

## Community Orientations of Higher Status Women Volunteers

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William T. Markham and Charles M. Bonjean, "Community Orientations of Higher Status Female Volunteers," *Social Forces*, 73(4) (June, 1995), 1553-1572.

is available online at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/sf/73.4.1553>

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### **Abstract:**

This study examines how class, gender, socialization, and member selectivity relate to the importance members of a higher-status women's organization attach to community problems. Most members come from the traditional, business-oriented middle class and politically moderate upper class. They see child welfare and health, education, substance abuse, adolescent issues, economic well-being and environment as the most important issues, but adopt establishment-oriented approaches to solving them. Lowest ratings go to issues associated with confrontational activism or the liberal agenda — citizen involvement, urban revitalization, and race relations — and cultural enrichment. Class standing, personal characteristics, and length of membership are little related to importance ratings, nor do newer members have more diverse views. The organization evidently achieves consensus by attracting members with similar views rather than by socialization.

**Keywords:** Women | Social problems | Community issues | Gender | Middle class | Socialization

### **Article:**

The private pursuit of public purpose has long been heralded as a unique feature of U.S. society (Tocqueville [1835] 19-15), and the nonprofit sector remains crucial in addressing problems facing communities. Voluntary associations play important roles in defining and dealing with community problems and in transforming interest group goals into policy (Van Til 1988).

While many citizens volunteer their efforts in communities, nonprofit organizations depend disproportionately on wealthier, more prestigious citizens for financial support, legitimacy and volunteers (Hodgkinson & Weitzman 1992). Higher-status women, in particular, play key roles in many community organizations (Daniels 1988; Ostrander 1984).

Higher-status citizens who are active in voluntary associations and community affairs thus have a strong voice in defining community problems (Domhoff 1978,1983) Yet only a handful of case studies (Daniels 1988; Hunter 1980; Ostrander 1984) investigate their views. This research helps to fill this gap by examining how members of 12 chapters of a higher-status women's community service organization rate the importance of various community problems. We also examine (1) the congruence of members' views with the organization's class and gender composition; (2) how members' responses compare to national sample data; (3) the extent of agreement among members from different backgrounds about the relative importance of community issues, and (4) the extent to which organizational socialization and membership selection contribute to homogeneity of opinions.

### **Defining Community Problems: Class, Gender, and Organizational Influences**

Whether an objective condition constitutes a “community problem” is not self-evident (Lauer 1976), and differences in backgrounds and experiences affect how people define social problems (Feagin 1975), Members' views may be shaped by (1) the class composition of the membership, (2) members' gender, (3) membership selectivity, and (4) organizational socialization.

### **Higher Status and Definitions of Community Problems**

#### *The Upper Class*

Studies of the upper class (Domhoff 1983; Dye 1990) often suggest that it is divided into two segments with somewhat different political views. One segment consists of moderate conservatives from established families who are committed to public service, support some existing welfare programs and some regulation, of business, and favor equal opportunity for women and minorities. A more conservative segment includes those who are less secure in their positions, less connected to establishment institutions, less socialized into noblesse oblige, and less supportive of welfare and government regulation. Yet despite their differences, both segments do share some class interests. Their incomes depend heavily on corporate holdings (Domhoff 1983), so emphasizing community problems for which likely solutions would reduce corporate profits (e.g., pollution and low wages) is unlikely to be appealing. They also generally resist attempts to define social issues in ways that suggest major expansions of government programs (Dye 1990), especially when programs financed by higher taxes are likely solutions (e.g., urban decay or unavailability of health care).

#### *The Upper Middle Class*

Traditionally, upper middle class people have been conservative on economic and social issues (Shingles 1989; Vanfossen 1979), but today this class includes groups with diverse interests: managers, professionals, and, small business owners. Not surprisingly then, recent research (e.g., Shingles 1989) shows a more complex picture. Nevertheless, several studies converge in

identifying two segments with different views: the “new class” and a traditional upper middle class (Bruce-Biggs 1979; McAdams 1978).

The new class centers around well educated professionals not identified with business (Ladd 1979; McAdams 1978) and less committed to economic individualism, free markets, and limited government (Dye 1990). It is variously defined (Brint 1984), but there is considerable agreement that its core includes university professors, especially in social sciences and humanities, journalists, mainly in metropolitan and national media, arts and entertainment figures, and planners and administrators in social service and regulatory agencies, particularly national ones (Bruce-Biggs 1979; Lipset 1979). Broader definitions add scientists, engineers and technicians, teachers and social workers, and management support personnel whose jobs rest on technical skills (Bruce-Biggs 1979).

