the restrictive anti-abortion Corrie Bill then pending in the House of Commons. This marked a unique expression of union support that moved beyond the rhetorical level to practical action.

With regard to key points in the TUC charter—equal job opportunity for women and an end to pay discrimination—only limited progress has been made. As suggested above, male dominance still exists in the unions at all levels, from regional councils to the shop floor and in industrywide negotiating teams. Hence, while support has been forthcoming on some "social issues," impact has been minimal on such economic and industrial matters as pay and maternity leave. Male control limits possibilities for the local- and plant-level implementation of the numerous resolutions passed in union conferences (Turner 1982). It is difficult to escape the conclusion that women's concerns are viewed as secondary to the more significant social and economic issues, with a resulting subordination of feminist demands (Adams and Winston 1979, 141; Scott 1982, 55).

In contrast, in the U.S. the tradition of feminist autonomy from established groups is evident in relationships with the trade union movement as well as parties. Feminists have organized within—but also outside—the labor movement. After facing a set of legal challenges aimed at forcing unions to comply with antidiscrimination measures (particularly the Civil Rights Act of 1964), in 1974 the leading arm of the American labor movement, the AFL-CIO, helped to establish a women's caucus, the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), within its organization. Like women's groups in British unions, CLUW has pressed for greater sensitivity to women's concerns, increased representation in leadership circles, and an end to job discrimination; it also lobbies for legislation and aids in organizing potential women union members. CLUW has created a women's base and forum for networking within the labor movement, and the result has been more representation of women in union offices and the creation of women's departments and committees within some unions.

In the main, though, CLUW has met with an uneven response, like its British counterparts, and while union support has been engendered for such issues as the ERA and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act and coalitions formed around these

issues, there has been limited progress on increased representation of women in leadership ranks and support for such issues as affirmative action. One visible result was the selection of Joyce Miller in 1980 as the first woman on the AFL-CIO's executive council. With regard to issue concerns, the rhetorical level of support in Britain appears greater. Having only 16,000 members, CLUW operates within the constraints of labor union politics and has avoided confrontation with the union hierarchy (Goodin 1983, 146).

In the U.S., a second tradition of labor women has developed, rooted in part in the ambivalence of many professional Americans toward the organized labor movement and perhaps also in the absence of a vigorous socialist (feminist) presence. This tradition involves independent organizations of working women and includes primarily white-collar workers in such groups as Women Office Workers, Nine to Five, and Union WAGE. Unlike unions, which concentrate on collective bargaining, these groups seek to enforce antidiscrimination and affirmative action legislation, demonstrate against employers, and engage in educational efforts relating to safety, organization, and job rights (Gelb and Klein 1983, 34; Seifer and Wertheimer 1979, 168). As unions have perceived the growing strength of autonomous groups of women workers, they have sought to establish links with them, as in the relationship recently forged between Working Women (office workers) and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) to create a new union, District 925, to organize women. Nonetheless, the independent tradition continues, and together with groups such as Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) and Catalyst, autonomous groups of working women have been active in finding jobs for women at all levels of the economic ladder, in organizing women, and in fighting job discrimination.

THE IMPACT OF INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND ORGANIZATIONAL DIFFERENCES

The research presented here suggests that the contemporary British and American movements have evolved into different organizational forms. The analysis has emphasized the degree to which external factors—including political institutions, culture, and values—have influenced movement structure and goals.

The most active part of the British feminist movement emphasizes expressiveness, personal transformation, consciousness, and changed belief systems. It eschews formal structure and hierarchy and is centered in small groups that stress life experience and self-help politics. In Gerlach and Hine's (1970, 55) terms, it is segmented—localized, autonomous, and ever-changing—and decentralized. Nonetheless, it lacks the *reticulate* or networking structure that they see as accompanying segmentation and decentralization, largely as a consequence of ideological conflicts and localism. Mediating structures that might resolve conflicts and coordinate action, as well as permit the sharing of resources (particularly at the national level) are absent.

