INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
FIXING THE AGENDA:
THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN’S EQUALITY, HOLISTIC POLITICS
AND TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE IN TORONTO’S URBAN
RENEWAL MOVEMENT

by

Lisa M. Caton

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Adult Education, Community Development and
Counselling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

© Copyright by Lisa M. Caton 1998
The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author’s permission.

L’auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L’auteur conserve la propriété du droit d’auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.
FIXING THE AGENDA:
THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY, HOLISTIC POLITICS
AND TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE IN TORONTO’S URBAN
RENEWAL MOVEMENT

by Lisa M. Caton

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Adult Education, Community Development and Counselling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto
1998

Abstract

This study examines women’s experience, holistic politics and transformative practice in
Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement, a sub-section of the broader urban renewal
and environmental movements. Sources for this study include reflection on the researcher’s
own experience within the movement as well as formal, open-ended interviews with women
practitioners/activists in the movement.

The research shows that women’s participation and the question of who has power to
set priorities and receive recognition for their work, are significant issues and impact upon
both the political culture and the overall political effectiveness of the movement. Women’s
claims for equality, recognition, respect and status are, in fact, an intrinsic part of building a
more effective and holistic politics for the sustainable transportation movement. The findings
of this study also may have relevance beyond the sustainable transportation movement to
other environmental, community and neighbourhood groups as well.
Acknowledgments

Researching and writing this thesis has been a long, challenging process. I could not imagine all the years of working on this project without the love and friendship of my husband and lifepartner, Gordon Laird. His belief both in me and this project have been beneficial beyond words. Special thanks to my mother, Charlotte Caton, who has provided her support, encouragement, and especially her love over the years. I am thrilled that our theses will sit side by side on the library bookshelf at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE).

I have benefited from the exchange of ideas and support from numerous professors and students at OISE. Of these, I would particularly like to thank my academic mentor and thesis supervisor Angela Miles. She consistently encouraged and challenged me intellectually; her interest in this project has made it both a more enjoyable process and a better piece of research. I am also appreciative of thesis committee member Margrit Eichler’s constructive feedback. Marilyn Struthers, of my thesis support group, helped to reduce the isolation of thesis-writing early on.

My friends and colleagues in Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement are a constant source of inspiration. In particular, I have been sustained by the wisdom, moral support and generous encouragement of Sue Zielinski and Lesley Wood. Several other people gave important feedback on the ideas or on drafts of the chapters including Lyn Adamson, Barb Brook, Joan Doiron, Lois James, Gillian Kranias, Sally McKay, Lisa Salsberg and Nancy Smith Lea. A short leave in the summer of 1997 was made possible by my employer, the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, and enabled me to write the original draft of this thesis.
This research study has been an important part of my life for over four years. There have been times my motivation and energy waned. Through this long process, I have been encouraged by the women who took an interest in this study. I have learned an enormous amount and will be forever grateful to the women who participated in this study and who opened up their homes and lives to me. I am inspired by their work, their insight, their creativity and their commitment. I hope that this research gives back to women in the sustainable transportation movement at least a small portion of what I have gained.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1 – Introduction and Chapter Outline</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic Politics &amp; Transformative Practice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Politics</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Outline</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2 – Toronto’s Sustainable Transportation Movement</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic and Ecological Perspectives</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Celebratory Approach</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaigners and Community Developers</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with Government</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing Tactics</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics of Transformation</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3 – Issues of Women’s Inequality in Social Movements</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Dialogue</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalization</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanguardism</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Roles in Social Movements</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Objects</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 – Holistic Transformative Practice</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Community Organizing</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ends and Means</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building the Movement</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With The People</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixers</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialectical Politics</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1
Introduction and Chapter Outline

Introduction

This study examines women's experiences, holistic politics and transformative practice in Toronto's sustainable transportation movement.1 "Sustainable transportation" is a diverse, vibrant movement that brings together people from urban renewal organizations, environmental movements, and community and neighbourhood groups to address issues of air quality, city planning, equity, access, cycling, walking, public transit, rail and land use. The primary vision of the movement is to create transportation alternatives to auto and fossil fuel dependent society and culture.

Like most social movements, issues of gender infuse much of its work; however, the sustainable transportation movement has yet to develop a critical, internal dialogue on gender issues and concerns. As in other movements there has been some reluctance to develop a dialogue on the relationship between gender politics2 and the movement's political culture.

When this study began to take shape in 1994, it was little more than an inkling of a discussion that seemed to be waiting to happen. I had been active in community, neighbourhood and environmental organizing in Toronto's multi-faceted urban renewal movement. Specifically, the sustainable transportation sub-section of the movement was an area in which I had been an active participant since 1991. My ongoing experience with, and observation of, various social movement organizations — the sustainable transportation movement in particular — grounds this investigation.

---

1 The emphasis on women's experiences in this study is not to ignore or dismiss other inequalities in the sustainable transportation movement grounded in racism, homophobia, or class prejudice. These are important related areas for further research and action.
2 Gender politics is defined as politics which address the power relations between men and women.
In 1993-94, I stepped back slightly from movement organizing to focus my energies on full-time graduate studies but remained active in several groups. During this period of distance from full-time involvement, I found myself in a number of discussions with women in the movement who wanted to share their ideas, frustrations, issues, and conflicts in organizing and activism. These were women who felt that their participation was seen by their colleagues as disruptive and that their ideas were not taken seriously. Some women spoke to me about their thoughts of quitting specific groups or the movement as a whole. I sometimes wondered if I was included in these discussions because of my distance from day-to-day movement activities—i.e., was I someone “safe” to talk to about these issues because I was not as directly involved in the groups we discussed? Or were similar discussions happening among many small groups of women across movement organizations?

In the end, I observed an emerging critical exchange among women in the sustainable transportation movement. In these informal and formal discussions, women confirmed their dissatisfaction with the dominant culture of the movement, though they did not always describe their dissatisfaction in these terms. Within specific organizations and coalitions, women often felt their participation and perspectives were being marginalized, trivialized and/or ignored. Even organizations that women themselves had built with holistic agendas and transformative processes and structures seemed to have a default mode for male-defined dominant culture and hierarchy. This often made women’s participation a chronic, and sometimes draining, struggle. One of the supports of their ongoing struggle has been the development of loose, unstructured networks of women active in the movement. However, this manifests mainly as personal support networks among individual women, there is still no movement-wide, public dialogue on women’s experience.

As I worked at developing my research proposal, I was interested particularly in the experiences of women in the movement. At the very beginning of my research process, I

---

3 Please see page 6 for a discussion of “male-defined dominant culture.”
conducted one taped, open-ended interview with a key movement participant. What this discussion suggested to me was that women’s difficulties within the movement organizing might be linked to the politics they practiced, but I was not sure how these issues were linked. I put this issue of women’s experiences and the politics they practiced at the centre of my study, and set out to explore further the relationship between women’s practice and the development of holistic, transformative politics within Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement. In doing this I wanted to explore the barriers to women’s full participation in the movement and to further articulate the holistic approach to social change I saw being developed and implemented in several movement groups.

Holistic Politics & Transformative Practice

As an activist in the sustainable transportation movement I am committed to creating a better society – socially, environmentally and economically. This goal is holistic in nature as are the politics required to achieve it. In all of this, there is an implicit understanding that social life and politics are inter-connected and that social transformation is achieved by changing the very fabric of society. But what does it mean to practice ‘holistic politics’? I have defined holistic politics as politics which aim to address all of society, not just a single area; to recognize the interconnectedness of issues, social movements and disciplines; to be visionary and to put this vision of transformed social relations into practice; to be both process and action oriented; and to work with an ecological perspective. Holistic politics are a full politics which have not only a broadened conception of “transportation planning,” but also have perspectives on society in general.

This definition of holistic politics encompasses an expansive notion of ecology in the sense that social movements are not seen as acting in isolation from each other. Seen from an environmental perspective, “struggles against militarism, feminist struggles against the exclusivity of male power, struggles for top-down racial equity and bottom-up social justice
in the fullest sense can be rightly seen as struggles for the environment” (Seager, 1993: 166). Or, as the late Petra Kelly, outspoken feminist and Green Party activist, wrote,

Our call to action, our call for nonviolent transformation of society is based on the belief that the struggle for disarmament, peace, social justice, protection of the planet Earth, and the fulfillment of basic human needs and human rights are one and indivisible (in Plant, ed., 1989: ix-x).

Holistic visions of society recognize the interconnectedness of economic, social and ecological relations. In this view, transportation is a key factor in transformation of general social and economic relations. Transportation is at the core of how our households and communities are organized, experienced and linked together: “Transport is a vital indication of the quality of our individual lives, as well as the quality of our relationships with each other and with the earth” (Freund and Martin, 1993: 184). Reciprocally, our whole social organization must change in order for the mobility of people and goods to become truly sustainable.4

Like many of the women I interviewed, my activism (and this study) is infused with a commitment to transformative practice – the belief that transformative politics require a practice that models movement-building, egalitarian, democratic goals. The end of domination (over people and nature), hierarchy, prejudice, and injustice, will not be advanced by using dominating or hierarchical process. Without transformative practice, the credibility, creative possibilities and success of social movements are limited. In addition to the limiting possibilities, the lack of transformative practice alienates people, both women and men.

Transformative practice recognizes the importance of integrating ends and means as well as putting the transformed vision of society into practice within the movement.

Transformative practice recognizes that the same values must shape the movement itself as

4 The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) defines “sustainable” not as a fixed limit within the planet’s ecological means, but instead a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with the needs of future generations as well as present ones (9). “Sustainable transportation” refers to modes of transportation that are environmentally, socially and economically viable – a shift away from privately owned, single occupancy, fossil fuel burning automobiles.
well as its goals – that social movements must practice what they preach. As Murray Bookchin (1971) writes, “There can be no separation of the revolutionary process from the revolutionary goal” (167).

Gender Politics

One element of holistic and transformative politics is the vision of transformed gender relations. In Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement, the individuals who are integrating holistic visions and processes into their work are mostly, but not exclusively, women. Around the world, women have been at the forefront of promoting holistic visions in theory and practice. Hynes (1985) names the three pioneers of the American environmental movement: Ellen Swallow, Lois Gibbs and Rachel Carson. All are women. Early on, each of these women observed the link between human and environmental well-being and saw the need for holistic change. Swallow was the founder of ecology, the science of humans and the environment, through her efforts to promote an understanding of the interrelationships of air, water, food, and human health and the impacts of industrialization. Gibbs, housewife and mother turned environmental activist, presented her so-called hysterical housewife data (she plotted sickness of residents on a map of her neighbourhood after interviewing local families) to the New York State health department which led to the removal of hundreds of families from the Love Canal. Carson linked modern contaminants (pesticides, herbicides) to all parts of the environment and human health.

Thus it is no coincidence that individuals working towards holistic visions and practices within the sustainable transportation movement are mostly women. As I progressed further into my research and interviews, I began to observe the connections between women and holistic practice I had read about in the literature of other social movements. In her study

---

5 My preliminary research and interview revealed this to be an important dynamic within in the movement.
of thirty years of holistic and integrative feminist practice, Miles (1996) finds that the affirmation of holistic and integrative values is actually the affirmation of the work, characteristics and concerns that have been relegated to women; values that are marginalized and trivialized in industrial, patriarchal society. Miles identifies a crucial paradox in advancing holistic politics: the dualistic gender system is challenged and transformed initially through the affirmation of one side of the dichotomy – the female side.6

This is not to suggest that women have well-developed holistic politics by nature, i.e., women have no genetic disposition to a certain kind of politics, nor is it to suggest that men are incapable of such views. Many women as well as men accept male-defined cultural and political norms, and there are some men who resist these norms in the name of holistic alternatives. It is simply to say that at this point in history, women’s struggle for political recognition and equality is closely related to the affirmation of holistic politics, a key finding of this study.

Dominant culture is referred to here and throughout this study as male-defined in the sense that it is patriarchal.7 The dominant culture is developed by and for the benefit of men. Certainly, there are some women who reap rewards from patriarchal society. But the reality is more fundamental: male-defined organizations function in stride with broader cultural and social currents to reflect and reproduce patriarchal society, sharing to greater or lesser degrees characteristics of being hierarchic, bureaucratic, dualistic, elitist, and/or instrumentalist, to name a few. Practically, male-defined organizations function as microcosms of the wider society in which they function with little or no recognition of women’s inequality. This is not to say that women do not also help to run male-defined organizations. Male-defined organizations are not determined by the number of women and men in leadership positions within the organization: it is the non-recognition and non-

---

6 Miles (1996) argues that there is an important, but not an essential, link between women and holistic politics.
7 Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as a “system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (20).
resistance to the cultural undertow of patriarchy that makes organizations ‘male-defined.’ Even feminist organizations with explicit commitment to resist patriarchal process and structure will sometimes struggle with this reality. 8

Though there is little research on the gender make-up of environmental organizations, Seager (1993) suggests there is a glass ceiling which restricts the number of women in leadership roles to 30 per cent of the people on the boards of directors and in paid executive positions within the mainstream environmental movement, an executive-managerial class she refers to as the “ecobureaucracy.” At the grassroots level, it is generally recognized that women make up the overwhelming majority of participants in most environmental struggles. From my observation, the sustainable transportation movement includes roughly equal numbers of men and women at all levels, though there has been no quantitative research on this. The greater level of male participation can be explained in part by transportation being a traditionally male-dominated field. Conversely, the relatively small scale of movement organizations means that there are few executive-managerial positions available; even the movement’s “elite” levels are relatively grassroots compared to the environmental mainstream.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 – Toronto’s Sustainable Transportation Movement

This chapter describes the context for this study: Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement. With over 50 groups active in Toronto alone the sustainable transportation movement is a diverse collection of projects and people that address the interlinked issues of automobile and fossil fuel dependent society. The movement has a strong holistic foundation

---

8 See Whitlock (1980) for a discussion of how the National Organization of Women (NOW) has internalized the same form of power relations and hierarchical domination that characterizes patriarchal society.
stemming from its ecological perspective, which recognize the interconnectedness of issues and the links to social, environmental and economic well-being. Despite this, there has been little or no dialogue on gender issues, women's participation, or on the development of an agenda to promote women's equality in the movement.

Chapter 3 – Issues of Women's Inequality in Social Movements

Chapter Three turns to the literature of other progressive social movements to frame and contextualize women's issues that have not been articulated in the sustainable transportation movement. This chapter examines the struggles of women in various progressive movements to raise consciousness on gender issues against resistance from men and women within their groups and organizations. In various ways, consciousness-raising work has advanced dialogues on women's roles and has created space for women within a variety of movements. Women have criticized both the treatment of women in their movements and the effects of male-dominated movement culture in limiting the broader vision of social change. Women also have critiqued the structure of their movements where men compete for power and status at the top, and women do the work at the bottom.

Chapter 4 – Holistic Transformative Practice

This chapter examines literature on community and feminist organizing, with a focus on issues related to transformative practice. In particular, it addresses issues in the application of the principles of equality and freedom within personal and political relations. These issues have long been discussed and debated by community organizers and by feminists. At the centre of these debates are the interrelated issues of values, leadership, organizing tactics and movement-building strategies.
Chapter 5 – Methodology

Chapter Five outlines the research methodology used in this qualitative study of women’s experiences, holistic politics and transformative practice in Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement. A key source of data for this study was the personal reflection and participant observation on the part of the researcher, a movement participant. Important data on women’s experiences, gender and political culture were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants in the movement.

Chapter 6 – Women’s Experience, Gender and Political Practice

Chapter Six uses the data gathered on women’s experiences in Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement to examine the relationship between women’s concerns with gender issues and movement politics and practice. Although a public discourse on women’s equality is for the most part absent within the sustainable transportation movement, women nevertheless raised gender issues in their interviews. The women observed that though they participated in supportive groups for the most part, the wider movement still suffers from the undertow of male-defined dominant culture. This has the effect of shaping the politics and practice of several movement groups, resulting in devaluing women’s contributions, over-promoting experts, limiting participation, relying on adversarial approaches, and creating hierarchical organizational structures. Women are challenging the movement’s shortcomings in addressing the importance of building the movement through outreach, open agendas, openness to new ideas and people, and cultural difference. In resisting male-defined organizational and cultural norms, women are promoting ways of working in the movement that are collaborative, participatory, member (as opposed to staff) driven, process-oriented, supportive, and fun. They are emphasizing that a group or project needs to be defined by the people involved (bottom up as opposed to top down) and needs to build on people’s strengths
and interests. The data show that women are developing holistic approaches to their work that suggest the potential of a new politics and practice for the movement.

Chapter 7 – Women’s Experience, Holistic and Transformative Practice

Chapter Seven draws on the experience of women in Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement to examine holistic and transformative politics. Women are not only asserting their own claim to recognition and power, but are advancing democratic, egalitarian, movement-building politics. In their efforts to build a multi-centred, diverse movement, women are attempting to transcend the male-defined dualisms of ends and means; thinkers and linkers; leaders and led; knower and known; product and process; and centralization and decentralization in ways that strengthen the transformative politics of the movement.

The major discovery of this research is that the issue of women’s participation and the question of who has power to set priorities and receive recognition for their work has significant implications for both the political culture and the overall political effectiveness of the movement. Women’s claims for equality, recognition and status are, in fact, also about advancing a new and more holistic politics for the movement. Seen in this light, the advancement of women’s status and power not only benefits women in the movement, but strengthens the movement as a whole. The findings of this study also may have relevance beyond the sustainable transportation movement to wider urban renewal, environmental, community and neighbourhood groups, out of which the sustainable transportation movement is formed.
Chapter 2

Toronto’s Sustainable Transportation Movement

In cities all over the world there are groups of people working to revitalize their urban environments, both social and physical. Issues such as housing, homelessness, pollution and ecological destruction have inspired a broad category of activism Manuel Castells (1977) refers to as “urban struggles.”

Within the world’s urban renewal movement, there is a sub-movement of people who have joined together to find solutions to the complex problems of auto-dependent, fossil-fuel transportation systems and related social, environmental, health and economic impacts. This movement, known as the sustainable transportation movement, proposes a new politics of urban ecology, economic equity and human-scale planning.