The new class, strongly influenced by intellectual elite values (Podhoretz 1979), is more liberal than the general population, especially on social issues, sexuality, women's issues, race relations, and civil liberties (Ladd 1979; McAdams 1978). It is critical of business and favors government action in areas such as the environment, education, and health (Dye 1990; McAdams 1978). Substantial evidence supports this description (Ladd 1979; McAdams 1978; Shingles 1989), though support may be limited to narrow definitions of the new class or specific cohorts (Brint 1984).

The traditional upper middle class stands in opposition to the new class. Its core consists of small business owners and entrepreneurs, along with middle and higher private sector managers. It is more opposed to government regulation and spending for social problems and more conservative on social issues. Its members are often involved in civic betterment groups (Gans 1962).

#### *Gender and Definitions of Community Issues*

Sapiro (1983) suggests that women's political concerns center on the “private sphere” of social welfare and family, rather than the “public sphere” of business and public affairs, and Burns and Schumaker's (1987) findings support this view. Shapiro and Mahajan's (1986) review of national opinion polls about social problems found women more concerned than men about violence, more opposed to nuclear power, slightly more supportive of welfare programs, and slightly more conservative on women's issues.

#### *Voluntary Associations and Definitions of Community Problems*

High status men's voluntary associations have usually been viewed as strengthening upper class social networks, building member consensus about social problems and policy, and influencing government's definitions of problems and solutions (Dye 1990; Hunter 1980). But associations may also bring together members from segments of one or more classes on the basis of similar political views or definitions of social problems. Thus, members of the moderate versus conservative wings of the upper class and the traditional versus new class segments of the upper middle class may choose different associations.

Higher-status women are active in many associations, but they have a long tradition of work in organizations devoted to community service and welfare. Most such organizations have emphasized working within the system, and participants usually hesitate to support radical changes that might challenge the bases of their privileges (Daniels 1988; Ostrander 1984). Some organizations are almost exclusively upper class, but others have both upper and upper middle class members (Daniels 1988; Domhoff 1970; Johnson 1993). Members rarely have access to community power structures dominated by men (Daniels 1988; Ostrander 1984). Instead, they generally seek to ameliorate community problems by fund-raising and donating time and money to local programs and agencies. Most prefer the role of volunteer to that of activist (Daniels 1988).

### *Selectivity, Socialization and Members' Views of Community Problems*

Voluntary associations tend toward homophily (McPherson & Smith-Lovin 1987) and homogeneity of views (Betz & Judkins 1975). They can build consensus of views -- including views about community problems — in two ways (Adams 1983; Johnson 1993). Selectivity occurs when outsiders with divergent views avoid joining or quickly resign from an organization dominated by one view, or when members consciously or unconsciously seek recruits with backgrounds and views like their own. Several studies (e.g., Betz & Judkins 1975; Chatman 1991) find that the values of new members resemble those of more senior ones, suggesting selectivity. Socialization builds consensus by teaching new members the organization's culture, making them more like existing members (Ott 1989). Tendencies toward homophily and homogeneity of views may be especially strong in associations oriented toward solving community problems, as diversity can make reaching consensus about problems and solutions difficult (Johnson 1993).

Organizations that exclude members on the basis of race, gender, or class have recently come under increasing criticism (Johnson 1993; Vanfossen 1979), generating pressure to broaden their membership. But even when efforts to diversify succeed in adding members with backgrounds unlike the majority, the new members may resemble the majority in outlook and views about community problems.

### *The Organization and Sample*

Our data come from 12 U.S. chapters of The International Association of Women (IAW). IAW is a higher-status women's volunteer organization with about 200,000 members in 300 chapters, mostly in the U.S. Its official purposes are to develop members' potential for volunteer service and leadership, contribute to community change, and promote volunteerism. Local chapters (1) train members to understand the community and become participants and leaders in volunteer activity, (2) raise funds, (3) operate community service projects, and (4) provide volunteers and funds to other community projects. Recently, the central organization and some chapters have initiated efforts to influence public policy in selected areas. Most new members enter IAW in

their 20s or early 30s. After a short probationary period of intensive training, they become full members. By middle age, they are defined as ready to be independent community leaders, so most choose a reduced role, paying dues without formal participation.

Our sample includes probationary and full members of 12 chapters selected using a stratified random sample based on chapter size. Chapters range from 112 to 486 members and are located in metropolitan areas from just under 100,000 to several million population. We administered questionnaires in 1991-92 at general membership meetings. Absentees received mail questionnaires. Response rates ranged from 53% to 97% (only one chapter was below 60%), with an overall rate of 74% (N = 2,362).

## **Results**

In addition to being all female, IAW members have distinctive and relatively uniform backgrounds, which helps to explain their views of community issues and how these views differ from the general population's. The uniformity of their ^dews appears to be a result primarily of selectivity rather than socialization.