The significance of structural type in affecting organizational effectiveness depends in part on the goals sought. Small structures do maximize personal interaction and community, while larger ones are better able to sustain long-term campaigns at the national level. However, one trend in the U.K. that may effectively interface with existing movement structure is the growing interest of local council governments in aiding feminist efforts. By 1983, women constituted 18.4 percent of local councillors (EOC 1983, 94) and were able to effectively pressure within primarily Labour councils for acceptance of women's concerns. The GLC (Greater London Council), under left/radical Labour domination and significant feminist influence, developed and funded a Women's Committee which in turn funded a variety of women's projects (Interview, Valerie Wise, Chair, GLC Women's Committee, July 1984). In 1984 £8 million was committed to this effort by the GLC. Radical women's projects have been funded, including a women's transportation service and day care for the anti-nuclear women's group at Greenham Common as well as more traditional services. Local London boroughs, including Southwark, Camden, Islington, and Brent, have also established women's committees. Feminists in the U.K. prefer dialogues with local authorities to gain access, funding, and space rather than participation in national elections and representative government. A fear of male hierarchy and co-optation has continued to limit interactions with the political system.

In the U.K., parties and unions occupy a major—if declining—political role, and a tradition of leftist/socialist thought has been strong. While activity in party and trade union politics may be viewed as equivalent to the American liberal-equal rights movement, little evidence for this perspective exists. Rather, it appears that women's participation in these British institutions has been marked by marginalization, with women organized into separate advisory groups and limited to a handful of mandated seats on executive committees. The major union force, the TUC, has endorsed numerous progressive policies on behalf of women, lobbied for them, and even demonstrated on their behalf (in the case of abortion), but has shown greater hesitancy when issues of economic and political power are involved. In addition, tensions exist between socialism and feminism and between the hierarchical unions and parties and feminist ideology. Nonetheless, at their most effective, women's groups within parties may serve as forums through which women's demands and concerns may be highlighted.

In the U.S., a tradition of reform, the absence of a strong socialist Left, and the significance of interest groups in decision-making have combined to produce a different type of movement. Perhaps reflecting the increased weakness of parties and unions politically, feminists have organized as separatist or gender-based groups outside established structures (Adams and Winston 1979, 104). This has given them greater autonomy in terms of strategy, as the mid-1980s trend in the direction of electoral efforts demonstrates. American feminism is characterized by far greater inclusivity of different views than its British counterpart; coalition building and networking are movement watchwords. The American movement

has come closer to an accommodation between the more "radical" women's liberation movement and the middle-class reformist one; it has also developed strong ties with such traditional women's groups as the League of Women Voters and the YWCA. The American movement's most visible manifestation is the traditional interest group, organized with hierarchical structure and staff dominance. Organizations such as NOW have moved in the direction of mass membership, while such feminist groups as the Women's Equity Action League, the Center for Women Policy Studies, and the National Women's Political Caucus fit the Zald-McCarthy model of funded social movement organizations that rely on "conscience constituencies" or contributors for resources and on staff for day-to-day decision-making and long-term strategizing (Handler 1978, 8). As the history of the movement against domestic violence demonstrates, even nontraditional groups with grassroots origins are pulled in the direction of political engagement and greater professionalization. American feminists have been eclectic and pragmatic in their use of strategies—from protest to litigation and campaigning.

Definitions of what constitutes social movement "success" may vary. "Success" may refer to legitimization of a group's goals, change in individual or group consciousness, and/or change in public policy outcomes involving redistribution of social goals and changes in power relations (Jenkins 1983, 544). For some, political access for hitherto excluded groups constitutes "success."