Auto-dependent transportation is a chronic problem in cities around the globe. In most metropolitan cities, cars currently create more pollution than industry. This problem is intensifying – the mounting social costs of the car are causing more and more people to question the transportation status quo. The estimated annual health care cost in Ontario for disease attributable to car-related air pollution is $646 million.9 In the Toronto area the number of cars is increasing faster than the number of residents. The current 2.4 million cars is predicted to become 3.5 million by the year 2010.10 This increase in car use has overshadowed advances in emissions and fuel efficiency standards. Potentially the most dire environmental consequence of automobiles is their substantial role in climate change, an estimated global climate rise of 2 to 5 degrees above pre-industrial temperatures by the end

---

of the next century.\textsuperscript{11} Even though auto dependence manifests primarily as an urban problem, its consequences are increasingly global in nature: the associated impacts of climate change will affect forest, coastal, and other ecosystems, as well as agriculture and other economic sectors.\textsuperscript{12}

The impact on human health of automobile dependency is already significant: urban areas have higher rates of death from lung cancer and lung diseases than rural areas (which has been attributed in part to air pollution from automobile exhaust); and the largest cause of accidental fatalities in Toronto is motor vehicle accidents, including a growing number of pedestrians and cyclist fatalities.\textsuperscript{13}

The economic impacts of the car are significant. Transportation is an appropriate metaphor for the modern global economy: centralized ownership (car companies); captive audiences (limited alternatives); wealth created through waste (crashes, unnecessary movement of people and goods); and inequitable access (inadequate public transportation for the poor, working class and "transportation disadvantaged" non-car owners). The effects of our economy's over dependence on autos fuels the international military machine in the ongoing geo-politics of maintaining access to the world's oil supplies (see Enloe, 1989; Freund and Martin, 1993).

Responding to local and global consequences of auto dependency, the sustainable transportation movement in Toronto is a diverse, vibrant movement that brings groups and individuals from urban renewal, environmental, community and neighbourhood groups together to promote public transit, cycling and walking, among other alternatives to auto and fossil fuel dependent society. In 1996, Detour Publications' "Sustainable Transportation in Toronto" directory listed over 50 groups and organizations working on sustainable transportation issues in Toronto, 30 projects, 19 events, and 12 publications/information

\textsuperscript{11}Healthy City Toronto (1991), p.4.
\textsuperscript{12}Healthy City Toronto (1991), p.4.
\textsuperscript{13}Healthy City Toronto (1991), p.4.
access listings. Over half of the groups and organizations listed work specifically in the area of cycling issues.

Toronto activists spend an incredible amount of energy doing the work of city transportation planners: designing local and regional transportation plans; developing transportation systems that accommodate all users (including pedestrians, parents with strollers, the disabled and cyclists); conducting economic analyses of transportation projects; making the connections between transportation, militarism, poverty, the environment and health; and sometimes even planning roads that are less environmentally damaging.

Sustainable transportation groups active in Toronto include, but are not limited to:¹⁴

*Advocacy for Respect for Cyclists*
*Better Transportation Coalition*
*Clean Air Partnership*
*Community Bicycle Network*
*Detour Publications*
*Environmental Centre for New Canadians*
*Environmentalists Plan Transportation*
*Feet on the Street*
*407 Highway Action Group*
*GreenSaver*
*Green Tourism Partnership*
*Greenest City*
*Greenpeace*
*Latin American Bike Club*
*Multiracial Network for Environmental Justice*

¹⁴ Contact information for these groups is included in Detour Publications’ “Sustainable Transportation in Toronto” directory. Detour can be reached at email: detour@web.net or tel: (416) 504-3934.
North Toronto Green Community
Ontario Lung Association
Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG)
Pollution Probe
Rocket Riders
Skills Development Program for Sustainable Transportation
Song Cycles - the choir on bikes
South Riverdale Community Health Centre
Sustainable Transportation Economic Development Initiative
Toronto Centre for Appropriate Transportation
Toronto City Cycling Committee
Toronto Environmental Alliance
Transportation Action Now, Inc.
Transport 2000
Transportation Options
Women for a Just and Healthy Planet
Women on Wheels
Women Plan Transportation

Fossil-fuel consumption is one of the keystones of the global economy: men own the world's biggest corporations (which are also transportation based) and benefit the most from a transportation status quo that is dependent on privately-owned automobiles; whereas many women, who constitute a growing majority of the working poor in Canada, are excluded from this system.

15 Within the groups that form the sustainable transportation movement there are both feminists within transportation groups and transportation activists located within feminist groups. In some cases, as in Women for Just and Healthy Planet, membership overlaps between feminist groups and transportation groups.
As well, the sustainable transportation movement reflects a number of internal tensions that have characterized the feminist movement. Back in 1971, Judith Hole and Ellen Levine’s research on the women’s movement found two distinct branches: women’s rights and women’s liberation. Women’s rights groups were characterized as more moderate as they stay away from “controversial” issues to reach as broad a group of women as possible. Women’s liberation groups were found to be younger, more radical and more analytical. They wrote:

Thus if moderate and conservative feminists focus exclusively on reforming laws and official practices without recognizing the importance of issues and ideas raised by radical feminists, they run the risk of confusing short-range activities with the long-range goal of completely eliminating the sex-role system. By the same token, if many radical feminists become mired in introspection, they face the danger of never transforming their new insights and analyses into action to effectuate specific changes (399).

More than twenty-five years later, the same observation could be made of Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement. Groups that focus exclusively on reforming laws and official practices in support of pedestrians, cyclists and public transit riders, may find the vision of their group narrow to a short-term scope. Similarly, if more radical activists cannot put into practice their transportation analyses, little action will occur.

Holistic and Ecological Perspectives

Despite its similarities with the feminist movement, the categories of “moderate” and “radical” do not encompass all of the perspectives within the sustainable transportation movement. For instance, not all groups in the movement share the same ecological orientation: while some environmental organizations focus only on the environmental outcomes and impacts, other health organizations focus only on the impact of the
environment on individual health. Overall, within Toronto’s movement there are a substantial number of groups and individuals working to advance a holistic perspective on the issue of sustainable transportation, a reality that sometimes works to blur clear distinctions between “radical” and “moderate.”

Therefore, the designation of “holistic” can often overlap more traditional ideological categories. Freund and Martin (1993) define a holistic and ecological perspective to transport as:

Transport is viewed as an organic system, with ideological, subjective, infrastructural, political and economic levels. Land use patterns, gender-differentiated issues, social and political forces that shape technology – all these require consideration in thinking critically about transport. Ultimately, critical analysis of auto-centred transport forces us to address broader issues of political economy, ecology, and social inequality (183).

Toronto’s various organizations cannot easily be labeled as working with a holistic/ecological perspective, just as they cannot easily be categorized as either radical or moderate. In terms of political practice, the movement does not always clearly divide itself along the lines of ideological difference and political perspective; cleavages and tensions are just as likely to manifest within organizations as between organizations. Within organizations, there are individuals and alliances with differing priorities and perspectives. For example, within the Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA), two main sub-groups focus on transportation issues: the Transportation caucus (called Environmentalists Plan Transportation) champions a more holistic view of transportation in its emphasis on the social, health, land use, safety and environmental impacts of transportation, whereas the Smog and Climate Change caucus is mainly concerned with quantifiable impacts and outcomes related to the physical environment. Within these caucuses there are individuals with varying political outlooks.
Nevertheless, holistic ecological approaches often characterize the movement. In 1992, the Second International Conference on Auto-Free Cities was held in Toronto. The event brought groups together from all parts of Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement (as well as a significant number of international participants), and was hosted by Transportation Options, an organization that had been formed a year earlier to plan and organize the conference. In practice, the Auto-Free Cities conference demonstrated a holistic and ecological orientation to transport. As the conference programme read:

The Second International Conference on Auto Free Cities will bring together researchers, business people, grassroots activists, transportation engineers, architects, and auto-free visionaries to seek and share local and global paths to car reduction. It will include practical plans as well as inspirational visions of a car-free world. Topics will range from the economics of car use, to land use planning, to architecture for a car-free world, to business opportunities in a car free world, to transportation systems planning, to auto-free art, to the role of the car as a cultural icon, to visual presentations of auto reduction successes in other cities. . . . Toronto’s costs, causes and cures will be the focus of the final day.

The proceedings from the conference were published in two popular forms: the magazine, TransMission (which continues to publish in 1998) and a book, Beyond the Car: Essays on the Auto Culture (Zielinski and Laird, eds., 1995). Reflecting the sentiments of the 1992 conference, the introduction to Beyond the Car reads:

The history of transportation has been plagued with an over-abundance of experts, most of whom have only made matters worse. In response, what we’ve tried to do with Beyond the Car is present a healthy arrangement of options, possibilities, and ideas, so that people can make their own decisions about the automobile. That’s really what it’s all about: creating more options that help people to move themselves beyond the car — and, hopefully, get involved in things that foster social equity, public health, economic justice and urban renewal (8).
A year and a half prior to Toronto’s Auto-Free Cities Conference, a social democratic government, the New Democratic Party (NDP), was elected in Ontario. Some of the members of the conference committee had wanted to organize the conference so that each workshop contributed to the building of a political programme, resulting in an action agenda for the new provincial government. But the goal of having the conference build towards a provincial sustainable transportation agenda did not materialize. Other organizers successfully argued that bringing together of a diverse group of participants was effective and desirable as an end in itself to spark a broader range of ideas and action within a less circumscribed format.

In the end, as the NDP government was not especially open to having a sustainable transportation agenda, and it was no strategic loss that the Auto-Free Cities conference did not attempt to formulate a provincial agenda. What this example does illustrate is that the ongoing interplay between strategies within the movement is characterized by a tactical tension: for some, bringing people together is the most effective means to bring about action and movement-building; and for others, setting a unified movement-wide political agenda is the priority.

This tension highlights another debate within the movement: just what does “sustainable” really mean? Does the vision of a “sustainable” future include cars? Are we talking about getting rid of cars or just reducing their numbers? At the time of Toronto’s Auto-Free conference, many people weren’t sure if they could attend if they owned a car, including a City Councillor representing a downtown ward.

Ambiguity surrounding the term “sustainable” has been the cause of some friction within a number of groups. In 1995, a debate surfaced within Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) about a proposed car pooling project, Ride Together. The Transportation caucus was not interested in projects that included cars, whereas the Smog and Climate Change caucus viewed car pooling as one of the options to be promoted in the shift to sustainable transportation as long as it did not move commuters away from transit and into
cars. In the end, the Ride Together project found funding, and went forward led by the Smog and Climate Change caucus that had proposed it.

Where a group stands on the continuum between auto-free and auto reform often determines their programme and how much time they invest in regulatory and technology issues. Pollution Probe is an organization that has been described as having a “moderate view” on cars, a vision of sustainable transportation change that incorporates alternative fuels and electric cars as solutions. Pollution Probe is one of the environmental organizations that works directly with both the auto industry and government to implement a vehicle emissions testing program for the province, while recognizing that the long-term solution is to wean people away from privately-owned automobiles. As outlined in Chapter Four, there are organizational culture issues that challenge environmental groups who work closely with the mainstream. The resources available to work on technological projects (such as electric cars and computerized navigation systems) are monumental in comparison to the resources available to work on issues of car culture and automobile dependence. It is expected that over the next 20 years, over $200 billion will be invested in “smart car” technology alone.  

To date, most regulatory issues related to automobiles and the environment have focused on technical fixes, such as emissions reduction and fuel innovation. Technological fixes work towards incremental improvements in auto performance to address the environmental concerns of car dependency. As cars have become less polluting through technical innovation, the overall pollution from the growing car population has steadily increased: between 1982 and 1985 pollutants from vehicles grew by 18 per cent in Toronto. As many transportation activists have argued, decreasing the impact of individual auto usage does not necessarily decrease overall social impacts. Vehicle ownership and road traffic in Toronto is expected to double between 1991 and 2025 overshadowing any gains in

---

17 Healthy City Toronto (1991), p.3.
technological innovation. Even if we had non-polluting cars, issues of land use, access, equity, safety, would still pose significant problems. Freund and Martin (1993) write,

An alternative vision of transport technology seeks to encourage more ecologically-friendly modes of production and consumption. Rather than simply retrofitting existing technology to eliminate pollution (for example, catalytic converters), we need to develop structures and processes that minimize auto-dependence. Priority should be given to developing less energy-resource intensive means of transport and to providing improved forms of collective transport (177).

It is the concern of many environmental groups that the technological fix agenda is being driven by the auto industry and supported by governments to protect private economic interests and the status quo. If the structure of the transportation status quo is not questioned and challenged, they argue, then the enormous cultural, economic and political momentum of the car will persist. Therefore, many of Toronto’s sustainable transportation groups choose not to enter the debates on alternative fuels, smart cars, and electric vehicles in the interest of promoting social change and holistic solutions. In the conclusion to Beyond the Car, Zielinski (1995) writes,

If the solution to car chaos were as simple as the car ads tell us – alternative fuels, plastic cars, air bags, clean cars, and re-cyclable cars – this would have been a pretty short book. . . . But it’s a little more complicated than that. It’s not just that our popular technical fixes and safety devices ignore the larger problems associated with car dependence – like poor land use, car waste, global warming, and social inequity. It’s that what is really being planned for us is more likely to meet short term commercial and surveillance needs than our needs for mobility – and especially for community (174).

The Celebratory Approach

Besides its tendency towards holistic politics, another important characteristic of Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement is its celebratory politics: its tendency to link creative

18 Healthy City Toronto (1991), p.3.
alternatives and a healthy, liveable city with having fun. As two transportation activists pointed out:

One of the prime characterizing features of the whole movement is the fun we have in the process. To this, we are dedicated. Fortunately for those who have never been involved in the transportation movement, there is no end in sight to the struggles ahead. So get mad, get creative, get active, and join us. From the range of projects and groups, there's got to be something that suits your issue, your lifestyle, and your personality (Zielinski and Caton, 1995).

This is not to say that the movement's members have not been accused of being over-earnest, but the creativity, humour and fun of the movement has been noted by other environmentalists in the city. Examples of the movement’s celebratory style of making social change include: Song Cycles (a choir on bikes); the Spadina Canada Day Street Festivals and other “street openings” (closing to cars, opening to people); Critical Mass and other mass bicycle rides which mix protest and celebration; and the fun that TransMission and other publications have in deconstructing car culture.

But as in many movements before it, there is a tension between those who see the “real work” of the movement – protests, lobbying, research and action – as more important than the celebrations, cultural work, publishing, and artistic expression. In the editorial to their summer 1996 issue, the Chicks United for Non-noxious Transportation (CUNT) ‘zine states: “Like a flushing, full-moon menstrual flow, with words and images us biker-chicks are conveying the empowerment, excitement and outrage of the urban cycling experience” [italics added]. For people more inclined towards lobbying activities, the notion of “words

---

19 Brian Milani, instructor of the Green Economy course at the Metro Labour Education Centre, tells his classes that the sustainable transportation and food security movements in Toronto have been able to attract new people and express themselves creatively in ways that the building materials and other branches of the environmental movement in Toronto have not.

20 Critical Mass rides, inaugurated in San Francisco, are assemblies of cyclists that “take to the streets to demonstrate and celebrate their right to do so. Critical Mass now happens in dozens of cities around the world.” In Toronto, Critical Mass takes place on the last Friday of each month at the Standby Cafe at Yonge and Temperance streets. (Sustainable Transportation in Toronto, Detour Publications, p. 47)
and images" as a tool for social change is often devalued. "Publishing a ‘zine might be fun, but how is it making a difference?" they sometimes ask.

Clearly, within the movement there are different approaches to social change, as well as varying degrees of tolerance to differing approaches. In Toronto, we see a wide range of organizing tactics, but the question still remains as to whether these approaches can supportively co-exist.

Campaigners and Community Developers

The sustainable transportation movement in Toronto is largely decentralized. There is no single group that sets the movement’s agenda. This can be seen as either a good or a bad thing, depending on one’s perspective on social change. According to one professional working at a larger environmental organization, there has been no effective forum to bring all the sustainable transportation organizations together to build consensus, set organizing goals and identify issues the movement wants to win. This environmentalist lamented that people within the movement see a plethora of problems and want to work on them all at once; that there is not a lot of good strategizing going on within the movement; there is too much unprofessional behaviour; and that people assume any energy expended is useful.21

An alternative perspective that is often articulated within the movement suggests that the diversity of groups and action within the movement is cause for celebration; it shows the broad range, depth, breadth, energy and initiative within the movement. In this seemingly anarchic system, it’s not just helter skelter. It can be quite cohesive and effective.

The years 1992 to 1995 saw a range of individuals and organizations come together with differing organizing styles and political agendas as the sustainable transportation movement worked to create a province-wide coalition, the Better Transportation Coalition

---

(BTC). At the BTC, a series of conflicts revealed the tensions in organizing styles and differences in perspectives on sustainable transportation issues and social change. Sometimes, the conflict boiled down to two opposing camps: on the one side was the campaigning approach with a more hierarchical organizational philosophy that emphasized a conventional top-down strategy of setting a winnable goal and going after it; by contrast, the other camp favoured more educative and community development approaches, where goals are not as clearly structured around campaigns and consensus is built as community goals emerge. From the former perspective, the BTC was seen as the political muscle of the movement, whereas from the other perspective the BTC was the place to build the movement through education and participation. There was a distinct gender split within the Board of the BTC, where most of the women on the Board found themselves in the latter camp. But in the end, the “muscle” approach dominated. After significant struggle within the organization, the BTC became known as a lobbying organization and its paid staff defined their role as professional campaigners. For the most part, individuals and organizations that sought to facilitate the growth and development of the sustainable transportation movement through the work of the BTC became alienated in the process.

The sustainable transportation movement in Toronto is stronger than it was 25 years ago, partly due to the fact that the movement’s identity has been broadly defined in the challenging process of resisting and creating alternatives to car dependency. During the Stop the Spadina Expressway campaign of the early seventies, a group of citizens rallied against the building of a highway through downtown Toronto. One of the organizers recalls that focussing on the singular goal of stopping the expressway meant the energy of their group dissipated when they reached their goal:

We ourselves [didn’t] articulate the [issue] clearly enough, and big enough. It was like the David and Goliath thing [and] we were just doing this one [campaign to stop the Spadina Expressway]. We thought that was all there
was to it, but obviously [transportation] was so much bigger and we weren't defining it as being big enough.”22

It would be twenty years after the end of the Stop Spadina campaign before the movement reached critical mass again in the early nineties.

Other environmental issues like nuclear power and landfill pollution have seen visible, vocal movements over the past few decades. Unlike transportation, the mainstream of the environmental movement has been characterized by campaigns and issues that respond to an outside threat (e.g., fighting government plans to bring in a landfill or some other polluting scheme). By contrast, the spark that ignites the sustainable transportation comes from within the community. A self-propelled movement with broadly defined goals is likely more sustainable in the long term as some activists have argued, because the problems themselves are deeply systemic. Though there are groups organized to resist specific highway, airport and even transit expansions, there is no single campaign that defines the movement as a whole; there is just as strong a tendency to promote alternatives as there is to oppose external threats. The diversity and dispersion of the movement is a perceived weakness that can also be considered a strength; the movement builds longevity through the fact that it is not wholly focused on winning a single campaign.