### *Membership Composition*

#### *Education*

Members reported high levels of education. About 87% had a baccalaureate degree. And only 1% had not attended college. About 19% held a master of arts degree, and an additional 19% had completed some graduate work. About 6% held beyond the M.A.

#### *Income*

We asked members about personal and family income, obtaining answers from 93% for each question. About 19% of those responding had no personal income; all but eight of these 417 were married. Among those with personal income, 37% reported less than \$25,000, 39% \$25,000 to \$49,999, and 14% \$50,000 to \$74,999. About 11% earned \$75,000 or more, including 2% over \$200,000. Unmarried members had higher personal incomes than, married, mainly because they more often worked full time. Only 14% of single and divorced respondents had incomes under \$25,000; 54% reported \$25,000 to 49,999, while 21% fell between \$50,000 and 574,999 and 11% had incomes of \$75,000 or more. These incomes suggest a quite comfortable level of living for most unmarried members.

Among the 80% of respondents who were married, almost all have a comfortable incomes, and some are quite affluent. Only 5% had family incomes below \$50,000, with an additional 20% between \$50,000 and \$74,999. About 44% have family incomes of \$75,000 to \$149,000; 30% report \$150,000 or more, including 9% at \$300,000 and above.<sup>1</sup> We did not inquire about sources of income, but 40% of nonemployed respondents reported some personal income, including 14% with \$25,000 or more.

## *Occupation*

Table 1 shows the number of IAW members and husbands with occupations in each of 31 categories. For occupations in the top panel, we also show the percentage distributions of members and spouses, along with the corresponding percentages of the female and male civilian labor forces.<sup>2</sup>

IAW members and their spouses are highly concentrated in higher-level occupations. Only five members and 20 husbands hold positions as farmers, foresters, or fishermen or are skilled, semiskilled or unskilled laborers. Husbands are also largely absent from retail sales, administrative support, and service occupations. About 12% of members do have jobs in these categories, but 78% of these are married, and some hold atypical positions, such as keeping books for a family business or selling prestige merchandise.

Substantial numbers of members hold Jobs at the highest prestige and income levels, including administrators and managers and lawyers. Many occupy management related occupations, such as accountants and personnel specialists, or are in public relations. Traditional female professions are also well represented, as are advertising and insurance, real estate, securities, business service, and wholesale sales. Husbands are even more concentrated in high level jobs, including administrators and managers, physicians, lawyers, and engineers and architects. Other major groupings include management related jobs, insurance, real estate and securities sales, and wholesale sales.

Comparisons of the occupations of members and husbands with women and men in the labor force are inexact because few members are over age 45. Nevertheless, clear patterns do appear, especially for the husbands. IAW spouses are greatly overrepresented in, private sector management, medicine and dentistry, insurance, real estate, and securities sales, and, particularly, in law — all occupations of the traditional upper middle class. Husbands are underrepresented in traditional female professions, technical occupations, and sales supervision and among small proprietors, probably due to the relatively low pay and prestige of these occupations. But IAW husbands are so underrepresented in engineering and architecture, Mathematics and natural science, postsecondary teaching, social science and urban planning, and In the arts — all typical “new class” occupations.

IAW members' occupations are more similar to those of the female labor force, but also show a bias toward traditional middle class rather than new class occupations. They are overrepresented in management support, law, advertising, business service, and wholesale sales, versus among nurses, social scientists, or technicians.

Members' advanced educations, the dominance of professional/technical and managerial occupations and small business ownership among members and spouses, and comfortable personal and family incomes combine to indicate that a majority are upper middle class. The occupational data also suggest overrepresentation of the traditional segment of this class. MW's

history as an elite organization (Domlioff 1970; Ostrander 1984) and the very high incomes of some members and, families and substantial personal incomes of some nonemployed women - suggesting significant investment income - indicate that a minority are upper class.