Clearly, the British movement has succeeded in creating local activities emphasizing consciousness and lifestyle transformation in numerous (primarily urban) centers throughout the country. The degree of activism and commitment is impressive, even to the casual observer. But also crucial in evaluating mobilization and success in the women's movement is the creation of a "collective consciousness," which incorporates varying degrees of approval for the movement's grievances and goals (Mueller 1983, 4). Such support may involve potential members, allies, and the general public. Measured by this standard, the total membership of British feminist activists has been estimated as one-tenth of one percent (or 20,000) of the female population, indicating a huge distance to go in terms of reaching even a fraction of the women in the U.K. (Bouchier 1984, 178). In contrast, membership in traditional British women's groups is closer to a million. Nonetheless, the mobilization potential of British feminism is evident from the massive pro-abortion demonstration in 1979 and the 1982 antinuclear protest at Greenham Common.

The American movement has grown in size and heterogeneity, particularly in the Reagan era, where apparent disaster has been turned to advantage in terms of group mobilization. NOW's membership, for example, increased from 125,000 (in 1978) to 250,000 over several years. A 1981 poll indicated that 4 percent of women and 2 percent of men contribute to the women's rights movement (about 4.5 million people), and that one of every 300 women is active in some type of feminist activity (Bouchier 1984, 180). Underscoring the acceptance of many

TABLE 12-1
FAVORABLE FEELING TOWARD WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

	<i>Parents</i>	<i>Offspring</i>
U.K.	43%	38.1%
U.S.	45.7%	51.8%

Source: Jennings, Allerbuck, and Rosenmeyer 1979, 497.

feminist views were the results of a *New York Times* poll (19 December 1983): 28 percent of those surveyed indicated that the women's movement had made their own lives better—most often citing improved job opportunities—and these respondents were most likely to be young and educated.

Studies comparing attitudes toward feminism and women's social role in the U.S. and U.K. offer some striking attitudinal differences. One study (see Table 12-1) found British youth much less supportive of women's liberation than their European or American counterparts (less than their parents, as well), suggesting that generational change reflecting positive attitudes towards women's liberation has been far more limited in the U.K.

Another report of European opinion reveals that British women (and men) hold a higher proportion of negative views on feminism than citizens of any other European nation except Italy (Hernes 1982, 520). While strictly comparable data are difficult to obtain, a 1979 poll showed 63 percent of American respondents, compared with 40 percent of the British, agreeing that the part played by women in their nation had changed a lot (International Gallup Poll 1981, 696). Other significant differences emerge when attitudes toward compulsory military service for women are examined—favored in Britain by 35 percent, in the United States by 53 percent (Hastings and Hastings 1982, 262–63)—and the distribution of household responsibilities compared: see Table 12-2. These findings suggest that some of feminism's basic goals, including sex role modification, have met greater resistance in the more traditional U.K. In turn, I have argued, the importance of traditional values has constrained political opportunities for feminists and, together with the rigid nature of the political system, has limited their options. The British movement has a long way to go in gaining the support of women who do not enter into competition with men and thus do not feel unequal, and in convincing the vast majority who are married, have been married, or expect to be married that the feminist movement they perceive as anti-male is relevant to their lives (Hills 1981, 104).

Public policy reflecting feminist concerns has been formulated in both the U.S. and U.K.; hence, in both nations legislative enactments relating to equal pay, sex discrimination, abortion, and domestic violence are in effect. However, the policy process leading to and implementing legislation has been significantly different in the two nations, thus influencing policy impact. In the U.S., policy

TABLE 12-2
DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES

	<i>U.K.</i>	<i>U.S.</i>
HOUSEHOLD REPAIRS		
Husband	76%	39%
Shared or equal	11%	47%
CLEANING HOUSE		
Wife	66%	46%
Shared or equal	31%	45%
COOKING		
Wife	73%	58%
Shared or equal	22%	35%

Source: Hastings and Hastings 1980–81, 239; 1981–82, 285.

has largely been the result of lobbying by gender-based groups. As suggested above, policy networks are made possible by the emphasis on coalition formation and the relative openness of the political system to group participation. In both the U.K. and the U.S. it has been more difficult to secure policy implementation than the legislation itself, but in the U.S. the opportunities for intervention in bureaucratic politics are far greater.