Working with Government

Groups in the sustainable transportation movement are used to working together. Many organizations share office space, regularly collaborate on projects and even do their annual planning collectively. There is also a long history of partnership with local government. In 1997, the 20th anniversary of the Toronto City Cycling Committee (TCCC) was celebrated.

The TCCC is a citizen committee that reports to City Council on issues concerning cycling in the city, supported by three professional staff employed by the municipality.

In 1991, Healthy City Toronto published *Evaluating the Role of the Automobile: A Municipal Strategy*. As part of the global Healthy Cities movement, Healthy City Toronto (HCT) is a municipal government office that works to promote the interconnected issues of social equity, economy and environment within local government, in partnership with citizens, and business. Key recommendations of *Evaluating the Role of the Automobile* include: making better use of existing streets for transit, cyclists and pedestrians; expanding the rapid transit system; limiting vehicle emissions; and planning for fewer cars. Healthy City Toronto has been a key partner in many sustainable transportation initiatives. Both the TCCC and HCT were instrumental in the development of Toronto’s Community Bicycle Network, the Clean Air Partnership and Toronto’s 1998 Anti-Smog strategy, among numerous other initiatives.

Effective partnership with local government does not extend to all transportation issues in Toronto. On some issues there has been significant conflict with municipal government. Municipal government has initiated numerous attacks on the Toronto Island community, one of the few auto-free neighbourhoods in North America, with ongoing attempts to expand the Island Airport and add a bridge (fixed link) for cars and buses to the island. This has been the key transportation issue of the island and harbourfront communities throughout the 1990s. In 1992, Toronto City Council endorsed in principle building a fixed link (tunnel or bridge) from the island to the mainland; in 1993 council voted against building the fixed link; in 1995 council narrowly voted against allowing jets to use the airport; and as of 1998, the fixed link is in its final planning stages. The pro-expansion lobby – developers, the fuel interests, the aircraft companies and the Board of Trade – argue that the airport is not economically viable without jets, a fixed link, a new terminal building and a lengthened runway. The determination of both the pro-expansion side and their opponents – downtown residents and environmentalists organized by the Metropolitan Toronto
Waterfront Coalition and supported by their City Councillors – means that this issue is not going away. This example of the Island Airport illustrates the multiple positions of opposition and support the municipality finds itself in on the issue of sustainable transportation.

Though the Better Transportation Coalition (BTC) was founded through the strong support of municipal supports such as Councillor Olivia Chow, Healthy City Toronto and the Toronto City Cycling Committee, the BTC decided that it would have no membership categories for government. This included local government, which directly limited the participation of some of the BTC’s founders. The relationship between the municipality and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) continues to be an important and complicated dynamic within the sustainable transportation movement. As Joni Seager (1993) observed, the environmental movement will need to work more closely with government in the future:

. . . as both global and local environmental problems become more pressing, governments will become more, not less, important environmental actors. The reality is that those individuals and groups among us who strive for environmental sustainability will need to work with governments more, not less. But to do so effectively, we will need all our wits about us – a renewed commitment to co-operation need not be (cannot be) on the old terms (166).

She argues that the eco-establishment is ill-equipped and poorly positioned to embrace the struggles of other social movements to meet this emerging challenge of local and global cooperation.

Organizing Tactics

Collaboration is a key defining characteristic of many of the sustainable transportation groups and whenever direct action tactics are employed, they stand out in comparison. In 1992, cyclists held a “die-in” on Spadina Avenue when the municipal government refused to
incorporate bike lanes into a multi-million dollar redesign of the city’s widest street. This statement about the need for safer roads was uncharacteristically direct for mild-mannered Torontonians who generally prefer polite forms of protest – hosting public forums, meeting with politicians and bureaucrats, making deputations, writing letters and participating in mass bicycle rides.

In 1996, Advocacy for Respect for Cyclists (ARC) formed in reaction to the arrest of two cyclists at a summer Critical Mass ride (both were eventually acquitted) and the deaths of six cyclists killed on Toronto’s streets in the same year. Looking to co-operate within the movement, ARC did not want its formation to appear as a negative comment on effectiveness of the municipal citizen’s committee, the Toronto City Cycling Committee (TCCC), though they have taken positions in opposition to some of the TCCC’s programmes and lack of response in defense of cyclists. Recognizing the importance of both groups working from within the municipality and independently, ARC has been one of the few groups in Toronto doing direct action. But even ARC must balance strong tendencies towards both assimilative and radical politics: in 1998, the group had to decide how much of its time it was going to spend rewriting the Highway Traffic Act (i.e., getting a bigger piece of the transportation pie for cyclists) and how much to spend on its other activities (i.e., linking bicycles to broader transportation and social transformation).

Protesting highway construction and road widening projects has been a priority of alternative transportation movements around the globe. The organizing tactics of the main anti-highway group in Toronto, 407 Highway Action Group, stand out in contrast to the highly organized, direct action tactics of the anti-road movement in the United Kingdom. In the Toronto area, the 407 Highway Action Group has been leading the protest against the 69-km super-highway being built (in stages) across the top of the city. They have had meetings with politicians and bureaucrats, public forums (one of which the Ontario Ministry of Transportation paid for), research and development of alternatives, meetings, lobbying campaigns and a rummage sale. In the U.K., mass direct action and civil disobedience has
developed public and political support, bringing loads of media attention to the issue. ALARM UK, an umbrella organization, links 250 anti-road groups such as the Revolutionary Pedestrian Front and Reclaim the Streets which have organized members to chain themselves to bulldozers, occupy houses set for expropriation, and paint cycle lanes on streets across Britain, among other actions.

Politics of Transformation

A number of the tensions within the sustainable transportation movement are reflected in other social movements. In her discussion of the feminist movement, Miles (1996) refers to Alain Touraine’s social movement theory. Touraine wrote that the dynamics of Identity, Opposition, and Totality are essential elements to the development of social movements:

A social movement is an expression of a conflict between social forces for the control of social change. In more analytic terms, it is the combination of three elements: the defense of unity of action – what we call the principle of Identity; the struggle against a social adversary – the principle of Opposition; the reference to the whole of society – principle of Totality (in Miles, 1996: 15).

In the development of social movements, Miles (1996) notes that an “alternate rationality” is the core of transformative politics:

Reference to the whole of society distinguishes a social movement from a pressure group or other limited protest politics. To be a full politics, that is, a politics that speaks to social organization in general, a movement must espouse a set of values representing an alternative to the dominant ones. Touraine has called this the movement’s “alternative rationality.” Mass activism, no matter how large, determined, and angry, that does not articulate an alternative set of values cannot create alternative social arrangements. It is thus limited to a politics of assimilation rather than transformation (15).
As defined by Miles and Touraine, the politics of assimilation are alive and well in Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement, as each distinct “mode” of transportation – be they pedestrians, cyclists, transit users or train riders – jockeys to increase or protect their piece of the transportation pie. But there are also hints of transformational politics within the movement, as evidenced by the findings of this thesis. Holistic politics have been defined in Chapter One as politics that have views all of society (the totality, or alternate rationality); are visionary and seek to put into practice its vision of transformed social relations (in addressing gender, race, class and other issues), are both process and action oriented; and recognize the interconnectedness of issues, social movements and disciplines.

A number of individuals and groups in the sustainable transportation movement recognize the interconnectedness of transformative politics and make links between the sustainable transportation and other social movements. The Skills Development Programme for Sustainable Transportation reaches out to communities not involved in the mainstream of the movement. The Community Bicycle Network has worked to build bridges between its member clubs and other movements, such as during the 1996 Days of Action in Toronto when CBN organized a bicycle ride of its members to join the two days of union-organized protests which shut down the city. The Multi-Racial Network for Environmental Justice has included many sustainable transportation activists who have worked to link the issues of racism and environmentalism.

In terms of practicing transformed gender relations, there has been relatively little dialogue about gender and transportation in the movement, or about gender issues within movement organizations. There are a few groups and projects particularly related to women and cycling: Women’s Bike Works is a group of women teaching basic bike repair workshops; Women on Wheels promotes, educates and encourages women’s cycling; and the Community Bicycle Network sponsored a project of bicycle recycling projects in women’s shelters. In 1995 a group of women began publishing Chicks United for Non-noxious
Transportation (C.U.N.T.) a 'zine by and for "biker chicks," though it is widely popular with both male and female bicycle couriers.

The Patriarchy & Technology workshop at the 1992 Auto-Free Cities Conference in Toronto is one of the few instances that directly addressed patriarchy and transportation. As the workshop was described in the conference brochure:

Patriarchy & Technology: How are patriarchal structures and car-dominated structures linked? Bring your experience and help shed some light on the often over-looked angle on the problem. Participant animated session. Open to all.

Proceedings from the conference (Beyond the Car, Zielinski and Laird, eds., 1995) included two selections specifically about gender and transportation: Patricia Zimmerman's "Boys and their Toys" looked at the car as phallus, and another discussion, "The Auto-Free Cities Movement: A Discussion with Olivia Chow, Joan Doiron, Jane Jacobs, Lisa Salsberg and Sue Zielinski," spoke to women activists about transportation issues.

Summary

Toronto's sustainable transportation movement has both assimilationist and radical tendencies and these branches of the movement are often mapped out on an auto-free / auto reform continuum. The movement has a strong foundation of holistic ecological perspectives, which recognize the interconnectedness of issues and the links to social, environmental and economic issues but have so far notably not addressed issues of gender and women's status within the movement. As well, Toronto's movement is noted for its creativity and celebratory approach but is often marred by the ongoing debate about how to organize for social change between environmental campaigners and community developers. Linked to this debate is the role of partnerships, including partnerships with government. Within the movement there are
strong hints of an emerging transformational politics, and it is these politics this study further investigates.
Chapter 3
Issues of Women’s Inequality in Social Movements

“When it’s volunteer work it’s left to the women, but when the bucks come, the men take over.” Florence Thompson

The history of 20th century social movements shows that transformative and revolutionary movements have not brought about long-term changes in power relations between men and women. In movements which recognize women’s oppression, their liberation is usually a secondary goal – women have been told to wait until after the revolution or some later date for their issues to be addressed (e.g., West and Blumberg, eds., 1990). This is as true in the environmental movement as it was in the movements before it. This is not to suggest that feminism has been without victories. Rather, that struggles of women around the globe have yet to gain full recognition even within the social movements they are committed to.

Struggles over vision, process and practice are constants within social movements. Movement organizations and coalitions often wrestle with their own political culture issues including consensus decision making, ends and means, racism and sexism to name a few. Throughout history, these struggles have often focussed on women’s status in the movement and more broadly within society as a whole. Women’s exclusion, inequality between the sexes, and men’s abuse of status and power are all issues that continue to be talked about. In particular, literature on organizing for social change has documented a wide range of struggles concerning political culture and women’s equality in modern socialist movements (e.g., Randall, 1992), the civil rights movement (e.g., Hole and Levine, 1971; Evans, 1980; 23 In Seager, 1993: 178.
Adams, 1975; Horton 1989), revolutionary Latin American struggles (e.g., Lopez, 1977; Lobao, 1990; Ascencio, 1992; Alemán et al, 1993); the student and New Left movements of the 1960s (e.g., Bernstein et al, 1972; Morgan, 1977; Evans, 1980); Black power movement (e.g., Murray, 1970; Smith, ed., 1983; Brown, 1992); union movements (e.g., White, 1990; Briskin and McDermott, 1993; Crean, 1995); the peace movement (e.g., Burris, 1973; Epstein, 1991); national liberation movements (e.g., Un groupe de femmes de Montréal, 1971; Ward, 1983; Trask, 1984); indigenous and native movements (e.g., McIvor, 1992; Stacey-Moore, 1993); the environmental movement (e.g., Plant, ed., 1989; Seager, 1993) and so on.

This chapter deals with women's inequality in various progressive movements, including issues of leadership, professionalization, vanguardism, and overt sexism. In various ways, women have raised consciousness on these issues against great opposition and resistance from men and women within their groups and organizations. Their work has advanced dialogues on women's equality and has created space for women to advance this agenda within a variety of movements. Women have criticized both the treatment of women in their movements and the effects of male-dominated movement culture in limiting the broader vision of social change.

In particular, this chapter frames issues of women's inequality that have not yet been fully articulated within the sustainable transportation movement. Though from what little literature there is on the topic from the environmental movement and my experience and conversations in the sustainable transportation movement, the issues are present as well. From the experience of women and men in the sustainable transportation movement who have found it difficult to identify gender issues in their groups to professors and students in my graduate program who challenged the existence of sexism itself, I felt it was important to include examples of the ways in which women have identified and sought to address their inequality in a variety of social movement contexts where the commitment to social justice and social transformation has been clearly articulated. Selection of the movements discussed
which focus on Civil Rights, Black Power, and the New Left – was dictated largely by
access: reflective material on the internal workings of social movement practice was difficult
to track down.24 In the end, I found the best information in biographies and personal
histories, where issues of the internal politics of social movements were discussed in-depth.
These new social movements are also of particular interest as they were the precursors of the
contemporary environmental movement.

This sampling of social movements is by no means comprehensive or exhaustive and
is meant to be illustrative of women’s ongoing struggle for recognition, power and status
within progressive movements. Many of the issues have changed for movements active since
the second wave of the feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, but many issues persist. For
example, Seager (1993) suggests that overt sexism is not as prevalent in the environmental
movement as it had been in earlier movements. Reading this literature helped me to more
deeply understand the issues that women in the sustainable transportation movement were
struggling with.

In her now famous 1970 essay, “Goodbye to All That,” writer Robin Morgan
documented the sexist excesses of her radical male colleagues within the New Left. “A
genuine Left doesn’t consider anyone’s suffering irrelevant or titillating” she wrote, “nor
does it function as a microcosm of capitalist economy, with men competing for power and
status at the top, and women doing all the work at the bottom (and functioning as objectified
prizes or ‘coin’ as well)” (Morgan, 1977: 123). But Morgan wasn’t the first to raise issues of
male leadership, question women’s role in the movement and expose the sexist behaviour of
fellow ‘movement’ men. Margaret Ward (1983) writes of the Irish nationalist movement:
although Irish women have been politically active for over 100 years, this has not led, for the

24 West and Blumberg, eds., (1990) also note the lack of literature on women in social movements: “The
absence of gender analysis (except, in research on the women’s movement) stands out starkly in almost all
academic works on social protest. Interested readers are hard-pressed to find the mention of women, let alone
comparative analysis of men and women’s roles, attitudes, feelings as social protestors (7, italics in original).
Neal and Phillips (1990) also write that “research on social movements, social movement organizations, and
other forms of collective protest of the 1960’s virtually ignores women’s involvement in such activities” (243).
most part, to an improvement in their lives. She writes that feminists have had to “fight for the space in which to articulate women’s demands, refusing to be deflected by other considerations.” Creating space for women within the Irish nationalist movement is not an easy task. Ward describes Irish feminism as a “fragile collection of individuals attempting to develop a space for women’s voices to be heard” (262-3).

Women in the Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s voiced similar concerns about the failure to address women’s equality in all-black groups. Pauli Murray, an activist lawyer, wrote at the time:

Reading through much of the current literature on the Black Revolution, one is left with the impression that for all the rhetoric about self-determination, the main thrust of black militancy is a bid of black males to share power with white males in a continuing patriarchal society in which both black and white females are relegated to a secondary status (1970: 92).

From the New Left to the Black Power movement to Irish nationalism and beyond, women have had to fight within their movements to create space for women to share and analyze their experiences and develop political strategies. In doing this, women have taken on extra political duties: working for both for equality and recognition, and for advancing the effectiveness of the movement’s overall values and vision while attempting to improve the status of women. In the environmental movement, women have initiated dialogue on the movement’s failure to explore the tenacity of male power and privilege. In a 1992 special feminist issue of The Ecologist, Pam Simmons wrote:

A shadow lies over the environmental movement: patriarchy. Like so many movements before it – socialist, conservationist, civil rights, national liberation – the environmental movement is failing to acknowledge and criticize its own attachment to male power and privilege. . . . By shying away from the challenge of feminism, men (and many women) in the movement are blocking out opportunities and perspectives that will be indispensable for reaching the solutions they are anxious to find. Environmentalists cannot credibly discuss the effects and future of development, equality and justice,
conflict-resolution, the preservation of diverse cultures, the industrial and military complex, the reconstruction or preservation of economic self-sufficiency or the dynamics of people's movements without discussing feminism. . . . If the movement does not face up to its own patriarchal base, it is excluding potential allies, while creating a hierarchy ripe for sell-out (in Seager, 1993: 202).

Women would not be the only beneficiaries if the environmental movement was to advance women's equality; as women in other movements have shown, the wider movement also would be strengthened through the devolution of patriarchal relations.

The writings of women such as Murray, Simmons, Ward and Morgan are particularly relevant as these women wrote at the height of their own movement's activities. They challenged the status quo and became engaged in raising a dialogue about the role of women in their movements, not in reflective autobiographies years later, but at the very time the movement was active. Their voices are echoed by the many women in a variety of social movement contexts who have also raised consciousness about women's participation in addressing various forms of oppression. This dialogue highlights the ongoing critique by women of their movements' failure to develop a wider vision of social transformation.

Developing Dialogue

Women have long struggled to put women's issues on the agenda of social movement organizations. In the early 1960s, dialogues on gender issues within the civil rights movement in southern U.S. were initiated by black and white women, a dynamic which also paralleled divisions within the movement between the black and white organizers. In the period between 1963 and 1965, hundreds of young northerners went south to join with in the civil rights movement and "Freedom Summer." In a period of intense growth in the early 1960s, one of the key civil rights organizations, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), grew from a staff of 16 to 180, half of whom were white.
Within the SNCC, it was black women who first initiated dialogue on women’s status within the movement. In 1964, they staged a mock sit-in in the SNCC office to protest the movement’s gendered division of labour. Their complaint was that women were regularly assigned administrative, clerical and educative work while their male colleagues received the more dangerous and high-profile roles of working voter registration and providing leadership for the SNCC (Evans, 1980: 76-7).