**Table 1.** Occupations of IAW Members and Husbands, 1992, Compared to Employed Civilian Labor Force, 1990

	Employed IAW Members	Female Civilian Labor Force	Husbands of IAW Members	Male Civilian Labor Force
Occupation	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Legislator and public administration <sup>a</sup>	1.5 (18)	1.3	1.2 (20)	1.4
Education and health administration <sup>a</sup>	3.7 (46)	2.5	1.3 (22)	1.6
Other managers	18.5 (22.9)	15.6	41.2 (682)	24.3
Management related occup. and public relations	20.9 (25.9)	12.2	9.1 (151)	9.7
Engineers and architects <sup>a</sup>	.9 (11)	9	4.0 (67)	7.2
Mathematicians, computer analysts, and natural scientists <sup>a</sup>	1.5 (18)	2.0	1.1 (18)	3.4
Physicians, veterinarians and dentist	.8 (10)	9	9.8 (162)	3.0
Nurses, dieticians, pharmacists, therapists and physicians assistants	6.9 (85)	11.4	.6 (10)	1.4
Postsecondary teachers <sup>a</sup>	1.8 (22)	1.7	.4 (7)	2.0
Teachers and school counsellors	14.8 (183)	177.7	.8 (13)	4.9
Librarians and curators	.5 (6)	.9		.2 (0)
Social scientists and urban planners <sup>a</sup>	.4(5)	1.0	.2(4)	8
Social and recreational workers <sup>a</sup>	1.3 (16)	2.5	.2 (4)	8
Clergy and religious workers <sup>a</sup>	.3 (4)	.5	.1 (2)	1.4
Lawyers and judges	6.0 (74)	1.0	13.7 (227)	2.5
Authors, musicians, actors, artists, dancers and athletes <sup>a</sup>	1.6 (20)	1.8	2.0 (16)	1.8
Designers and photographers	3.3 (41)	1.9	.4 (6)	1.6

Reporters, editors, and announcers <sup>a</sup>	.6 (7)	.8	.5 (9)	.8
Pilots and air traffic control	.1 (1)	.1	.5 (8)	.6
Technicians, surveyors, and technical writers	2.3 (28)	10.6	.5 (9)	9.6
Sales Supervisors and proprietors	1.6 (20)	5.5	1.0 (17)	9.6
Insurance, real estate and securities sales	4.0 (50)	3.8	7.7 (127)	4.4
Advertising and other business service sales	2.9 (36)	1.5	1.0 (1.7)	1.8
Mining, manufacturing and wholesale sales and sales engineers	4.1 (51)	1.8	3.5 (58)	5.2
Sales, personal goods, and services	(43)		(11)	
Supervisors, administrative support	(20)		(1)	
Administrative support and legal assistants	(89)		(6)	
Service occupations	(21)		(7)	
Fanning, forestry and fishing	(1)		(11)	
Skilled labor	(4)		(6)	
Semiskilled and unskilled labor	(0)		(3)	

<sup>a</sup> Occupation coded as “new class” occupation in subsequent analyses. Occupations in lower panel not included in computing percentages; Ns shown in parentheses. Civilian Labor Force Statistics from U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993; 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Equal Employment Opportunity File.

### *Race and Ethnicity*

Racial and ethnic minorities are greatly underrepresented in IAW. Only 1.1% are African American, 0.8% Latina, and 0.4% Asian American. Jewish women comprise 2.1% of members.

### *Members’ Views of the Importance of Community Issues*

Respondents rated the importance of 17 problems in their home communities on a four point scale from “relatively unimportant” (coded 0) to “critically important” (3). Table 2 shows that members differentiated clearly among them. Mean importance ratings ranged from about midway between “highly” and “critically important” to almost the midpoint between “moderately” and “highly important.”

Three issues involving children and education were rated as the most important problems, and a related topic, adolescent issues, ranks sixth. The emphasis on these issues is congruent with the traditional emphases of higher-status women's organizations and the argument that women emphasize problems related to the private sphere. Two interrelated concerns, criminal justice and substance abuse, were also seen as of high importance.

Issues ranking low in importance include citizen involvement, urban revitalization, race and ethnic relations, adult health and mental health, and aging — all mainstays of U.S. liberalism. The low rank of race and ethnic relations and the middle rank for women's issues are also noteworthy because the “new class” is liberal on these issues.<sup>3</sup> The low rankings for urban revitalization and minority relations occur even though about half the chapters are in or near metropolitan areas plagued by urban, problems and poverty, and all but two are in areas with significant minority populations. Cultural enrichment, once a staple of higher-status women's organizations, tied for last place, and we heard much about IAW's desire to escape from its former “white glove” image.

The issues ranking fourth and seventh in importance — economic wellbeing and the environment — are in fact problems for which government expenditures or compromise of corporate interests are widely discussed solutions. Interestingly however, economic well-being was not on the list of problems initially developed in collaboration with IAW's staff, but was added at the researchers' request. Even the wording (see Table 2) was a compromise of our initial suggestion (“poverty”). It emphasizes instead nutrition, housing, and service delivery, along with unemployment. Nevertheless, when given the opportunity, members ranked economic well-being high, and two-thirds of the chapters studied had projects in this area, most directed toward homelessness or emergency food relief. None however, concerned themselves with wage levels or economic development. The environmental issue is even more interesting. One-third of the chapters had environmental projects, had environmental education. But when we asked respondents what three other voluntary associations they devoted the most time to, only 12 of 2,769 mentions were environmental organizations.

An argument also could be made that education is a problem with proposed solutions that might harm the well-to-do through increased taxes, but it is a more ambiguous case. Many proposed reforms, such as voucher programs, do not involve additional expenditures. Furthermore, moderate corporate interests often view education as key to economic competitiveness. Finally, education is also congruent with the traditional interests of higher-status women's organizations.