In the U.K., because of ideological purism and localized structures, women have not developed comparable political networks. Institutional factors such as the growth of administrative power and executive dominance, and secrecy combined with the strength of parties and parliament, have limited opportunities for direct intervention in policy-making in the U.K. and made monitoring of implementation almost impossible. It is clear that British unions and parties (particularly the Labour party and the TUC) have "literally preempted feminist demands and have put their political clout behind numerous proposals to advance equality between women and men" (Scott 1982, 53). Their efforts were prompted at least in part by European Economic Community (EEC) directives requiring equal pay and job equality. Enactment of public policy has in large measure left the unions and parties free to pursue issues of equality in the workplace and in their own decision-making bodies at their own pace and on their own terms, and issues of power sharing and male dominance have largely been left untouched.

Evidence regarding the disparate rate of change in these areas appears to demonstrate far more impressive economic and professional gains for American women. In Britain, women's hourly earnings in 1983 were 74 percent of men's and gross earnings were 61 percent of men's; comparable figures in the U.S. show hourly earnings at 83 percent, gross earnings at 63 percent (Coote and Campbell 1982, 18; EOC 1983, 89; *New York Times*, 16 January 1984). The female part-

time work force in the U.K. was over 40 percent, in contrast to 23 percent in the U.S. In 1975, female managerial and professional employees totaled 13 percent in the U.K. and 20 percent in the U.S. (Ratner 1980, 15). American women have greatly improved their representation in such fields as law—which are particularly compatible with political involvement—with women constituting 14 percent of lawyers and judges; 34 percent of all new law students in 1980–81 were female. In Britain, 7 percent of barristers and only a handful of judges are women (Deckard 1983, 117, 140; Robarts, Coote, and Ball 1981, 10). American women have surpassed men in their representation in college populations and the number of B.A.'s earned; in Britain, women were 40 percent of university students in 1980–81 (Deckard 1983, 117; EOC 1983).⁷ While a causal relationship between movement politics, policy enactments, and the growth of a professionally active group of women with economic and political potential is not provable, it may be suggested that the American feminist movement has had a profound impact on changing expectations and possibilities (see *Ms. Magazine*, July 1984).

This essay has sought to demonstrate that external factors—particularly political systems and culture—help both to explain social movement goals and structure and to determine their impact. On the basis of the analysis presented, I conclude that American feminism has been more "successful" than British feminism in gaining public acceptance of many movement goals, reaching larger numbers of supporters and sympathizers, and achieving policy outcomes that may aid in restructuring power relationships.

NOTES

1. The material presented in this essay is the result of ongoing research in the United States and of two visits to the United Kingdom: the first in the spring of 1980, the second in the summer of 1982. Research in Britain was primarily based on interviews with feminist journalists, scholars, and activists as well as women active in political parties, unions and interest groups, elected and appointive politics. The period of analysis covers the 1960s until the end of 1982.

2. Britain has had the smallest amount of generational change of the six European nations surveyed by Inglehart; less than half of Germany's—and, reflecting its more traditional society, the divorce rate (per 1,000 population) was 3.01 in the U.K., as compared with 5.19 in the U.S. in 1980 (U.N. 1982, 303–4).

3. This last provision was made restrictive by the Thatcher government.

4. Most recently, NAC has fought an administrative effort to limit abortion through issuance of restrictive permission forms to be signed by physicians.

5. See Bouchier (1984, 39) for a statement of this view.

6. These proposals were soundly defeated at the 1982 Women's Conference.

7. See also *Digest of Education Statistics 1982* (Washington, D.C.: Govt. Printing Office), Table 3, p. 8. In 1976, 36 percent of British B.A.s were granted to women (Hills 1981, 13).

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