At the same time, two white female leaders in the civil rights movement, Casey Hayden and Mary King, lamented the lack of community for discussion regarding the position of women within the SNCC: “Nobody is writing, or organizing or talking publicly about women, in any way that reflects the problems that various women in the movement come across . . .” (in Evans, 1980: 99). A group of women began meeting to discuss these issues, including Hayden and King. They authored an unsigned position paper entitled “Women in the Movement” for the 1964 SNCC staff retreat in Waveland, Mississippi. The position paper documented 11 points of gender discrimination including: key committees being exclusively male; the assigning of clerical work to women; the exclusion of women from decision making groups and leadership positions; and the tendency to refer to men as people and women as ‘girls.’ The paper went on to say, “Undoubtedly this list will seem strange to some, petty to others, laughable to most. The list could continue as far as there are women in the movement. Except that most women don’t talk about these kinds of incidents, because the whole subject is [not] discussible.” The position paper also made the links between racial and gender discrimination. The authors wrote, “What can be done? Probably nothing right away. Most men are probably too threatened by the possibility of serious discussion on this subject” (in Evans, 1980: 233-4). And they were right, the position paper failed to initiate serious discussion of gender discrimination at the SNCC retreat.

25 A copy of the original document is included as an appendix in Evans, 1980, pp. 233-235.
In 1965, the civil rights movement began to splinter with the growth of black nationalism and the role of white women in the movement began to change. As white women worked to put gender issues onto the agenda of the civil rights movement, they wrote a memo primarily to black women in the hope that “perhaps we can start to talk with each other more openly than in the past and create a community of support for each other so we can deal with ourselves and others with integrity and can therefore keep working” (Evans, 1980: 100). But debate on gender issues was overshadowed by other debates taking place within the movement, regarding the role of whites in the movement and the movement’s commitment to non-violence.

The challenge that women in the civil rights movement experienced in getting issues of women’s equality on to the movement’s agenda has been repeated over and over in various contexts as women struggle to create space and develop dialogue on these issues.

Leadership

Women can and did assume leadership positions within social movement organizations. However, women’s leadership was not without opposition and struggle. As the Black Power movement grew out of the civil rights movement during the mid-1960s, gender discrimination persisted. For many women, it became clear that their Black brothers “wanted to determine the policy and progress of Black people without female participation in decision-making and leadership positions” (Murray, 1970: 95).

According to women in the Black Power movement, and within the Black Panther Party in particular (including Elaine Brown, Ericka Huggins, Norma Armour, and Phyllis Jackson), members of the Panthers’ central committee had no intention of allowing Panther men to assign them an inferior role in their revolution. As with other social movements, equality was often seen as a threat or as unwanted competition for power. When Brown assumed leadership of the Black Panther Party after leader Huey Newton was exiled in Cuba,
one man said to her, “I hear we can’t call them [women] bitches no more.” Brown replied, “No motherfucker, you may not call them bitches no more” (Brown, 1992: 363, italics in original).

Brown remembers that if a Black woman assumed a leadership role, she was said to be eroding Black manhood, hindering the progress of the Black race, and acting as an enemy of Black people (1992: 357). During the 1974 Panther Party leadership campaign, an opponent told Brown that “those in the know” were sure she was a “man-hating lesbian.” He pointed to the number of women who had suddenly “taken over” the party under her leadership. Brown remembers these feelings: “Now hearing the ugly intent of my opponent’s words, I trembled with a fury long buried. I recognized the true meaning of his words. He was not talking about making love with women – he was attacking me for valuing women” (367, italics in original).

These attitudes were not unique to the Black Power movement. In her studies of contemporary social movements, Linda Christensen-Ruffman (1982) noted the following patterns in the gender politics of leadership, which she calls the ferous syndrome:

1. Women, especially middle-class women trying to raise new issues, often seek male spokespersons or colleagues because men have more credibility, legitimacy, and public-speaking experience.
2. Men often take over issues raised by women and translate them into terms more appropriate to their own goals.
3. Men are often attracted to new movements and organizations once they appear to be legitimate.
4. Women are often willing to relinquish power and control to competent men.
5. Outsiders and professionals routinely undermine the status of women.
6. Some women organizers realize they can operate as well or better without the ego involvement sometimes characteristic of men (395).

Women’s claims to power within organizations, in many cases, have occurred against great opposition and challenge. Women in leadership positions have, in many cases, not only
advanced women’s equality within their movements, but have attempted to transform both the nature of power itself and advance a holistic politics.

Professionalization

One of the challenges to women’s leadership has been the professionalization of movement organizations. Professionalization can be an impediment to structural change, including the challenge to patriarchal institutions. Robin Morgan’s account of discrimination within the New Left – with men competing for power and status at the top and women doing all the work at the bottom – was echoed by Joni Seager (1993) in her critique of the environmental movement as having a growing schism between the male-dominated ‘ecobureaucracy’ and a female-dominated grassroots movement. Seager writes, “the existing power structure of the environmental establishment in North America and Europe is ubiquitously male, and mostly white. While grassroots groups everywhere in the world are primarily run by women, virtually all of the large international and major national environmental organizations are run, and have always been run, by men” (176). Seager argues that there is a very clear trend toward the “professionalization” of ecology pressure groups and an emergent non-governmental ecobureaucracy in London, Bonn, Washington and Toronto (168). Professionalization often not only excludes individual women from advancing within the movement but it also changes the very political culture of an organization in a way that makes it even less suited to addressing issues of women’s inequality:

The professionalization of an ecology group brings changes not only in its headquarters’ address, logo, and stationery; it also brings changes in its tactics, priorities and politics. These changes are controversial; issues of changing style, substance, priorities are now being debated, somewhat reluctantly, often heatedly, in environmental circles. What is not being debated, what is overlooked time and time again, is the fact that these changes also alter the gender politics of the movement; and, in turn, that changing the
politics between men and women inside the movement will change the nature of environmental activism (168, italics in original).

Seager continues:

In the recent history of Europe and North America, the process of "professionalization" of any social group or discipline has, without fail, resulted in the exclusion of women, the undervaluing of women's contributions, and the trivialization of women's concerns . . . The relationship between maleness and "professionalization" is so strong that in the literature of radical labor sociology and labor history, the extent of male control of any activity or enterprise is often used as a measuring stick of the extent of professionalization; complete male control indicates full professionalization (186).

In their study of the New York City tenant movement, Lawson and Barton (1980) found that women are predominantly organizers, active participants and rank-and-file members – and that men hold a disproportionate number of leadership positions. They found that at the outset women's leadership was usurped by men's when neighbourhood organizations first were formed.

Almost seventy years after the formation of the tenant movement, a similar process has occurred within the recycling movement. Seager (1993) writes, "many women who were in the forefront of the recycling movement in Europe and the US in the 1970's . . . are angry that now that recycling us becoming part of the social mainstream, it is also becoming big business – and it is men who are reaping the benefits" (178). This phenomenon caused one activist to say, "There is a feeling among some women that creating the recycling movement 'was our doing' and now we've got all these blue suits and red ties coming in" (178).
Vanguardism

If the environmental movement of today practices the politics of professionalization, then the New Left of the 1960s practiced the politics of vanguardism. “For all its emphasis on personal relationships, on openness, honesty and participatory democracy, the northern student left was highly male-dominated” (Evans, 1980: 108). The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a key New Left and student movement organization, reinforced traditional roles by focusing the movement’s agenda on intellectual work and making intellectual labour primarily a male task: “verbal skills, political maneuvering, reliance on proper form and precedent quickly raised young male politicos into prominent positions” (Evans, 1980: 113).

Women in the New Left found themselves outside of the decision-making and intellectual work of the movement. As Beverly Jones and Judith Brown (1968) wrote at the time:

This kind of desperate attempt by men to defend their power by refusing to participate in open public discussion with women would be amusing if it were not so effective. And one sees the beginnings of it even now, while still students, in SDS meetings. You are allowed to participate and to speak, only the men stop listening when you do. How many times have you seen a woman enter the discussion only to have it resume at the exact point from which she made her departure, as though she had never said anything at all? How many times have you seen men get up and actually walk out of a room while a woman speaks, or begin to whisper to each other as she starts? (6)

The male vanguard of the New Left was so insular that James Weinstein was laughed at by the male staff of Studies on the Left when he proposed to review a book written by a woman (Evans, 1980: 118).

In an oft-cited example of women’s difficulties in shaping the agenda of the New Left, the 1967 National Conference for New Politics brought groups together from movements across the U.S. The women’s caucus posed a resolution that women should
receive 51 per cent of the convention votes and committee representation (the convention was seriously considering passing a similar motion for Black participation); the women's proposal was greeted with ridicule and dismay. Conference participants Jo Freeman and Shulamith Firestone tried to get the women's resolution heard at the conference but were told their "trivial" business was not going to be heard. Reportedly one of them was literally patted on the head and said, calm down "little girl" (Hole and Levine, 1971: 113-4). In many ways, the experience of women in the New Left paralleled that of their sisters in the civil rights movement.

Women's Roles in Social Movements

Women's attempts to shape the agendas of social movements were challenged by the lack of recognition of women's oppression as well as the secondary positions women held within organizations. Hole and Levine (1971) wrote of the civil rights movement, "Women went south to fight for equality only to find out that they were second class citizens in a movement that was purportedly about wiping out discrimination. Rarely permitted to participate in policy-making, they found themselves relegated to kitchen-work, mimeographing, typing, and serving as a sexual supply for their male comrades after hours" (110).

Repeatedly, women found that there were barriers to their full participation in their own movements; they were expected to support men, not work as equals. In the student movement, as the Vietnam war became the major focus of the movement, gender roles became defined in very traditional ways. Evans (1980) writes;

After 1966 women found that they were auxiliaries to the central issue of the movement – the draft. Men were drafted, women were not. Men could resist the draft, they burned their draft cards; they risked jail. And women's role was to support them. "Girls Say Yes to Guys Who Say No!" was a widespread slogan of the movement (179).
The roles that women did play in the movement were rarely given the same status and recognition as their male counterparts. The leadership of the Students for a Democratic Society continued to be male dominated even as the organization moved away from publishing and campus activities and into community organizing in poor urban neighborhoods in the north during its 1963-65 period. The Economic Research and Action Projects (ERAP), as they were known, were still led mostly by men. Women with significant community organizing experience who worked with teenage girls or welfare moms in the ERAP projects felt they were not given the status that male ERAP organizers who worked with male youth or unemployed men enjoyed (Evans, 1980: 151).

In 1965, staff person Carol McEldowney suggested raising gender issues at an upcoming ERAP summer institute: “What is the role of women in the organization and in the movement and how would that relate to our concerns about democracy? . . . Why is there a tendency to think about women as filling certain slots in the movement and why do many men deny that that problem exists in ERAP?” But there is no evidence that the role of women was actually discussed at the meeting (Evans, 1980: 159).

Resistance to taking issues of women’s inequality seriously within the New Left led to many women leaving the movement to form the first organizations of the women’s movement. Not only did sexism limit the possibilities for women within movements, it affected the practice of transformative politics as a whole. Elaine Brown (1992) asserts that the entire Black Power movement was “handicapped by the limited roles the Brothers allowed the Sisters and by the outright oppressive behaviour of men toward women” (363).

**Sex Objects**

In addition to doing the work of social change as female auxiliaries and second-class citizens, women in social movements have also been objectified as prizes and trophies. It has often been noted that women who held leadership roles within male-dominated groups were often
involved in relationships with men who held leading roles (Freeman, 1973). This was said of Casey Hayden and SDS leader Tom Hayden and of Elaine Brown and Black Panther Party leader Huey Newton.

Casey Hayden was one of the key women in the civil rights and New Left movements to raise issues of women’s role in the movement. The discussion paper, “Women in the Movement,” presented at the SNCC staff meeting did not spark serious discussion of gender issues. One prominent man’s rebuttal to the paper is said to have been: “The only position for women in SNCC is prone” (Hole and Levine, 1971: 110). A black male leader claimed that while female volunteers “spent [Freedom] summer, most of them, on their backs, servicing not only the SNCC workers but anybody else who came” (Evans, 1980: 80).

Brown remembers several events that shaped her awareness of women’s role in the Black Power movement. Once when visiting Oakland from L.A., she was enraged to find the women preparing the food for their Panther brothers. A 15-year old woman in Oakland said to Brown shortly after her arrival: “A Sister has to learn to shoot as well as cook, and be ready to back up the Brothers. A Sister’s got to know the ten-point platform and program by heart. . . . A Sister has to give up the pussy when the Brother is on his job and hold it back when he’s not. ‘Cause Sisters got pussy power.” Brown’s Panther brothers applauded the young woman’s statement (1992: 189).

The position of women in the student and New Left movements wasn’t much better. In a now famous incident at the anti-inaugural demonstrations against President Nixon Washington in 1969, a key female organizer addressed the crowd with a message from the women’s liberation movement. Her message was met with cat calls from the crowd as the movement men yelled, “Take it off! . . . Take her off the stage and fuck her!” (Mitchell, 1971: 85-6).
Violence

Women leaders have, in certain cases, been able to hold powerful positions in their organizations, as in the case of Elaine Brown and the Black Panther Party. But in cases like Brown’s, her movement brothers found other ways to exert control over her and her Panther sisters – through violence. In one instance, Brown was assaulted and beaten at gun point for three hours by her lover, who suspected her of sleeping with another man. She remembers: “Getting my ass kicked was just what I needed the men had responded. ‘It was about time’ they said” (Brown, 1992: 313). In another case, Brown was on an international tour when she was threatened by the tour’s organizer Eldridge Cleaver (then Minister of Information for the Panthers who was living in Africa at the time). Brown writes that Cleaver repeatedly threatened to kill her and told her she would not return home alive after the tour (Brown, 1992: 224-5).

In her now famous critique of RAT, the radical cum life-style paper of the New Left in the 1970s, Robin Morgan questioned, “Was it my [movement] brother who wrote, ‘Fuck your women till [sic] they can’t stand up’ ‘men will make the Revolution – and make their chicks’” (Morgan, 1977: 127). Whether real or threatened, women have had to endure violent behaviour from their movement ‘Brothers.’

Vision

Women in many social movements have criticized both the treatment of women and the effects of male-dominated movement culture in derailing larger visions of social change. In hindsight, Brown saw the link between the objectification of women and the lack of a transformative vision within the Panthers. The machismo culture of the Party’s leaders felt dismayed that their “vanguard party” was spending more eggs for their Panther-sponsored breakfast programs than they were on guns for bloodshed in the revolution (Brown, 1992:
In the end, Brown argued that the male chauvinist tendencies in the Black Panther Party won out. She writes,

The words “Panther” and “comrade” had taken on gender connotations, denoting an inferiority in the female half of us. Something awful was not only driving a dangerous wedge between Sisters and Brothers, it was attacking the very foundation of the party. The men suggested that “if all else failed” the party had the ability to become a kind of black version of the Mafia. We had the guns and the men, they had boasted. We could take what we want from the Establishment (444).

She concluded, “The [men] wanted so little from our revolution, they had lost sight of it” (Brown, 1992: 444).

Summary

This chapter has documented women’s experiences of discrimination and oppression and their responses in a variety of social movements. Women have raised and continue to raise issues of women’s inequality, holistic visions and transformative practice against great opposition and resistance from both men and women within their own movements. Their efforts haven’t been without success: feminism within social movements has advanced dialogues on women’s roles, created space for women and raised wider issues of vision and social change. Nevertheless, Robin Morgan’s analogy between capitalist economy and social movement practice remains a strong one: men still compete for power and status at the top of social hierarchies and often appear ambivalent about women doing all the work at the bottom. As Mitchell surmised back in 1973, “not one single left-wing movement, working-class, Black or student can offer anything to contradict this experience [of male domination]” (86).

Though there is little research and literature on the environmental movement, it has been found that, unlike the movements that came before them, many women who work in the
environmental movement report that there is “less overt sexism, more respect for them and less pressure on them to conform to male work constructs than in more conventional businesses or organizations” (Seager, 1993: 175). Seager goes on to write, “many of the men who work in environmental organizations, women say, tend to be sensitive and gentle men; as many women point out, men with big egos tend not to be attracted to the small salaries that are (or, were) standard in the ecology business” (175). Nevertheless, these issues still remain – men at the top with paid positions largely define the agenda of the overall environmental movement. Within this current context of less-overt sexism, there is still a reluctance to examine gender issues within the environmental movement. And within Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement, there has been even less dialogue and research on women’s inequality.
Chapter 4
Holistic Transformative Practice

Transformative politics require a transformative practice, a practice that models the democratic, egalitarian, movement-building goals. The struggle to end domination (over people and nature), injustice, prejudice, and hierarchy will not be advanced through yet more domination or hierarchy. In fact, without transformative practice, the credibility, creative possibilities and success of social movements are limited. In addition to the closing of possibilities, the lack of transformative practice alienates women and other movement participants. A transformative practice synthesizes means and ends and puts its transformed vision of social, economic and ecological relations into practice within the movement. Transformative practice recognizes that the same values must shape the movement itself as well as its goals, that social movements must practice what they preach — or, as Audre Lorde (1984) wrote, the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. Or, echoing the credo of the civil rights movement, freedom will not be won by unfree means.

26 For example, much has been written about the Green Party in West Germany. The Green Party was founded with a strong commitment to feminist principles and women’s equality. As their electoral success and inclusion in mainstream politics increased, the agenda and structure of the Party changed. Joni Seager argues that the commitment of the Party to feminism suffered as a consequence of inclusion in mainstream politics. As a result of the loss of their radical politics, the Greens lost their political base; in the 1990 elections in West Germany, the Green Party lost all of their 48 parliamentary seats (Seager, 1993; 169-75).

27 Women’s responses to this alienation include organizing within the organization for reform, setting up women’s caucuses within the organization and, in some cases, leaving the organization. See Evans (1980) for a discussion of how the failure of the civil rights, student and New Left movements to recognize women’s oppression led many key women to leave these movements and form autonomous women’s movement organizations in the 1960s. See Seager (1993) for a discussion of how women in the Green Party are being driven to organize autonomously, alienated by the new politics of the Party (pp. 169-175).
Women's Community Organizing

Women's community organizing is an expression of holistic politics and transformative practice. Women's community organizing literature has identified the need for a broader and non-sexist definition of 'politics' to include women's grassroots organizing (e.g., Gilkes 1980; Bookman and Morgen, eds., 1988; Sacks, 1988; Christensen-Ruffman 1982, 1995; West and Blumberg, eds., 1990; Hardy-Fanta, 1993). Women have a long history of working as grassroots activists, connecting their everyday lives to struggles for community empowerment, social change, and environmental protection (e.g., Garland, 1988; Shiva, 1988; Agarwal, 1992; Ferree and Martin, eds., 1995; Naples, ed., 1998). As Bookman and Morgan, eds., (1988) observed, "The historical tradition and contemporary practice of community work is a predominantly female social institution" (75).