In short, among the community conditions they would like to address, members assign highest priority to the welfare and education of children and adolescents, some aspects of poverty, and substance abuse and crime. They attach less importance to issues associated with the liberal agenda or confrontational activism: race and ethnicity, women's issues, and citizen involvement.

When they define a potentially confrontational issue (e.g., environment or economic well being) as important, their approach rarely challenges established privilege. Nor do they often give high ratings to issues where proposed solutions call for major expenditures of public funds, such as urban revitalization or health care.

**Table 2.** Mean Ratings of importance of Community Issues among All Members and by Years of Membership

	All Members		Years or Membership								
	Mean	Std. Dev.	0-1		2-3		4-6		7 or more		Eta <sup>2</sup>
Mean			Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
Child welfare (family preservation, protection of children, abuse and neglect, and effective parenting)	2.58	.64	2.62	.62	2.57	.64	2.60	.62	2.56	.66	.00
Education (early childhood and student needs, education reform, school management, and equitable and adequate funding)	2.58	.67	2.58	.68	2.59	.68	2.57	.64	2.57	.67	.00
Child health and mental health (access to and affordability of prevention and treatment services from prenatal care through adolescence)	2.35	.74	2.35	.72	2.34	.75	2.35	.74	2.34	.74	.00
Economic well-being (adequate housing, nutrition, employment, and access to services)	2.28	.74	2.27	.75	2.31	.72	2.26	.75	2.28	.75	.00
Substance abuse (education, prevention, and treatment)	2.16	.82	2.15	.83	2.16	.79	2.14	.83	2.21	.82	.00
Adolescent issues (life skills, development, self-	2.13	.81	2.08	.84	2.07	.83	2.20	.79	2.17	.79	.00 <sup>a</sup>

esteem, and sexuality)											
Environment (education, conservation, waste management, and pollution)	2.13	.84	2.11	.84	2.14	.84	2.13	.83	2.11	.83	.00
Criminal Justice (adult and juvenile offenders, crime prevention, and victim assistance)	2.09	.84	2.11	.84	2.12	.84	2.04	.83	2.09	.84	.00
Adult education (issues ranging from literacy to career development and leadership training)	1.92	.82	1.88	.81	1.93	.82	1.94	.82	1.92	.82	.00
Work and family issues (child care, dependent care, and family and medical leave)	1.90	.88	1.96	.88	1.90	.89	1.87	.88	1.90	.87	.00
Women's issues (equal educational and employment opportunities, special health needs, and violence against women)	1.87	.85	1.89	.83	1.86	.88	1.87	.85	1.84	.85	.00
Adult health and mental health (access to and affordability of both prevention and treatment)	1.79	.80	1.81	.80	1.82	.80	1.78	.79	1.72	.82	.00
Aging (provision of and access to affordable services, economic welfare, and quality of life)	1.74	.81	1.77	.77	1.72	.80	1.73	.79	1.72	.82	.00
Race and ethnic relations (improvement of intergroup relations and reduction of prejudice and discrimination)	1.59	.92	1.62	.90	1.64	.93	1.53	.91	1.59	.97	.00
Urban revitalization (planning.	1.47	.88	1.49	.84	1.51	.88	1.41	.86	1.48	.92	.00

transportation, and economic development)											
Cultural enrichment (arts, preservation, and recreation)	1.44	.89	1.47	.87	1.37	.87	1.46	.90	1.50	.90	.00
Citizen involvement (voluntarism, voter registration, and participation in community issues)	1.44	.87	1.53	.84	1.43	.84	1.45	.87	1.34	.91	.01**

(N = 2,240)

\*p < .05 \*\*p < .01

### *Comparison to National Survey Results*

Because of differences in question wordings, coding, and survey dates, comparisons of our results to national surveys must be made cautiously. Nevertheless, comparisons with numerous surveys from recent years (e.g., Gallup 1992; Opinion Research Service 1991; Smith 1985) did reveal some interesting patterns, which are exemplified by the results below.

National surveys frequently include open ended questions about the most important problems facing the U.S. Concerns about foreign affairs appear among the responses, but in recent years the great majority of responses identify domestic issues. For example, an American Institute of Public Opinion (AIPO) poll conducted December 5, 1991, just as we were beginning data collection, included an open ended question about most important national problems. Mentioned most often were the economy (32%), unemployment (23%) poverty and homelessness (16%), drugs (10%), crime (6%), and health care (6%). Other coding categories parallel to IAW questions include education quality (4%) and environment (3%) (Opinion Research Service 1991).<sup>4</sup>

Items asking respondents to rate the importance of problems in their own communities are more comparable to our results, but have not appeared often in recent national surveys. A Los Angeles Times poll (Opinion Research Service 1989) did inquire about the importance of community issues, but suggested nine problems in the question stem. Crime was chosen most often (31%), followed by job opportunities (28%), schools (25%), living costs (18%), housing costs (14%), taxes (14%), quality of health care (13%), and traffic (9%).<sup>5</sup>

In short, in comparison to IAW members, the U.S. population appears more concerned with economic issues, sees education as less pressing, agrees in ranking crime and drugs high, but gives child welfare minimal emphasis.

### *Homogeneity of Member Opinions About Community Problems*

Most IAW members are well educated, relatively affluent members of the business-oriented segment of the upper middle class; however, some hold “new class” jobs, some are upper class, and others report modest upper middle class incomes. Education ranges from high school to doctorates. For some members, membership is a family tradition, suggesting links to the IAW's history as an elite organization (Johnson 1993), but 63% lack such ties.

Members also vary in other ways. A few are minorities or Jews. Age ranges from 22 to 47. IAW was once dominated by homemakers, but today 20% are unmarried, 32% are childless, 47% work full time and 20% part time. About 5% have been members over ten years, but 71 % have belonged five years or less, and 16% are probationary members. About 21% have been board members.

To determine whether such variables are related to members' views of community issues, we first constructed three dependent variables suggested by factor analysis of the importance ratings: (1) importance of the liberal agenda - items 6,9,12,13,14, and 15 from Table 2; (2) importance of children and family- items 7, 8,10, and 17, (3) importance of poverty and crime - items 1 and 2. We regressed these measures, as well as three individual items (cultural enrichment,<sup>6</sup> education, and substance abuse), on variables designed to capture differences in class background and other likely sources of differences in opinion. To include the variables of central interest — whether the member and spouse held new class jobs, family income, personal income, and self-employment - we present separate regressions for (1) nonmarried employed women, (2) married employed women, and (3) married women without paid employment.<sup>7</sup>

Table 3 shows that the importance ratings have only a few weak relationships to the independent variables. Only four of 18 equations explain a significant amount of variance, and all but two explain 5% or less. The 18 significant coefficients are only slightly more than the 13 expected by chance alone. The importance ratings are little influenced by education, personal and family income, member's and spouse's “new class” occupation, or self-employment.

Similar scattered, unpatterned relationships of very modest size also characterize the other independent variables. The same is true of employment status and marital status in a combined analysis omitted here to save space.<sup>8</sup> Thus, whether one looks at class related variables or at others, members characteristics have little association with their views.

#### *Sources of Member Homogeneity: Selection and Socialization*

The homogeneity of views of IAW members with different backgrounds could stem from two sources: selective member enlistment or socialization. We might infer member selectivity — even absent formal membership requirements or active discrimination - if two conditions are met: (1) women who might be expected to differ from the majority in world view, such as minorities, “new class” members, and those not from high status backgrounds, are underrepresented, and (2) new members hold opinions similar to senior ones and do not have more diverse views. Greater homogeneity in the views of senior members might suggest that

socialization created uniformity. It might also mean that members with deviant views more often resign or that senior cohorts always had more homogeneous views.

The underrepresentation of members from classes below upper middle and of “new class” members and minorities was documented above. The right panel of Table 2 presents the remainder of the evidence — the means and standard deviations for the importance ratings broken down by years of membership. The results indicate that neither socialization nor selective retention of those with views like the majority’s are likely explanations for the homogeneity of opinion. Except for citizen involvement, ratings of problem importance are unrelated to years in IAW. Moreover, diversity of opinion is greater among the senior members for ten issues, twice as many as for junior members.

Nor is there evidence that IAW recruits new members from diverse backgrounds, only to see them drop out. The percentages of Jewish and minority members and members and spouses with “new class” occupations do not differ significantly between probationary and active members. Nor does personal income. Education ( $\eta^2 < .01$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and family Income ( $\eta^2 = .01$ ;  $p < .01$ ) are lower among probationary members, who are younger, but the differences are quite small

Without comparable data from a representative sample of women in the 12 cities, we cannot prove that selectivity accounts for this consensus of opinion. Nevertheless, the underrepresentation of minorities (despite real emphasis on recruiting them), less affluent women, or women with “new class” occupations (or married to men with such occupations) clearly suggests this. So too does the fact that members in these groups hold views similar to the majority.