Women's community organizing is generally holistic even when it is not explicitly defined as such: it recognizes the interconnectedness of issues; seeks alternatives to hierarchy; focuses on building a larger base for the movement; and empowers communities to take action on their own behalf. For example, the late Earth First! leader Judy Bari positively influenced her male-dominated organization to advance a holistic politics; she was able to shift the culture of Earth First from eco-warrior tree-huggers to recognizing the interconnectedness of struggles for the earth and workers' struggles (Bari, 1992).

Ralph Nader, in the introduction to Women Activists: Challenging the Abuse of Power, asked why most community activists are women, and wondered if their gender influenced their activism (in Garland, 1988). Women's activism is influenced by their gender as exemplified by the integration of personal and political in the lives of activist women. In many cases, women pay a high price for their activism in the toll on their families and personal lives.28 But they also have exhibited a strong desire to build a better life for their

28 By the end of her study, over half of the women Krauss (1998) interviewed for her study of white, working-class women's toxic waste protests were divorced. Women's challenge of power in the public sphere also
families and community (Gilkes, 1980), and to protect their children from threats; e.g., toxic waste in the case of infamous Love Canal activist Lois Gibbs (Gibbs, 1982).

Due to the strong orientation of women’s community organizing practice towards holistic politics, the male-domination prevalent Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement institutionalizes not just women’s inequality but the predominance of non-holistic practice. Increasing women’s power and equality in the sustainable transportation movement would, therefore, benefit not only women but strengthen the movement as a whole: “By shifting our attention to the perspectives of women who are usually left out of our historical record, we can discover new analyses and political strategies to help us reinvent progressive movements in more inclusive and relevant ways” (Naples, 1998: 2).

This chapter examines community organizing and feminist literature as an investigation into the nature of transformative movement practice. The application of the principles of equality and freedom in personal and political relations has a long history of discussion and debate in social movement literature. At the centre of these debates are the inter-related issues of values, leadership, organizing tactics and movement-building strategies.

Ends and Means

With its mix of education, cultural activism and social transformation, the Highlander Folk School in the Appalachian mountains of the southern U.S. is a fascinating organization. Founded in 1932, and later renamed the Highlander Center for Research and Education, it has developed its own transformative approach from playing a supportive role to social movements during its near 70-year history – including the industrial union movement of the challenged traditional roles of housewife in the private, family sphere, in many cases against great opposition from their husbands. See also Maggard (1990) on women in the Brookside Coal Strike. On the flip side of this argument, men’s activism often benefits from traditional gender roles. Petra Kelly spoke out against structural sexism in the Green Party arguing that many of the men were able to be in politics because their women partners were taking care of the children at home (in Seager, 1993: 173).
1930s, the desegregationist and civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s, and more recently, environmental and other social movements in the southern U.S. and around the world. The staff at the Highlander Center, including founder Myles Horton, have contributed a number of essential writings on transformative social movement practice.

With respect to means and ends – linking practice with a new vision of society – Myles Horton described the Highlander philosophy: “When you believe in people, when you believe in a democratic world, you’re trying to have an economic democracy, real democracy, take place. You believe that, so you practice that. But you practice it, that’s the important thing. It grows out of your thinking” (in Kennedy, 1981: 111, italics in original).

Close to the end of his life, Myles Horton and education for social change pioneer Paulo Freire published a book of their conversations reflecting back on their combined over 100 years of social movement practice. In *We Make the Road By Walking*, Horton says to Freire: “If I believe in social equality and don’t practice it, then what I say is hollow. . . . That’s why I’m less interested in methodology or techniques than I am in a *process* which involves the total person, involves visions, involves total realities” (Horton and Freire, 1990: 176, italics in original).

Women community organizers also stressed the important link between ends and means. They understood that “. . . the ends don’t justify the means, that the way you interact, the way you structure your individual relationships and political groups, and the values by which you live are going to determine the kind of society you can ultimately create” (Delaplaine, 1978: 8). Within the women’s movement, the discussion of ends and means was often framed as the ‘process/product debate.’ At the core of this discussion was the belief that process – the ways in which issues are approached, the organization of work and interactions with others – impact on the product of the work.29 Feminists were committed to finding new ways to work together, make decisions and structure their organizations in ways that

---

reflected the anti-hierarchical, anti-bureaucratic, anti-patriarchal goals of the movement (Freeman, 1973; Whitlock, 1980; Ehrlich, 1982; Ferguson, 1984). Feminists attempted to integrate the process and product, recognizing that the process shapes the product.

Focusing on process (the means) by which we make social change has been resisted and maligned by many social movement and environmental campaigners; there are those who argue that discussions of integrating the values of the movement into its process hold relatively little importance to social movement practitioners. In his classic community organizing text, *Rules for Radicals*, campaigner Saul Alinsky addresses the issue of means and ends. His position is that an emphasis on the ethics and values within the social change process detracts attention from the primary battle against injustice. He argues that it is unjust not to use all available means in the battle against discrimination. Alinsky (1971) writes; “one’s concern with the ethics of means and ends varies inversely with one’s personal interest in the issue” (24). Later, he adds; “less important the ends, the more you can focus on means” (34). Alinsky disparagingly describes “impotent” struggles and those who want to keep their “ethical hymen intact” by focusing on process – in unapologetically gendered language (33).

Building the Movement

Practice that supports and builds the movement is at the heart of transformative practice because social movements are broad, far-reaching and made up of diverse organizations.30 These organizations take on lives of their own, with their own needs and internally-driven issues which to varying degrees are also independent from overall movement goals and visions. One key dynamic in social movement practice is between individual (the

---

30 A social movement organization is defined in this study as a “complex or formal organization which identifies its goals with preferences of a social movement or countermovement and attempts to implement those goals” (Neal and Phillips, 1990: 244).
organization) and collective (the movement) goals. This is particularly evident in the means-ends debates that alternately focus on building an organization or building the movement. On this topic, Horton said: “I’d say if you were working with an organization and there’s a choice between the goal of the organization and educating people, developing people, helping them grow, helping them become able to analyze – if there’s a choice, we’d sacrifice the goal of the organization for helping the people grow, because we think in the long run it’s a bigger contribution” (Horton and Freire, 1990: 115).

In their research on feminist organizations, Ferree and Martin, ed., (1995) note the reciprocal nature between the overall movement and organizations within the movement. The movement gives organizations their “broad purpose, specific agenda, and supply of activists, while drawing from them a set of practices, political and material resources, and a supportive context within which activists can carry on their lives while struggling for change” (7). Ferree and Martin argue against the notion that suggest that the survival and institutionalization of organizations are the goals rather than the means of movements. They argue that the effectiveness of organizations should be judged in relation to their contribution to the wider movement, not just their survival or degree of institutionalization.

Leadership

In building a transformative practice, movement organizations struggle with variety of leadership issues such as hierarchy, spokespersons, class issues, self-awareness, as well as the definition of leadership itself. Clearly, transformative practice requires that as movements develop leaders, they also need to transform what it is to be a leader.

In the women’s movement (and other movements), there was an early anti-leadership ethic:
We didn’t want leaders or spokesmen. It makes the movement not only seem stronger and larger if everyone is a leader, but it actually is stronger if not dependent on a few. It also guards against the time when such leaders could be isolated and picked off one way or another. And of course many voices are more powerful than one (in Hole and Levine, 1971: 159).

The women’s movement learned that if it did not choose its leaders, the mainstream media would. The movement continued to develop ways to promote collective, not individual, leadership.31 Jo Freeman’s classic essay “The Tyranny of Structurelessness,” pointed out that “leaderless” groups were inadequate to meet the new agenda of women’s groups as they moved beyond consciousness-raising groups (Freeman, 1973). Other groups, such as anarchists, have developed strategies to transform leadership including making leadership task-specific and temporary (Ehrlich, 1982).

Women’s community organizing literature shows the need for a broader, non-sexist definition of leadership – what is defined as leadership is usually roles that men play within organizations, i.e., spokespersons and decision makers. Christensen-Ruffman (1982) argues for a broader definition of leadership: “a leader is someone who takes initiative and encourages others to follow – one who is responsible for the existence of a movement and is committed to its development” (383). These leadership skills often get labeled as organizational skills by both women and men. Sally Ann Gumaer Ranney’s (1992) article “Heroines and Hierarchy” defines leadership in the more traditional, narrow sense with a detailed list of skills, knowledge and characteristics she feels women need to assume leadership positions in the American conservation movement. H. Patricia Hynes’ (1985) essay on the women catalysts of the American Environmental Movement also assumes a narrow definition of leadership. Karen Brodkin Sacks (1988) coins the phrase “centrewomen and spokesmen” in her piece “Gender and Grassroots Leadership,” in which women community organizers themselves define women as organizers and men as leaders.

Majaleena Repo (1971) has noted the class dimensions of leadership, suggesting that middle class residents in any given neighbourhood are the ones who enjoy community meetings and are more verbally skilled than working class residents because of their access to education and leadership training (62). Repo writes:

Community action in the form of frequent meetings and public confrontations gives [middle class organizers] great ego rewards and invariably advances their careers. Like confrontations, catering to the media consumes time and rapidly elevates certain persons into leadership and spokesman positions, from which they find it difficult to remove themselves in order to get back to the rank and file membership (52).

She notes that when leaders become spokespersons, the immediate task of talking and listening to the grassroots becomes secondary.

Given this, there is an important need for self-aware leaders in social movements:

Many social activists prefer to skip the stage of locating themselves, so they can more quickly focus attention exclusively on the needs of a specific struggle. We believe that the needs of a struggle can only be met by people who are self-aware, sensitive to power dynamics, and engaged consciously with people different from themselves (Arnold et al, 1991: 10).

Myles Horton describes his long process of building self-awareness through social movement practice. The Highlander philosophy was guided by the insight that the leader should never tell the participants what they should do. Horton learned to wait to be asked for his opinion before he shared it: “Until they pose the question that has some relevance to them, they’re not going to pay any attention to it” (Horton and Freire, 1990: 107, italics in original).

Paulo Freire credits his wife Elza with teaching him a similar lesson. In his early years, Elza would accompany Freire to the evening meetings he would attend with Brazilian workers. Elza said to him after one of these meetings, “All you said is right, but did you ask
them whether they were interested in listening to you speak about that? You give the answers and the questions.” From discussions like these, Freire learned the importance of respecting the knowledge, beliefs, fears, hopes, expectations, and language of his “students” (Horton and Freire, 1990: 65).

Asking questions and valuing the knowledge of the participants often works in opposition to the role an expert plays in a group. It is the expert and the professional who is expected to tell people what they should know and do. As Horton described the practical paradox that often arises; “An educator should never become an expert, and an organizer quite often finds that that’s his [sic] main strength” (Horton and Freire, 1990: 128). In their discussions and reflections on “democratic” practice, Horton and Freire noted an important distinction between those who blocked democratic processes by acting as “experts” and those who modeled democratic social relations by acting as “educators.”

The emergence of experts and conventional leaders poses a constant tension in social movement organizing. Society often teaches people to value the knowledge of experts, teachers and professors over their own knowledge. As they become professionalized, social movement organizations tend to rely more and more on the services of experts. In the environmental movement, as in other movements, professionalization “places an emphasis on three key players: the lobbyist, the litigant, and the expert” (Seager, 1993: 188). So common is our acceptance of the authority of experts, that the staff at the Highlander Centre often names this desire within the group of organizers who attend their programs: “you’re looking for an expert” (Horton and Freire, 1990: 161). Identifying the dependence on experts is a first step in valuing the knowledge of participants:

A lot of people use organizing to educate people. . . . The problem is confused because a lot of people use organizing to do some educating and they think it’s empowerment because that’s what they’re supposed to be doing. But quite often they disempower people in the process by using experts to tell them what to do while having the semblance of empowering people (Horton and Freire, 1990: 120, italics in original).
It often takes considerable time to get people away from dependence on speakers and experts. For example, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a key civil rights organization, which had been meeting at Highlander for six years prior to the 1960 North Carolina civil rights sit-ins, held five consecutive annual meetings before they started to challenge the lecture/theory format of the workshops that they themselves had designed (Horton, 1989: 240).

Horton believed that dependence on authority is antithetical to freedom of thought and expression. He graphically illustrates this point in We Make the Road By Walking in his story about a strike committee meeting where the strikers debated what their next move should be. The group turned to Horton for an answer, which he refused to give. One of the strikers pulled a pistol on Horton, “Goddamn you, if you don’t tell us I’m going to kill you.” But Horton did not tell them what strategy they should follow. Horton found that the more he did on behalf of the strikers, the less the strikers did for themselves. “No. Go ahead and shoot if you want to, but I’m not going to tell you,” he said (Horton and Freire, 1990: 126-7).

With The People

As with the age-old debate between means and ends, one of the perennial issues in social movement practice is the tension between “with the people” and “for the people” approaches. For example, within the civil rights movement, certain factions organized under slogans of “let the people lead themselves” (Evans, 1980: 94). In the neighbourhood organizing movement of the 1960s and 1970s, one of the organizing principles was to start with issues that the community defined: “people respond best, and in greater numbers, when given the opportunity to act on problems of their own choosing. Therefore staff do not impose issues on the people” (Keating, 1979: 229).
Organizing “with the people” and starting “where the people are at” can be problematic issues in social movement organizing. Just who are “the people”? To illustrate this tension, Repo (1971) critiques the mass-based community organizing practice of the Riverdale Community Organization that operated in the east-end, working-class Toronto neighbourhood of Riverdale in the early 1970s in “The Fallacy of ‘Community Control.” Mass-based community organizing is a process at the local level in which people create for themselves a chance to develop and practice their democratic rights by doing things for themselves: they identify problems, decide on solutions, and amass the power (in terms of people) to carry out the necessary actions (Keating, 1975: 63). As stated, the Riverdale Community Organization’s mission statement was “to build a broad based community organization in which every interest in the community is represented (church, business, industry, agencies, schools, fraternal groups, and neighbourhood groups).” Using a class analysis, Repo notes the competing interests within the “inclusive” group. She writes about the organization’s “assumption that everybody is equal, that all can work together for a common good, that no class conflicts exist or that they can be abolished through co-operative efforts at the neighbourhood level” and argues that this is contrary to existing reality (49). Repo’s position is that “through organizations such as the Riverdale organization, the working class is going to be led into insidious ‘participatory democracy’ games, while the powers-that-be continue their total control over all aspects of the lives of the working class” (60).

The question of “the people” leads to a discussion of organizing tactics. Mass organizing (Alinsky’s term) or mass-based community organizing (used by Don Keating, key community organizer in the Riverdale Community Organization; Keating 1979: 228) is often positioned in opposition to community development. Community developers, Keating and Alinsky argue, get everyone working together and “let the people decide” but do not address issues of power. Keating suggests that community developers fail to realize that conflicts of interest within communities are political conflicts. Community developers, “treat conflict as
abnormal. They are under the illusion that they can smooth over any conflicts of interest by inviting everyone to cooperate. They do nothing to offend politicians or the gatekeeping social agencies in the community. Those with power win and those without power lose” (Keating 1979: 238).

Tensions between organizing philosophies themselves can be complicated. Repo’s critique of Keating’s work with the Riverdale Community Organization is similar to Keating’s critique of community development workers: “Community developers see their role as that of getting people together and then leaving everything up to chance. They believe in spontaneity. Staff do not ‘organize’ because that’s manipulation. They sit and watch the process, making the odd random input and operating on the principle that they will do only what the people ask them to do” (Keating 1979: 238).

These tensions duly noted, transformational practice is generally understood as being about “power with” rather than “power over” strategies and tactics. Power with tactics favour “negotiation rather than directives, process rather than structure, collegiality rather than hierarchy, collaboration rather than competition, a holistic rather than a sectoral approach, both/and rather than either/or and win-win rather than win-lose strategies” (Hancock, 1996: 20).

Fixers

If community developers have been criticized for being too “hands off,” at the other end of the spectrum are fixers. Keating described fixers as individuals who build their own power by unilaterally attempting to fix the community’s problems. Fixers, similar to experts, are individuals, groups or institutions which take (potential) power away from people by removing the possibility for collective action, diffusing the issues, reducing the hostility and/or solving the problems without changing the essential power structure of the community (Keating, 1975: 56). Fixers often take the form of a community representative who feels they
have the authority to act on behalf of the community, such as civic representatives, politicians, or community leaders. Keating challenges the authority of "representatives" and representative democracy as a form of democracy. He views these representatives as taking away the power of the people: "Those who fix problems are the ones who increase their strength and you cannot build your own strength so long as you exercise someone else’s muscle . . . hanging on to your own problems and dealing directly with your adversaries takes away the opportunity for others to build their power by fixing your problems" (Keating 1979: 229, italics in original). Keating uses the examples of City Councillors (Aldermen) Karl Jaffary and John Sewell in Toronto in the early 1970s to illustrate fixer characteristics. The two men were on the reform left of City Council’s political spectrum and had backgrounds in community organizing. They couldn’t understand why the Riverdale Community Organization needed its own power base independent of the City Councillors, no matter how progressive (Keating, 1975: 74).

Keating claims that in mass-based community organizing, any given issue is not an end in itself, but instead a way to get people involved in changing society and transforming themselves. "The issue is a means to an end." Keating writes, "[building an organization] is the process by which people change the way they relate; that’s how people change themselves" (Keating, 1975: 160). Keating, for example, is a self-defined Alinsky-style organizer. And although Keating came through the Alinsky school of organizing, there are many major differences between Alinsky’s and Keating’s practice. On the issue of expediency, Keating’s commitment was to work with individuals on their own problems and not let anyone fix their problem for them and rob them of their potential personal and community power – an approach more akin to that of Horton and Freire. By contrast, Alinsky did not hesitate to fix problems himself.
Winning

At the core of Keating’s thinking about fixers was the belief that “… the people with the problems need to be the ones involved in winning the results” (Keating, 1979: 229). But there’s a telling emphasis on winning here. Winning campaigns put its own pressure and politics on democratic social movement practice. Placing one’s sole organizing effort on the goal of winning can have negative consequences on democratic processes: “If you’re into having a successful organizing campaign and dealing with a specific project, and that’s the goal, then whether you do it yourself or an expert does it, or the government does it without your involvement because that solves the problem – then you don’t take the time to let people develop their own solutions” (Horton and Freire, 1990: 119, italics in original).

One of the difficulties in focussing on winning is that the less transformative the issue, the easier it is to win. Keating notes this himself: “provided they stick to win-able issues and not try to change the world, they win” (Keating 1979: 233). This comment suggests that neighbourhood or community organizing, with its focus on winnable issues, is not about changing the world. By contrast, the focus at Highlander was not on “winnable” issues. Horton says, “I’ve often said that if we could do something overnight, it’s not worth doing because it it’s that simple and that easy, it’ll take care of itself. There’ll be plenty of people who will see that it happens. Tough problems take time and you have to struggle with them” (Horton and Freire, 1990: 216).