**Table 3.** Regressions of Perceived Importance of Community' Issues on Member Characteristics

Nonmarried, Employed Members									
	Age	Never Married	No. of Children	Years a Member	Board Member	Relative in IAW	No/Other Religion	Cath.	
Liberal agenda	.00	-.01	-.11	.04	-.03	-.01	.05	-.05	
Child/family	-.11	-.03	.02	-.04	.09	-.05	.01	-.01	
Poverty/crime	.05	-.08	-.03	-.10	.02	.03	-.05	-.02	
Culture	-.02	.04	-.11	.05	.06	.02	-.01	-.06	
Education	-.10	.01	.08	.01	-.14*	-.00	.04	.05	
Substance abuse	-.01	-.12	-.08	-.03	.09	.01	-.02	.02	
(N=329)									
Married, Employed Members									
	Age	No. of Children	Years a Member	Board Member	Relative in IAW	No/Other Religion	Cath.	Jewish	
Liberal agenda	.04	.00	-.06	-.03	.06	.04	.01	.05	
Child/family	-.08	.13**	.07	-.05	.00	-.01	-.02	.00	
Poverty/crim	.01	-.01	.01	-.08	.04	.02	-.03	.03	

e									
Culture	.04	.03	-.03	.07	.05	.01	.02	-.01	
Education	-.05	-.01	-.03	.00	.09*	.05	-.07	.03	
Substance abuse	.01	.07	.05	-.13**	-.01	-.01	-.06	.02	
(N=792)									
Married Nonemployed Members									
	Age	No. of Children	Years a Member	Board Member	Relative in IAW	No/Other Religion	Cath.		
Liberal agenda	.02	-.06	.05	-.01	-.05	.02	.05		
Child/family	-.05	.08	.01	-.05	-.03	-.07	-.05		
Poverty/crime	-.00	.03	-.02	-.06	.05	.03	.11*		
Culture	-.04	-.05	.08	-.02	-.01	.02	-.00		
Education	-.07	-.01	-.06	.01	.04	-.06	-.05		
Substance abuse	.05	-.02	.09	-.13**	-.00	-.05	-.01		
(N=539)									
Nonmarried, Employed Members									
	Jewish	Minority	Part-time	New Class	Self-Employed	Education	Own Income	R <sup>2</sup>	
Liberal agenda	.06	.03	.02	.02	.10	-.03	-.08	.03	
Child/family	.09	.03	.06	.08	.09	-.01	.01	.04	
Poverty/crime	.10	-.01	.04	.02	-.03	-.04	.03	.03	
Culture	.09	.11*	.08	.03	.15*	-.02	-.16**	.09**	
Education	.01	-.05	.09	.13*	.02	-.05	.06	.06	
Substance abuse	.07	.02	-.05	-.04	.07	-.12*	-.01	.05	
(N=329)									
Married, Employed Members									
	Minority	Part-time	New Class	Self-Employed	Education	Own Income	Husb. New Class	Family Income	R <sup>2</sup>
Liberal agenda	.06	-.06	-.02	-.04	-.03	-.06	.00	.05	.02
Child/family	.07	-.11*	.05	-.04	-.00	-.10*	-.02	.04	.03*
Poverty/crime	.05	.01	.05	-.07	-.01	-.04	.06	.05	.02
Culture	-.01	-.06	-.03	-.04	-.06	-.06	-.05	-.04	.02
Education	.03	.05	-.01	-.05	.10**	.06	.04	.00	.04*
Substance abuse	.03	-.02	-.01	-.11**	-.07	-.11*	-.04	.07	.05*
(N=792)									
Married Nonemployed Members									
	Jewish	Minority	Educ.	Own Income	Husb. New Class	Family Income	R <sup>2</sup>		
Liberal agenda	.11*	.05	-.05	-.06	.05	.06	.03		
Child/family	.03	.02	-.03	-.04	.01	.06	.02		

Poverty/crime	.09*	.07	.02	.02	-.03	.04	.03	
Culture	.08	-.01	-.10*	-.02	.02	.06	.03	
Education	.04	.07	-.04	.00	-.03	.03	.03	
Substance abuse	-.00	.00	-.06	-.01	.03	.06	.02	
(N=539)								

## Summary

Our results portray an organization that enrolls a majority of economically comfortable, business oriented upper middle class women and a minority of public spirited, moderate upper class women in genuine efforts to ameliorate community problems as they define them. In their questionnaire responses and the 4.2 hours they average devoting weekly to IAW work, members display awareness of some of the problematic results of the system in which they have prospered. Yet they embrace most readily those issues that are in line with higher-status women's historical commitments, do not threaten established power, and do not associate them with the liberal agenda or confrontational activism. They work to help those who suffer most from inequality — the homeless — but seldom advocate for higher salaries, urban revitalization, or public housing. They see environmental issues as important, but they emphasize environmental education and do not affiliate with activist environmental organizations.

IAW is thus not simply a higher-status organization; it attracts a particular kind of woman. Despite genuine efforts to diversify its membership (Johnson 1993), it has few minority members. Nor are members a random representation of privileged white women. Despite high education, few members or husbands have new class Jobs. Moreover, members from outside this mainstream view community problems much as do those within it. This uniformity evidently does not come from socialization. Instead, women who join IAW already agree with its members.