Dialectical Politics

There are no clear answers to these tensions in transformative social movement practice. In fact, recognizing that there are no easy answers is part of the process. As Miles (1996) describes it, “dialectical politics neither passively accept nor propose easy resolutions to contradictions. They attempt to transcend them. That is, they strive in their struggle to shift
the lived relations of contradictory terms in ways that open up new possibilities” (xii). At its best, the women’s movement attempted to transcend dualisms: it “resisted false choices between structurelessness or hierarchy, homogeneous leveling of participants or stars, personal self-transformation or political action, sectarianism or liberalism, reformism or revolution, cultural or political focus” (27, italics in original). Miles writes that these dualisms are not static opposites but dynamic contradictions to be lived and transformed in practice and are, in that sense, dialectical. Far from being mutually exclusive, they are mutually constitutive, and each of these dichotomies is transformed by the other.

Miles adds that “dialectical politics can appear paradoxical to those who work in linear terms. [The politics], for instance, seek to transcend the dualistic gender system initially by affirming one side – the female side – of the dichotomy as a necessary moment of this struggle” (xiii). She describes this balance between process and action as the refutation of the dualistic oppositions of the personal and the political – and of means and ends. Miles uses examples drawn from feminist movements and organizations to illustrate the ways in which feminists have resisted the oppositions that patriarchal relations presume and structure between the personal and the political, public and private, means and ends, reason and emotion, psychological and social, knower and known, production and reproduction, individual and community, society and nature. “Committed to developing new political forms that reflect their holistic values, they attempt to integrate these oppositions as part of their struggles to build a new world” (xii).

Summary

This chapter has framed several debates about transformative practice within community organizing and feminist literature, including issues of integrating ends and means; recognizing the tension between building the movement and building organizations; redefining leadership; noting ambiguities in phrases such as ‘with the people’; critiquing the
role of fixers; challenging the emphasis on winning; and practicing dialectical politics. This chapter has developed a foundation for discussing transformative practice by building on the experience of other social movements. This discussion will assist in understanding similar dynamics at work in Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement explored in Chapters Six and Seven.
Chapter 5
Methodology

Research Approach

This research project utilized qualitative research methods to study women's experiences, holistic politics and transformative practice in Toronto's sustainable transportation movement. Research for this study included reflection on her own experience and participant observation by the researcher (a movement participant); as well as formal, in-depth interviews with women practitioners/activists within the movement. A key source of data for this study, the researcher brings over seven years of involvement in Toronto's sustainable transportation movement. Important data on gender and political culture was collected through personal interviews with key informants in the movement (also referred to as participants).

Within the context of Toronto's sustainable transportation movement, this study examines debates and discussions about holistic, transformative approaches and gender politics from the point of view of the women closest to these issues (both paid staff and committed volunteers). As its methodological focus, this study emphasized a prolonged engagement between the researcher and the key informants (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 301).

The Researcher

When it came time for me to write my Master's thesis I went through a long and difficult process of finding a focus within a plethora of potential topics. I considered a broad range of issues, including co-operative development, women's work and feminist economics. I approached several organizations to see if they had research needs that could be met through
an MA thesis project. I had no prior connection with many of these organizations, and none were the right fit.

In the end, I realized that I had been overlooking what was closest to me the whole time: the sustainable transportation movement. For many years I had been active on transportation issues in Toronto. Over the years, I have had many discussions with women in the movement and there often seemed to be broader systemic issues underlying many of the challenges and frustrations they were experiencing. As I worked at developing my research proposal, I was interested in women’s experiences in the movement. At this time, I conducted one taped, open-ended interview with a key movement participant. I had suspected that the issues of gender and movement practice were linked, but the connections weren’t fully understood or articulated. What this interview suggested to me was that women’s experiences were linked to the nature of the politics they practiced and advocated. I put this issue at the centre of my study to further explore the relationship between women’s experience, holistic politics and transformative practice.

Once I decided to focus on the gender politics and political culture of the sustainable transportation movement, my research project took shape in a relatively short period of time. Personally, I felt motivated to better understand the gender processes at work within my own movement and their connections to transformative movement practice. A secondary goal was to contribute to the language and understanding of these issues, in order to help facilitate a discussion that has been largely absent.

Looking back, I think that one of the reasons I initially overlooked researching a movement I was involved in had to do with concerns about objectivity and bias. As I further explored qualitative research methods, I learned that closeness to the movement and its participants could be a benefit, not a weakness. I was inspired by the work of Sara Evans (Personal Politics) Dorothy Smith (The Everyday World as Problematic), especially their writings on research:
From the outset I was aware that my own background . . . would profoundly influence [my research]. At the same time, my own participation and experience used rigorously and self consciously might provide the kinds of intuitions and empathetic leaps that inform all historians as they come to know their material intimately. . . . My personal experience and informants confidence allowed me to comprehend what they had to say in a way that no "outsider" could. . . . The results were extraordinary. I only hope I have done justice to the histories with which I have been entrusted (Evans, 1980: x).

Dorothy Smith (1987) writes, "by the people research can also have a feminist approach, one in which the researcher researches her own experience. Instead of the research being done by and for disenfranchised groups, the researcher becomes the subject of the research" (154, italics in original). Smith presents a method that begins with posing women as authentic subjects rather than beginning with theoretical constructs. She suggests that it is the individual's "working knowledge of her everyday world that provides the beginning of the inquiry" (154).

And with these words spurring me on, I set out to conduct my research.

Feminist Activist Research

The method I chose is not new; it comes from a tradition of feminist activist research. That said, it is not an easy research method. Like many research methods, it is fraught with tensions and challenges. Naples (1998) highlights the challenges of activist scholars working for progressive social change, the first being the difficulties of combining activist and scholarly writing. In her introduction to the book Community Activism and Feminist Politics, Naples writes, 

32 Naples (1998) outlines that feminist activist research is not limited to participatory research or even to broader qualitative research methods. She identified Roberta Spalter-Roth and Heidi Hartmann's (1996) research at the Institute for Women's Policy Research in Washington D.C., as an example of quantitative feminist activist research. At its core, feminist activist research does research "for" not "on" women. Participatory research as defined by Patricia Maguire (1987) is "a method of social investigation of problems, involving participation of oppressed and ordinary people in problem posing and solving," (35) but is not always feminist in nature.
Every author in this collection who reported on community action in which she participated experienced some apprehension when constructing her chapter. As will all ethnographic work, the author’s goal was to produce a narrative that retained the integrity of the specific events, actors, and context while revealing the broader processes at work, which may not have been visible to the individual participants, or even to the researcher, at the time they were engaged in the struggle (6).

She goes on to write that feminist activist research requires researchers to find a balance between the passion they feel for the community action and the detachment required to present their analyses. In addition to this, making their participation visible presents “a more honest account of the community action or activist organization in which they participated” (7). She argues that the authors of Community Activism and Feminist Politics demonstrate that “analysis of the community action or the process of politicization can be deepened by making visible one’s own activist experiences and standpoint” (7).

Activist research cannot be defined by qualitative or quantitative methods; what distinguishes activist research is its commitment to social change. Naples writes, “presenting scholarship that supports an activist campaign or a progressive organization and that chronicles the lessons of organizing against oppression in its many guises constitutes the central purpose for progressive activist research” (1998: 8). As such, this study researches women in the sustainable transportation movement with a commitment to holistic politics and transformative practice (see Chapter One for a discussion of these terms).
Research Procedure

Site Selection

The personal involvement of the researcher in the sustainable transportation movement influenced the manner in which the site was selected. Naples (1998) writes that activist researchers enter the field in a variety of ways: some activist researchers search for a community-based site; others are approached by a group looking for outside assistance with research needs; and others find their site through personal involvement in the issue (10). The site for this study falls into this latter category.

As described above, early in the development of this study, an open-ended exploratory discussion over lunch with a key movement contact was conducted and taped. Following the lunch meeting, the tape was listened to and notes about the discussion were made. The issues raised in the discussion were broad-ranging and compelling and included a number of experiences in various organizations in several different urban renewal movements with issues of gender and process. There was an openness on the part of informant to discuss difficult issues with the researcher, suggesting the likelihood of access to data on the topic. From the broader urban renewal movement – including housing, anti-poverty, community economic development, food security, education, environment, and sustainable transportation – I narrowed the focus of my study to Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement. The study further focused on women’s experiences, holistic politics and transformative practice. Naples (1998) writes, “regardless of how an activist scholar joins a community action or initiates an activist research project, she must gain the trust of other participants. Since trust is earned over time, longer commitment to the local struggles is more likely to bring greater access to, and deeper understanding of, other community members’ political engagement” (11). The trust of the participants and prolonged engagement deepened the findings of this study.
Selection of Participants

The goal of this study is to build theory and understanding about the political culture of the sustainable transportation movement, not generalize to specific populations. As such, the selection of participants was accomplished by criterion-based not probabilistic sampling techniques. In the summer of 1994, ten women from ten organizations – from both sustainable transportation organizations as well as environmental, community and health organizations with significant transportation-related programs – were interviewed.

Purposive sampling was used to form an interlinked participant group, interlinked in terms of the informants being involved in overlapping membership in movement groups and organizations. Purposive sampling was employed over random sampling in the selection of participants because purposive sampling “increases the scope or range of data exposed (random or representative sampling is likely to suppress more deviant cases) as well as the likelihood that the full array of multiple realities will be uncovered” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 40).

This study used a snowball-effect sampling strategy for the selection of informants who could shed light on women’s experience and holistic politics in the sustainable transportation movement. The snowball-effect method for participant identification increases the interlinked nature of the informant group. However, an interlinked informant group may impact on the data collected by the influence of one informant on another, should participants discuss the study amongst each other. As this study is a social movement research study, discussion between key informants was seen as a positive, not negative, by-product of the study’s methodology.

Starting with the key informant from the lunch discovery interview, another four key informants were identified. These five initial key informants were known to the researcher to be: a) women directly involved in the sustainable transportation movement in Toronto; and
b) attempting to incorporate holistic politics and transformative practices into their work in the movement. These women were telephoned, given a description of the study, and were asked to participate in individual interviews as well as to recommend additional participants. The women provided 16 recommendations. The second round of potential participants were evaluated based on the following criteria: a) women directly involved in the sustainable transportation movement in Toronto; b) attempting to work with a holistic perspective; and c) available for an interview in the summer of 1994. Selection was also based on: d) heterogeneous organizational representation; e) referral by more than one informant; and f) a wide sample in terms of length of involvement in the movement to include new and long-time activists.

The research proposal for this study originally identified a sample size of eight informants. It was too difficult to shortlist the referrals to that small a number (i.e., only adding an additional 3 participants to the group) and in the end an additional six potential informants were sent letters and invited to join the study (Appendix A). All agreed except for one, bringing the final sample size to ten.

All of the informants interviewed are self-identified environmentalists, all are women (but not necessarily self-identified feminists), and most are active in neighbourhood, community, education, international development, and/or municipal issues in addition to their transportation activism. Seven of the women had full or part-time paid positions, with all or part of their job being related to sustainable transportation. Of these seven, four worked for NGOs and three in the public sector. Six of the women did volunteer activities in sustainable transportation outside of their paid work. The other three women interviewed were volunteers: one was doing contract work the other two were retired. The age range of the interviewees was from early-20s to early-70s; three of the women were from a racial or ethnic minority; one had English as a second language, all others were native English speakers; and three of the participants were immigrants to Canada. Half had children; one was on maternity leave, two had school age children and another two had grown children.
Data Collection

In 1994, the ten women who agreed to be interviewed were contacted and interviews arranged. During the initial call, they were asked if they would like to see the interview questions in advance (Appendix B). Interviews with the participants took place in the summer of 1994. Most of the interviews took place at the homes of the participants. One was held in the atrium of the local civic centre, one in a meeting room at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), and one in a meeting room at the woman's place of work. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours. All of the interviews were conducted in English. Interviews were tape recorded. At the end of the interview, informants were asked to answer questions about their experience of the researcher (as validation for researcher bias). These questions are included in Appendix B. Participants were also asked if they would answer personal information and background questions, if comfortable. All participants agreed. These questions also are included in Appendix B.

At the interview, women were given the following overview of the research project:

I am interested in women's experiences and impressions of working within the sustainable transportation movement in Toronto. This study investigates the barriers and supports in the movement to advance a dialogue on process, holistic politics, transformative visions and gender politics. It is my hope that this research will contribute to research on social movements in general as well as to the work of the participants and to the further development of the movement. In this interview I hope you will reflect and draw upon on your experiences in the movement, using as many examples as you wish to illustrate your points.

Using a semi-structured interview questionnaire (Appendix B), the participants were asked to reflect on their experience in movement groups highlighting isolating incidents, trivialization of their work, frustrations they felt, supports they counted on and positive
experiences they had had. They were also asked about how the groups they have been involved in dealt with issues of process, coalition politics, gender politics and leadership. Finally, they were asked what they liked best about being involved in the sustainable transportation movement and if they had any other issues they wanted to raise.

Of the women interviewed, seven saw gender issues as significant and discussed these in their interview. Three participants did not. Of the women who did not, one wondered what women’s issues had to do with transportation (Wendy); one recognized that women were taking action on transportation and environmental issues but described her world-view as humanist, not feminist (Tanya); and another spoke of race and ethnicity issues but remained silent on the issue of gender (Catherine). All of the informants were very generous with their time. Three of the participants weren’t sure if there was a sustainable transportation movement per se. All of the women found it difficult to reflect on their practice; they had been so busy with movement issues they had had relatively little time or opportunity to reflect on their activities and the activities of the movement. One found it difficult to talk about her experiences because she had pulled back from active movement involvement after a particularly trying string of incidents with one movement organization and had tried to distance herself from the experience. Four of the informants expressed enthusiasm for the research project; one asked about its relevance. One wanted her contribution acknowledged, three thanked me for including them in the study. Two of the women spoke of contributions movement men had made in terms of gender issues and transformative practice.

In the end, I received useful information from all but one informant, the “humanist” (Tanya), as she was unable to focus on the internal workings of the sustainable transportation movement and spoke instead of transportation issues more broadly. Her experience of the interview was not unique: the other women also found it difficult to focus on the movement itself. The experience of doing the interviews suggested that dialogues both on gender and holistic politics within the movement are not well developed. I found that the referrals were
not consistent and in retrospect I should have done pre-interviews with potential participants before conducting the full interview.

Nevertheless, I found the interviewing process to be an incredible learning experience and altogether very rewarding. In the case of several of the women, we had worked on projects together or known of each other, but hadn’t had the opportunity prior to the interview to connect on a one-to-one basis. Seeds for new events and actions were planted during the interviews. Stemming from the interviews, several women and I joined together to organize several major movement events – and in one case, form a new movement organization that is still active, four years later.

Participant Observation

My understanding of the gender politics and political culture of the sustainable transportation movement did not come from these interviews alone. I learned a lot from informal interactions with women and men within the sustainable transportation community. I had spoken to other movement women about their experiences in the sustainable transportation movement. Prior to this research project, I had a number of opportunities to observe issues I had often heard about in the interviews. This study has been shaped within the context of doing social movement work, through direct participation in publishing, event organizing, actions, conferences, workshops, and annual general meetings. My main involvements include:

33 Outside of the ten interviews conducted, I have had many conversations with movement activists in less formal ways as friends and colleagues about these issues over the years; another form of “participant observation.” Stern (1998) highlights the value of friendship for conversation-based activist research.

34 The groups, projects and conferences listed here are both past and present involvements. Several of these projects are complete, and the groups disbanded.
Board member, *Green Tourism Association*

Board member, *Transportation Options*

Conference committee member, Bikes mean Business conference

Conference committee member, Second International Conference on Auto-Free Cities (Toronto, 1992)

Editorial Collective member, *TransMission* magazine of politics, culture and sustainable transportation

Founding member, *Detour Publications* (for transportation and urban ecology)

Founding member, *Skills Development Programme for Sustainable Transportation*

Member, *Economic Conversion Bicycle User Group (BUG)*

Member, *Healthy City Toronto*, Public Education Committee

Member, Intersection (resource centre for sustainable transportation)

Member, *Toronto Centre for Appropriate Transport*

Steering Committee member, Moving the Economy: Economic Opportunities in Sustainable Transportation Conference (Toronto, 1998)

Volunteer, *Community Bicycle Network*

Writer and contributing editor, *Beyond the Car: Essays on the Auto Culture*

The Participants\(^{35}\)

The names of the participants are fictitious. In addition, the data have been altered to maintain confidentiality. Specific organization names have been replaced with the generic terms “organization” or “group.” The names of movement participants have been replaced with the terms “movement man” or “movement woman.” Below are profiles of the women who were interviewed for this study. The information included below is purposely brief and

---

\(^{35}\) Participant information was collected in 1994 and has not been updated since that time.
vague, otherwise their participation would be identifiable to anyone involved in the issues and the movement.

Amanda is in her mid-thirties and lives downtown. She has spent ten years working with various groups, first on cycling, then on transportation more broadly, and now on city issues. She serves on the board of several sustainable transportation NGOs and works in the public sector where part of her job includes working on sustainable transportation.

Catherine is in her mid-20s and since graduating from university a year ago has worked for an NGO on environmental health issues, including transportation and air quality. Catherine moved to Canada from Hong Kong in 1984 and lives in suburbs of the Greater Toronto Area.

Dawn is in her late 50’s and has spent the past 25 years working on various urban issues in downtown Toronto. She has been active on transportation issues since the early 70s. She is on the board of several sustainable transportation NGOs. Dawn’s career was in the public sector. Dawn has two grown children.

Emily is in her early 40’s and is an organizer in downtown Toronto. For the past several years she has worked on sustainable transportation as a part of her paid community organizing work. She is also active in a number of environmental and women’s groups. She has two school-age children and lives and works in the downtown core.

Kate is a student in her early 20’s who just got involved in the sustainable transportation movement through her summer job with a transportation NGO. She has been active
for a number of years in youth groups including organizing protests and events. Kate immigrated to Canada from the Caribbean.

Moira is in her early-thirties and got involved in transportation issues through her work in the public sector. For the past 5 years she has been involved in numerous transportation projects both within government and at the community level, including serving on the board of a sustainable transportation NGO. She lives and works downtown.

Naomi is in her early 40s and credits Dawn for getting her involved in sustainable transportation issues when she was at home with one of her three children. Naomi trained as a planner and since has been volunteer, staff and management in a variety of community organizations in her west-downtown neighbourhood.