More broadly, our results show that voluntary associations can bring together citizens with common views of community problems, even across class lines. Focusing on how upper class clubs and associations unify upper class opinion and exert class influence in communities overlooks diversity of views among upper class people. Moderate upper class women's efforts to address community problems can bring them into organizations with upper middle class members who share their world view. Upper middle class women of more confrontational bent occupy places in the Sierra Club, NOW, the NAACP, and the ACLU. Voluntary associations do tend toward class and race homophily, but not all are single class organizations based solely on class interests.

Our data also suggest that the agendas of voluntary associations are affected not only by class, but also by gender. IAW members' views strongly reflect concerns of higher-status women, such as child welfare and education, that men of these classes might see as less important. Similarly,

the low importance members give to issues such as urban revitalization and race relations may reflect their underrepresentation in male-dominated community power structures.

Finally our results cast doubt on the view that higher-status voluntary associations are important mechanisms of class socialization. Rather than socializing members of a single class to accept the same world view, IAW apparently achieves consensus by selectively enlisting members from at least two classes who already have similar views.

Our findings thus offer a first look at views of community problems among a national sample of members of a higher-status association and suggest how member views are shaped by class, gender and selectivity of membership.

### **Notes**

1. Comparisons between the respondent's income and family income suggest a considerable disparity between husband and wife in most — but not all — families. Among families with incomes of \$75,000 to \$99,999 for example, 52% of wives had personal incomes under \$25,000 and only 9%, \$50,000 or more.

2. Occupations in the lower panel are excluded from computing the percentages. The majority of the national labor force is in these categories. Including them in the base for the percentages emphasizes the expected overrepresentation of IAW members and their spouses in high level occupations, but it obscures the important differences between the distribution of IAW members and their spouses versus the national male and female labor forces among higher status occupations. Members in both the upper and lower panels are included in subsequent analyses.

3. We did not include a separate category for women's groups in our coding of the question about other organization memberships, because very few IAW members belonged to such organizations.

4. In a Los Angeles Times poll from June, 1991, the most commonly mentioned problems were the economy (18%), homelessness and poverty (12%), drugs (10%), unemployment (7%), education (7%), budget deficit (7%), crime (5%), health care (4%), and pollution (3%) (Opinion Research Service 1991).

5. In a January, 1991 USA Today poll of local officials (Opinion Research Service 1991), the economy (34%), drugs (31%), solid waste disposal (28%), city finances (23%), crime (22%), raids and sidewalks (21%), education (20%), unemployment (17%), and living costs (17%) received the most mentions.

6. Cultural enrichment loaded, surprisingly, on the same factor as the liberal agenda items, but we analyzed it separately because it is an historical emphasis in IAW now often seen as outmoded by members and leaders who want the organization to be more activist. Education and

substance abuse were analyzed separately because they were rated as important but loaded on more than one factor.

7. Three separate analyses were necessary because including key variables that cannot be coded for all respondents (e.g., husband's and member's occupations and self-employment, personal income, and family income) in a combined regression would produce unacceptable numbers of missing cases. The independent variables used appear in the table headings. All but age, number of children, years of membership, education, personal income, and family income are dummy variables. Board member included both present and former members of the chapters Board of Directors. Respondents who classified themselves as African American, Asian, Native American or Latina were coded as minority group members. The occupational categories indicated with an "a" in Table 1 were coded as "new class." Following Brint (1984), we experimented with several definitions of the new class, but neither wider nor narrower definitions produced more relationships than the one used here. Education is coded in seven categories from "some high school" to "doctoral degree (including law degree)" (coded 1 to 7). Personal income has 9 categories from "no personal income" to "\$300,000 or more" (coded 0 to 8) Personal income is included in the analysis for married women without paid employment because some do report personal income. Family income has the same categories, less the "no personal income" response. The lowest response was "less than \$25,000" (coded 1). Tests for multicollinearity indicate that the matrices are well conditioned. Missing data problems for most variables are in the range one to 2%, and the largest is 8%. Nevertheless, limiting the analysis to members who responded to all items reduces the number of respondents by 30 percent. To see whether this affected the findings, we computed regressions based on pairwise deletion of missing cases. Results differ from those shown only in fine detail

8. Never married ( $p = .11$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and divorced, widowed, and separated members ( $\beta = .06$ ,  $p < .05$ ) are slightly more likely to rate liberal agenda items high. The latter also give slightly more importance to poverty and crime ( $\beta = .06$ ,  $p < .05$ ), while the never married rate culture slightly higher ( $\beta = .06$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Members working full time see education as less important ( $\beta = -.08$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

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