Tanya has been active in environmental issues since the early 1970’s and has remained active as a volunteer in a variety of groups throughout her 50’s, 60’s and 70’s. She officially retired in 1965 and has four grown children. She lives on the outskirts of Toronto in a semi-rural area that has increasingly become suburbanized.

Wendy is in her mid-30’s and works for one of Canada’s largest environmental NGOs. As part of her paid work, Wendy has been involved in a variety of roles as a researcher and an advocate on transportation, air quality and land-use issues. Wendy was on maternity leave at the time of the interview and was interviewed on her front porch in east Toronto with her new baby.

Yvonne is in her early 30s and has been involved in a number of urban environmental issues, particularly in east Toronto. She has worked as a staff person for a sustainable transportation organization for a year. Prior to that, she was not directly involved in
Data Analysis

I transcribed the interview tapes over a period of one-and-a-half years in MS Word for Macintosh. Shortly after completing the interviews, I started a full-time job and transcribed the interviews on evenings and weekends. Half of the interviews were fully transcribed, and then after further discussion with my thesis supervisor, it was decided that I should do a mix of notes and transcriptions. In the end, half of the interview transcripts were a combination of notes with transcribed sections.

In March of 1996, copies of the transcripts were mailed to participants with a letter asking for changes and corrections (Appendix C). Two of the transcripts were returned. The edited transcripts contained mostly copy editing changes, and there were no major additions to the data.

In the end, with over 200 pages of interview transcripts, it seemed like there was enough material for ten theses. Then the real challenge began in finding focus and themes within the material. One movement organization figured prominently in five of the interviews and I briefly considered doing a case study on this organization. I decided not to pursue the case study because focusing on the one organization would make the comments of movement participants more public (the way the data are presented in this study, the organizations are not as easily identifiable as they would be if the research was a case study). Five of the women interviewed were trying to put their experience with this organization behind them, and I felt it would be more productive to focus on the movement as a whole.

In 1996 and 1997, I sporadically found time to work on data analysis and continued to work with the data, looking for themes. By the summer of 1997, I was ready to take three weeks leave from work to complete a draft of the findings. The categories included in
Chapters Six and Seven emerged from this process of research, writing and working with the transcripts. To begin with, the transcripts were carefully read and re-read with notes made in the margins of the print-outs. Clusters of interview comments were paraphrased under 30 headings, some entries with 20 entries, others with only one. The headings included: coalitions, control, setting the agenda, turf, money, campaigning, experts, results, community development approaches, democratic meetings, grassroots groups and so on. Under some headings the relationships between categories were noted from the interview data; e.g., under "grassroots groups" was the paraphrased interview comment, “often not respected by expert groups.” My overall impressions at the time were that the study’s grand themes were a) there are different approaches within the movement to organizing and social change; b) these approaches are sometimes in conflict; c) these approaches reflect different visions of building a movement; d) these approaches have notable gender differences; and e) groups become defined by their approach to organizing (expert vs. community development).

What became clear was that women were not criticizing the movement (this was not a priority of the women I spoke to), but all were involved in advancing a movement-building approach. The movement-building approach grouped many of the categories of the data analysis including outreach; open agendas; openness to new ideas and people, and cultural difference; a group or project is very much a part of the people involved; building on people’s strengths and interests; and having fun. The notes were recoded through a process of synthesizing the 30 headings down to 9 themes and the one organization that had figured prominently in five of the interviews.

It became clear that women’s claims for recognition were in fact linked to the politics they were promoting: they weren’t trying to claim power, but transform it. Out of this finding came the wider recognition of the dialectical politics the women were practicing. Their interview data showed that they were attempting to transcend male-defined dualisms and either/or politics. Many of the phrases/categories of Chapter Seven emerged out of the interview transcripts (thinker and linkers, upreach and outreach) and others built on
categories already established in the literature (means and ends, knower and known, etc.).
The development process of the data analysis went back and forth between the interview transcripts and the study’s literature. The interviews helped me to deepen my understanding of the literature which, in turn, deepened my understanding of the literature’s relationship to the data. As I wrote the drafts of Chapters Six and Seven, I took the paraphrased notes and went back to the original transcripts and compiled the quotations used in these chapters.

In October 1997, the draft findings were circulated to the participants, culminating in a focus group, which provided them with the opportunity to respond to the data analysis.36 The summary of findings was mailed to all of the ten original participants (all were kept track of in the years that had passed from the initial interview) with an invitation to a focus group to be held at a Sunday brunch at my home. Seven responded to the invitation – four attended the brunch; two weren’t able to attend due to prior engagements. One woman was not able to attend but sent feedback.

The focus group and feedback did not generate a lot of input about the research and analysis itself – most of the comments clarified and helped to edit the document. Two of the women already had begun to use the document’s categories of analysis in their thoughts and discussions. None found the analysis problematic. One said that she had found the analysis quite useful to her and appreciated the fact that complex issues had not been over-simplified. One wanted to clarify the link between women and transformative practice and make clear that there was no essential (biological) link between women and certain forms of practice. It was suggested by the group that I do subsequent writing on the study for movement publications and journals.

In the years that had passed since the initial interviews in 1994, many new women have joined the sustainable transportation movement. Three women in particular (who were

---

36 Kirby and McKenna (1989) write that feminist research illustrates the “need to shift away from the isolated interview and towards repeated group interviews” (72). Participatory research methods also underscore the importance of group discussions, especially in social movement research studies (Park et al., eds., 1993).
not participants in the original interviews) were interested in my research and I mailed them the findings of my research. I met with two of these women and the other provided comments via email. All three asked about gender issues and the link of the category women to certain approaches and perspectives in the movement. One couldn’t see gender dynamics as important in the groups she was involved with and doubted their presence. Two made the point that transformative visions and practice are not limited to women in the movement.37

Validity and Reliability

In choosing an appropriate research method for this study, the relative merits of smaller versus larger sample groups and single method versus multiple methods (triangulation) were evaluated. It was noted that dependability and validity of data is increased when multiple data sources, methods and theoretical schemes are used (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 316-317). Reliability in qualitative analysis is increased by multiple interviews with participants and by giving participants a chance to revise and edit their initial interview transcripts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In qualitative research, larger sample sizes increase the ability to generalize themes and trends in research findings, whereas smaller samples allow for more in-depth data collection procedures. A smaller sample group allows for more prolonged interaction between researcher and informant and allows for multiple interviews to take place. A smaller sample size also facilitates the incorporation of a group discussion among participants into the research design. It is argued that the validity of analysis is increased when the analysis is recycled through a subsample of the informants (Lather, 1986: 67). As such, the key informants in this study had the opportunity both to edit their transcripts, comments on the study’s draft findings and attend a group discussion about the study’s analysis.

37 As discussed in Chapter One, the main concern of this study is the relationship between women’s equality and perspectives and holistic and transformative practice. This is not to say that this practice is limited to women, nor is it meant to imply that men do not share the values associated with these politics.
Bias and Error

The following questions were asked at the end of each interview as validation for researcher bias:

1. How have you experienced me?
2. How free have you felt to express your own thoughts and feelings?
3. At any time during the interview did you feel that I expected a certain answer or that there was a right or wrong answer implied by the question?
4. What additional feedback would you like to give me about this interview?

Feedback to these questions was very positive. The informants felt that they could be open, that I had listened well, was engaged in the interview and asked good questions. One informant felt that the questionnaire posed more negative questions towards the beginning.

Summary

The most controversial aspect of this study has been the category of “women” as it relates to this research. As noted above, two of the key informants did not see “women” as a useful category with which to examine the politics of the movement (Tanya, Wendy), and one remained silent on the issue (Catherine). Regardless of whether they identified with the categories “feminist” or “woman,” the study’s participants still raised the same gender issues and many of their frustrations were shared. Although transformative politics were evident, several other movement women with whom I have discussed the study have difficulties identifying women with certain kinds of movement practice and have challenged me on this point. Catherine’s insights came from examples of racial and ethnic minority perspectives, which overlapped with the data on women’s oppression. Tanya had a well developed holistic
perspective, but felt she was too old to understand feminism and it wasn’t part of her world view, though she was not hostile towards it. And Wendy, being the one that worked for one of Canada’s largest environmental NGOs, had the deepest insights into this culture, though she did not define it as male-dominated.

The key informants in this study do not speak for all women in the transportation movement. The findings from any qualitative study are suggestive not conclusive, and they provide a basis for future hypothesis testing and theory building. If anything, this research maps a new way to look at gender and transformative politics within the sustainable transportation movement – and on both of these topics there has been little discussion or debate within the movement.
Chapter 6
Women's Experience, Gender and Political Process

As part of this study, ten women activists reflected on their experiences as participants in Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement. In interviews conducted in July, 1994, these women spoke highly of egalitarian, supportive organizations within the movement and stressed the importance of other women supporting them both personally and in terms of their work. All of the women worked or volunteered with movement organizations with mixed male and female membership. Several women worked within traditional environmental organizations and others had built or sought out organizations with a particular commitment to valuing women. They often felt most productive and effective in organizations where “women set the tone of the group,” as they put it.

One reason that I have this job is that I get to work with so many nice people, people who share the same goals and outlook on life. The people who would share my view on anything are just a phone call away (Wendy).

As I said it’s easy to get really eager about getting involved because of the people. The personalities that you meet are the types . . . who can pull somebody in really easily, and their personalities are such that you want to work with them (Kate).

I feel things are moving, there’s lots happening, there’s lots of energy – it’s very productive energy. It feels like we’re doing things that are actually having an impact (Yvonne).

I’d say, on the whole, what’s happening is pretty exciting (Emily).

Wendy pointed to good childcare and maternity benefits at her environmental organization as a contributing factor to making a woman-friendly organization. Yvonne was
particularly encouraged when a man at her organization brought forward a discussion about making the organization more woman-friendly after a sexual harassment incident took place.

But for many of the women, positive movement experiences such as these were limited to specific movement organizations and personal networks – and were not found across the movement:

I think it’s important to get rid of some of these cars . . . because I think there are other ways to plan our cities, so that’s part of what keeps me involved and then the other part of it is because I like the people that I’m involved with, I enjoy working with a lot of people. So, I wouldn’t work with [that other organization], though they’re probably as committed as I am to getting rid of these cars, but it has to be both those things – it has to be an issue that I am tied to and then people that I can feel good about (Moira).

[With] people that I really admire and respect . . . there’s a mutuality that is really powerful and had a lot to do with the way we relate to each other – it’s very egalitarian. . . . [whereas with certain organizations] I do feel strongly that my ideas are not valued . . . and my style of organizing is not appreciated and is not wanted, probably (Emily).

When asked to name what it is that keeps them involved in the movement, five women spoke about people they enjoyed working with (mostly women) and shared perspectives with, though it was more difficult to articulate the specifics of why a certain organization worked for them.

It’s just so obvious to me what about those groups are wonderful that I can’t even put it in words (Amanda).

[She] and I work really well together because we don’t have to explain to each other the other perspective, it’s there – I understand where she’s coming from and she understands where I’m coming from and we’re coming from a lot of the same places (Moira).

[There are key people, mostly women] who share [my] perspective and so when we’re working on projects together that becomes integral to it. The difficulty is always around vocalizing and articulating things. If you have an implicit understanding with somebody you can apply it in your work (Yvonne).
The interviews reflected women’s dissatisfaction with their status within the movement. Comments of seven of the participants addressed the existence of a cultural undertow of male-defined culture in the wider sustainable transportation movement, though they did not use the terms “cultural undertow” or “male-defined.” Participants identified several key issues of women’s status within male-defined organizations in the movement, including: an inconsistent commitment to and recognition of gender issues; women playing supportive roles that aren’t as valued as the status positions of decision-maker or speaker; and the fact that men received more status, recognition, and financial reward for their involvement. This cultural undertow manifests itself in a number of ways: women in the movement feel pressure to “act like men”; both women and men often accept the traditional male culture of the movement; and, in some cases, women have internalized their dissatisfaction by feeling negative and ineffectual, thereby devaluing themselves.

Recognition of Gender Issues

Participants noted an inconsistent commitment to and recognition of gender issues within movement organizations. At most organizations there was “very little” discussion about gender issues.

There was going to be no gender discussion because . . . a lot of environmental movements think they have that sewn up, “We’re an environmental movement and why do we need to discuss this?” . . . The stated desire is there but I don’t think the real desire is there because it’s a matter of sharing power (Amanda).

I guess, but we didn’t, [that] we should have made some kind of decision about gender equity a way back . . . I just kind of assumed it, but clearly others didn’t assume it (Dawn).

38 Please see Chapter One for a discussion of “male-defined dominant culture.”
I think there is still that reticence of anyone – male or female – who wants to bring up an issue that is gender based [that they would be told] it’s not part of this discussion. That’s what my worry would be . . . someone might say it’s not part of this discussion, it has nothing to do with what we’re talking about. I mean it’s not perfect – it’s probably one of the better movements (Kate).

Amanda recalled a conference where it had been agreed that the organizers would try to have 50 per cent women speakers in the workshops. She found she struggled with barrier after barrier of how to get women in speaking positions at the conference: “I think the natural division in most people’s minds was, ‘Okay, We’ll get male planners and female community workers.’ There was no sense that women can be planners too . . . . The other thing was, ‘Okay, well, facilitators must count as speakers and so . . . we’ve got three [male] experts and we’ve got a female facilitator.’ She found that women were more likely to say, “Oh no, I can’t possibly do that – I’m not good enough” and the members of the conference committee spent differing amounts of time trying to convince women that they were, in fact, good enough to be speakers.

Participants also discussed their experiences where men have been given more authority within the movement:

[When movement man gave his speech] . . . I was the only woman in the room, . . . I felt he and I were saying exactly the same thing but people were just focussing on him . . . There’s a gender thing in a lot of this (Moira).

My experience certainly is that a lot of women do a lot of work and say a lot of things that are very good, but . . . it’s just not given the same weight that the same kind of contribution from another place might (Emily).

Participants noted that they had to take on more of the day-to-day work of the movement while men saw their role as making decisions or giving direction:

One of the men on the committee . . . would come to every fourth meeting . . . and at one point I remember talking, and he said, “I gave you that advice now
it's for you to [do the work]" . . . He was too important . . . but I as a mom at home should [do the work] (Naomi).

A task that no one else will do will end up being a task group of almost all women (Amanda).

They noted that women did not receive as much recognition as men for their work:

... [M]en and women have different ways of doing things and we undervalue the way that women do a lot of things (Moira).

I realized that [those movement people] . . . didn’t know the kinds of work I had done. A lot of the work I had done was really unseen and unrecognized. So, it makes you feel not like doing as much of that kind of work which I think is very helpful work for the movement as a whole (Emily).

And in some cases, women’s perspectives and approaches are trivialized:

I was trivialized for my approach of connecting with people (Amanda).

This male-defined orientation within the movement has direct effects on women working in the movement. Women feel pressure to conform to male-defined norms, including competition:

If I want to be taken seriously I have to present things in a way that’s not representative of the way I think (Amanda).

I think that what message comes to me is that I have to keep selling, I have to think how to put myself at the front, which is really not the way I like to work. I much prefer to just do the work (Emily).

I feel some of the same things happen just women take on some of the male roles and so it’s not always a gender thing, it’s just different roles (Moira).

Participants have had experiences where movement men have pitted movement women against each other:
People like them get held up: "Well [so and so’s] a woman and she doesn’t agree with you!" (Amanda).

Participants identified a number of contributing factors as to why a dialogue on women’s status in the movement has not fully developed, including the reality that not all women identify gender as an issue; the threat of co-optation in the pursuit of power; and questions about the benefits of initiating such a dialogue. Clearly, the connection between gender and power is not one that all women in the movement have made. Some women benefit from or have adapted to the male-defined culture of the movement:

And then the women will go along with the powerful again. They want to be powerful sometimes (Amanda).

Sometimes you see women who really really want to please people, but they tend to want to please the people in power . . . I’ve caught myself doing it. But it’s really disappointing when I do it and it’s really disappointing when other women do it (Amanda).

There is also a worry about co-optation if there were to be a wider dialogue on women’s status in the movement:

[Movement man] gave this big pitch for collaboration and working together [like these were all new ideas that this was a whole new plan]. He credited himself for a lot that . . . [another movement woman] had initiated. He was giving himself all the credit for that . . . It’s a bit frustrating. Everyone was, “he’s so wonderful, he’s so wonderful.” Sometimes I’m not so happy with that (Moira).

- “So you feel that once the idea is named and packaged – are you saying that it’s co-opted and not all the people who did the work are credited?”
- “Yeah”
- “So you’ve tried to stay away from making it too easy for people to . . .”
- “Take, yeah” (Moira).

Overall, there is also a question whether a dialogue on gender would even be a positive discussion to have in the movement:
I think it would be really great if there were ways we could bring this discussion forward . . . it would be nice to develop things that enable people to talk about it without being threatened. Maybe where it has to start, or maybe where it absolutely has to stay, is with women – at least for the next maybe 7000 years (Amanda).

More than challenging women's status in the movement, women have challenged the effect of male-defined culture on the movement as a whole and on specific organizations in particular. Naomi described a male-dominated organization whose board she served on as “just half of what it should be” by focusing its efforts on campaigning to the detriment of its movement-building activities. Naomi described her approach as “setting a goal and then going after it” and distanced herself from less well defined movement-building, or community development, approaches. At the same time, as she lamented that this particular organizations was only doing work in one direction, only seeing “one side of the coin.” This awareness of the importance of both process and product was not shared by movement organizations working within a traditional male-defined model. Naomi described the organization this way: “it’s just half of what it should be because it’s only doing work in one direction, where in order to build a [movement] it needs to work in a very different way.”

Participants noted their commitment to process, a commitment that is lacking in several movement organizations:

Some people think that the adversarial way is the only way to do things and you only get things when you push hard enough and whoever has the most power wins. That’s true in a lot of ways. But maybe there are other ways. I think that’s what I’m trying to check out (Moira).

You have to be doing both education and advocacy . . . I think the education component is missing within the environmental movement . . . you can advocate and advocate and advocate but you cannot get the signatures of a group of people who don’t understand why you’re doing it (Catherine).
Experts and Expert Organizations

Participants identified the links between a male-defined culture within the movement and the tendency for individuals and organizations to practice the politics of expertise and power. Individuals who assume the role of the ‘expert’ tend to value their own knowledge over the knowledge of other participants by becoming speakers or lecturers. These individuals also tend to act as ‘fixers’ by developing solutions to problems on their own without working in consultation with others. This is particularly relevant for the sustainable transportation movement, where many experts abound, both inside and outside the movement: transportation planners, engineers, etc.

Men need to have quick answers and need to be fixers and they need to say, “This is how I’m going to solve the problem,” and it’s a lot like the training in the scientific method (Moira).

I think it’s more typical of men to make everything about what they’ve done sound much more authoritative (Emily).

As opposed to valuing the knowledge of the expert, women spoke of their efforts in promoting opportunities for all participants to share their knowledge.

I was astounded that even something as simple as [getting] people to sit in a circle [at a meeting and getting people] to introduce themselves . . . It’s like we want to divorce ourselves from each other. And the answers are so simple in a way. I feel that a lot of that is ignored (Dawn).

So when [I’m] dealing with the general public, I don’t talk; I let them talk (Catherine).

Over the years I’ve become more confident in my ability to talk about the issues. . . I still feel that bringing people together is important (Moira).
The practice of bringing people together and valuing the knowledge of all of the participants is devalued in male-defined culture. Amanda spoke of how she is trivialized for her approach of connecting with people – her colleagues don’t understand her approach and think she is consultative because she doesn’t know how to do the work herself, which is not the case. Moira noted the same difficulty:

It’s difficult to try and put an emphasis on process with a group that doesn’t put any value to that.

Expert behaviour also takes place at the level of organizations, where there is often a tension in deciding whether an organization spends its energy communicating with its membership or speaking for its membership. The ‘expert’ organization tends to speak on behalf of its membership.

[With this one organization’s project] it was an attempt to say here we have this set knowledge and here’s how you do it . . . rather than ask for input from groups that have done organizing. . . . It’s a certain kind of organizing style that I don’t think tends to bring people in, it doesn’t involve people (Emily).

I think it reflects an organizing style that isn’t participatory and isn’t involving and isn’t geared towards spreading out. It’s more like we’ve hired lobbyists to do our organizing and speak for us rather than organize the group so that everyone gets more opportunities to speak out (Emily).

I think there is that kind of feeling that all we have to do is really get it together in the back rooms and then we’ll make a change, we’ll convince them. In that way, it isn’t like you have to create a movement where you have to get thousands of people involved (Dawn).

These comments illustrate an alternative perspective on behalf of the women on how to build social movements and how to make change.

Because the expert has a product to sell – himself or herself – the expert protects his or her position by controlling ideas and by getting his or her name associated with specific ideas. In a similar way, the expert organization contains their power by keeping the debate
focused on their issues, which limits the opportunities for people to get involved and to develop new projects.

Each time people try and grab the power and the limelight, somehow grab the ideas and contain them, to me it hasn’t been useful . . . [but] each time a new person says, ‘You know I’ve never done any activism before, but this thing really pissed me off,’ and then suddenly there’s a new perspective on this and they’re gung ho and they put so much energy into it and I’ve seen it squelched so many times (Amanda).

This type of behaviour is not limited to social movement organizations, it is these ‘progressive’ organizations that are modeling themselves after traditional institutions. Moira said that she can deal with bureaucrats acting this way but when it’s movement people acting the same way it creates a much bigger frustration.

New organizations that don’t yet have turf to protect will often start creating new turf for themselves, based on the approach of the expert organization:

[This organization] was really set up by the people who started talking about it to bring groups together – rather than create another group that was going to do its own thing and staff that could set its own agenda without talking to anybody (Moira).

Expert approaches to building coalitions or organizations develop their own agendas and often become something other than the member groups involved; they tend to speak on behalf of their members instead of looking for ways to build the skills and effectiveness of the grassroots membership. As participants observed, experts often use an organization’s membership base to assume the status of official representatives of the movement, instead of using their time and resources to build the movement.
Fixed and Open Agendas

Participants also noted that movement organizations often experience a tension between having fixed agendas and open agendas. Some organizations have questioned whether they can do real community mobilization work if they stay focused on transportation issues and have debated widening their agenda to be more responsive to the interests of the communities they are working with. There is a distinct connection between community development (bringing new people in and growing the movement) and not having a fixed agenda (not controlling the agenda or limiting the scope of work of the organization).

There are times I note a definite conflict of approach . . . [like] how to proceed with a project and how much control to have over it, whether it should be all mapped out in advance and then implemented or whether things should be stimulated and supported, which is my approach and which I see as being [my organization’s] approach, which is part of why I work there. . . . I think there are different approaches within the movement about how to organize, how to mobilize, how to make change, how to make things happen (Yvonne).

We wanted to have equal representation in the workshops, we wanted to bring people who had different perspectives, we wanted to try and include some minorities — and that was more difficult because we had less connections to certain groups of people. . . . I’ve come to the conclusion that we haven’t been all that successful because it’s still been a lot of our own agenda. . . . It’s really hard to do that community development stuff (Moira).

I would like to do real community development – where you can’t go in with the issue already formulated (Catherine).

Related to experts and expert organizations containing ideas, debate over the movement’s agenda exhibits the tension between openness and control. When a movement or organization is open, the opportunities to contain and set the agenda are more limited. Opening an organization or movement up means sharing power and this strategy has been debated within movement organizations. If a group was to let everyone in, the experts would
no longer be able to keep their expert status. As such, the importance of outreach in building a movement was underscored by participants.

There’s a much larger goal as well which is to make sure that people who are not activists but who have air quality problems in their neighbourhood also learn that they can do something about it and show people how they can get involved. That’s the harder agenda and that’s the more important one I think. I don’t think any of us [at larger environmental organizations] feel confident that we’re doing a very good job at that (Wendy).

In some cases the recognition of the importance of doing outreach was gender-related:

The women would vote to expand and include and reach out and the men would vote to maintain a smaller size, keep control, and be an expert group. So, when those kinds of dynamics were happening, all the women were always being trivialized for wanting to allow other people in and for actually having the nerve to assume that other people might have some ideas or might have something to contribute. But the trivialization came from the taking away of expert status from the people who wanted it (Amanda).

[This one organization] is trivialized by the traditional [movement] people because they let everyone in (Amanda).

One woman described the attitude towards outreach within a male-dominated organization (where she served on its board of directors) as, “you just want to go out and build [a movement of] more people who you know are going to raise shit and take the expertise away from me.”

[It’s] tragic because if you’re going to [organize] right across the province, try to get more people involved and communities involved, it’s women who are overwhelmingly the organizers of their communities at the grassroots level and if you don’t include them as part of the trying to make some change then you’re cutting off your nose to spite your face (Dawn).
As participants observed, key to transformative practice is valuing the people involved as elements central to the project. This approach contrasts with the traditional perspective of seeing a project as disembodied from the people involved, the ‘organize it then implement it’ top-down approach. The holistic approach trusts in the process of bringing people and groups together. This approach also builds the skills of the people involved.

If you’re at a meeting you’re thinking about who’s involved and the unique qualities of each person, what they can contribute, what they can gain from being involved whether it’s skills, money, satisfaction or a combination thereof (Yvonne).

Participants also shared the importance of having fun, sharing ideas and building on people’s strengths and interests:

All [the groups I enjoy working with] are groups which have a primary goal of having fun while they work and also having a goal and getting stuff done without conflict and with helping each other (Amanda).

Professionalization

Professionalization and funding affects movement organizations, and there is pressure to model traditional male-defined culture. Professionalization was identified as an attempt (mainly by men) to use organizations in an effort to look credible to the mainstream. In these kinds of organizations, women’s participation was limited, not structurally, but by the very culture of the organizations. Dawn spoke of one such organization:

I’m on the board and the staff makes me go through hoops just to get the newsletter . . . What’s the point of spending a whole bunch of time trying to convince the staff of my opinion?

As soon as there’s any money to be had . . . men start taking more of an interest in it. I haven’t come to the bottom of trying to figure out what’s going
on here but I suspect it's just the same mentality operating where you have money so then you have men and men get to control it. I think that's what's happening.

I think it's sad that even the people we hire have not enough respect for spreading the word and getting one group supporting the other group, and so on... The male orientation of the staff compromises our success.

Emily spoke of another organization where the men held the power within the organization and set its agenda. In this group, she felt that her ideas and approach were not valued.

I found with [this one organization] and something to do with the formalness of it that it is harder to have that kind of dialogue and that kind of movement building.

[With this one male-dominated organization] there was the desire of being credible to the government, being credible to the mainstream.

The professionalization process also affected organizational structure. As participants observed, there is a default code for hierarchy in male-dominated organizations.

There were a few people who were saying, "we need to know how we're going to work together" which sounds a lot like a process question, but it's not. What they were saying was "we need to know who's going to run the show, we need to know the lines of hierarchy" (Amanda).

... how we're going to work, versus what tools we're going to use. It didn't make sense to me to chose a way to work (Robert's rules, voting mechanisms, a president) before we decided what we wanted to do. It's like first saying we're going to use a blender as our implement and then deciding what we want to do is build a deck (Amanda).

Summary

Though women's participation is not discouraged or limited by overt sexism to the same extent as that of earlier social movements of the 1950s and 1960's, non-holistic practices
represent the cultural undertow of male-defined culture still evident within the movement. In the sustainable transportation movement (and the wider environmental and urban renewal movements), challenges to women’s participation and perspectives often are subtle and more difficult to recognize and articulate. But the fundamental inequality observed in earlier social movements largely persists.

As women have pushed for holistic politics and transformative practice within Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement, they have met with resistance from both men and women working within a framework of traditional male-defined cultural norms (e.g., devaluing women’s contributions, promoting experts, limiting participation, relying on adversarial approaches, and creating hierarchical organizational structures). This resistance is not found movement-wide: women identified the sustainable transportation movement as “one of the better movements” on the issue of women’s participation and equality. But this commitment to holistic practice clearly was lacking in certain movement groups.

Women have begun to discuss their frustration in their ongoing struggle for equality and holistic movement practice with each other on an individual level. However, a dialogue on women’s participation and perspectives has not been raised at the organizational or movement-wide level. This study found that women’s concerns with their status are inextricably linked to the nature of the politics they practice. That is, women in the movement are being devalued not only because they are women: but also because they are advancing holistic politics. This suggests that the silencing of women’s voice in the sustainable transportation movement undermines not only women’s equality but transformational politics as well.

Quietly, women activists in Toronto are challenging the failure to understand the importance of building the sustainable transportation movement through outreach, open agendas, openness to new ideas and people, and cultural difference. In resisting male-defined organizational and cultural norms that still have hold on certain segments of the movement, women are promoting ways of working that are collaborative, participatory, member (as
opposed to staff) driven, supportive and fun. They are demonstrating in their practice that a group or project needs to be defined by the people involved (bottom up as opposed to top down) and needs to build on people’s strengths and interests. The data show that women are developing holistic approaches to their work that suggest the potential of a new politics and practice for the movement.
As discussed in Chapter Six, women in Toronto's sustainable transportation movement are not only asserting their own claims to recognition and power, but are advancing democratic, egalitarian, movement-building politics. Through their work, women are promoting political renewal, and the movement's possibility of recognizing the importance of building and renewing itself, an important prerequisite for social change. More than just working to expand the movement, women are building a transformative movement through the practice of holistic, dialectical politics.

In their efforts to build a multi-centred, diverse movement, women are attempting to transcend the male-defined dualisms of ends and means; thinkers and linkers; product and process; upreach and outreach; the knower and the known; leaders and the led; and centralization and decentralization in ways that strengthen the transformative politics of the movement. It is to a discussion of these themes that this chapter now turns.

Ends and Means

At the heart of transformative movement politics is the integration of the movement's struggle and its goals. Or as one participant (Dawn) said, "the way you do something is as important as what you do." Back in Chapter Four we saw that the linking of ends and means is at the core of the transformative projects of both community organizers and feminists. Adult education activist Paulo Freire underscored the importance of practicing freedom in political process when he said, "I cannot fight for a freer society if at the same time I don't respect the knowledge of people" (Horton and Freire, 1990: 101). Feminism at its best is also
about the transformation of power. Bunch (1970) writes, “Ending sexism means destroying oppressive institutions and ideologies and creating new structures and images to replace them” (164).

Participants gave examples that illustrated discongruities between how one organizes in the movement (the means) and the vision of the movement’s goals (the ends). Amanda and Yvonne both commented on the lack of understanding about the effects of non-holistic practice in limiting the development of the movement and its participants:

There’s a lack of understanding that . . . building the movement allows people to actually be involved in the process of making change for themselves (Amanda).

I’m not convinced that a kind of top down – organize it and implement it – is not effective ever, it’s just that I happen to be more interested in the opposite. Because I think that in the short term things happen [and] it also brings a longer term community development. People’s skills are developed and people are empowered. Because instead of just implementing somebody else’s idea they’re actually creating. I think that, in the long term, generates more in terms of change and in terms of understanding (Yvonne).

We see that fixers, experts, and lobbyists, those who build their own power by solving the community’s problems for them, can limit the participation of movement participants:

It’s more like we’ve hired lobbyists to do our organizing and speak for us rather than organize the group so that everyone gets more opportunities to speak out (Emily).

The interplay between means and ends is not a simple case of right and wrong – fixers often impose themselves on a willing community, a community that had been taught to defer to authority and have leaders and experts act on their behalf. Though not without their own set of challenges, movement-building approaches integrates the ends with the means, the struggle and its goals.
Thinkers and Linkers

Amanda described her efforts in not only encouraging more women to be “experts” but at the same time transforming what it means to be an expert. On the conference committee that attempted to get 50 per cent women speakers, committee members had to do extra work to get women to act as experts. At the same time that Amanda encouraged women to be “experts” she resisted acting as one herself when she was invited to speak in another city. Actions, which on the surface, may seem contradictory. When asked to do the “Martin Luther King thing” of delivering a rousing speech, she suggested instead an alternative approach. She told the event organizer that she would “do what he needed her to do” (including meeting their expectation that she act like the expert and deliver a speech). Based on the belief that the people attending the event had expertise to share, she suggested that instead of a speech she facilitate a discussion where the participants would be able to share with each other. When a local radio reporter interviewed her before the event, she skirted his questions when he wanted her to act as the expert. She remembers that the reporter had the puzzled look of “what, you don’t want to be the expert?”

These two approaches – encouraging women to be experts and not acting like an expert yourself – are not necessarily contradictory. A less transformative politics of pressure group or limited protest politics, might organize only around getting more women in the role of the expert (or politician or corporate leader). The data show that women in the sustainable transportation movement both push for more women in expert roles and, at the same time, resist the politics of expertise. Holistic politics practiced by women in the sustainable transportation movement are about not only claiming power, but transforming it.

Similarly, it can seem paradoxical that women continue to advance women’s strong linking and community development skills as this seems to play to the old “men as
thinkers/women as linkers” dualism. For example, Emily makes the clear link between women and the supportive roles they play within the movement:

I think there’s a very strong tendency in myself and in other women to do a lot of things that are very supportive – to pick up on other people’s initiatives and help them move forward without having to take them over.

This affirmation of the female side of the thinking/linking dichotomy is paradoxical only to those who think in linear terms. Integrative practice seeks to transcend the dualisms by affirming the female side, the linkers, as a tactical, not essentialist, strategy. Similarly with feminists who challenge the dualistic gender system of men/women initially by affirming one side – the female side – of the dichotomy as a necessary moment in social movement struggle. They affirm as they resist the category “women” (see Miles, 1996: xiii). In this case women are strategically transcending the thinkers/linkers dualism by initially affirming the linking side of the dichotomy. In this way they subvert old dualisms within their political practice in their efforts to affirm women.

The dialectical politics practiced by women also transcend the notion that dualisms are static opposites. By separating thinking from linking, one cannot recognize that each is constituted by the other; it suggests that linkers don’t think and that thinkers cannot link people together. This serves the purpose of reinforcing a dualistic, hierarchical, sexist system.

While his approach was probably to link people up and to pull them together and help them to gain their own confidence . . . he wasn’t seen as a linker, he was seen as a thinker. Women who do the same thing [are seen as linkers – “isn’t she nice to have brought all these great minds together”] . . . it’s like [they think] there’s no way if you’re a woman that you could have possibly done anything strategic (Amanda).

Dialectical politics resist the either/or division of the thinkers/linkers mindset and recognize that, indeed, thinkers should link and linkers should think.
Product and Process

The age old debate of product over process, results versus process, is well covered ground in most social movements. The dualism of product/process suggests that if you focus on process then you do this to the detriment of the product – if you advance ways of involving people and getting groups to work together, then the product is less well defined and the results are diminished.

Holistic, dialectical politics try to, as Moira described it, define results in a new way:

[These movement colleagues are] very results oriented, and I am to a certain extent too, but I see results in a different way. . . . The process of getting people working together has spun off to a bunch of other things.

The “results” people are often pitted against the “process” people, the process people accused of being too inclusive and thus slowing down the results. Instead, women advancing a politics of movement building have tried to turn this debate on its head by arguing that involving people actually speeds things up:

The thing that informed my thinking about this the most was when [Moira] explained the process of speeding things up by involving people at the beginning. I thought that was just a beautiful way of saying it because so often what women are accused of is being too slow – if you involve people you know how long it’s going to take (Amanda).

Similarly groups that are seen as being into process, can actually accomplish things faster than “results” groups. Miles (1996) describes women-defined organizations this way:

Although women’s groups are not always successful, many women seem to be less dependent on individual glory, more sensitive to the needs of others and less anxious for leadership roles than men. They seem more willing to do
the necessary humdrum tasks and to avoid time-consuming discussions whose only point appears to be for participants to hear their own voices (24).

Avoiding time-consuming discussions where the only point is for participants to hear their own voices is one of the things women clearly value in some of the organizations they are involved with:

I like that we don’t have to be engrossed in all that administrative stuff that we don’t get down to actually doing things . . . other board of directors [are] quite different [where people are there to use it as a stepping stone to go in to politics et cetera], to getting power for themselves . . . We seem to be able to attract a group of people who can just kind of go past some of that (Moira).

Moira gave an example of an organization she was on the board of where the “results” people from the larger environmental organizations were so anxious to get things happening that they rushed a hiring process which had a negative impact on the organization. The “results” people on the board argued to hire a man who presented himself as the “getting things going quickly” candidate:

In retrospect [he] was probably the worst choice we could ever make, for a whole bunch of reasons, but because he was totally not results or process oriented . . . He had a subtle way of directing everything himself and making it seem as if he was involving everybody else.

Dialectical approaches refuse to choose between product and process, and seek to integrate the two in practice. Yvonne gave this example:

[Let’s say a rally]: do you approach it as we want to have an impact on the government or we want to bring about this change? And do you focus on that or are you focussing on there’s so many changes we need to bring about? We need to build our movement, that grassroots approach, [so that] this rally or political action will have more than one purpose; it’s not just the purpose of hopefully making the papers but it’s also the purpose of getting people involved – all of us learning and sharing and, in that sense, broadening the movement.
In the case of Yvonne’s example of the rally, it's not the process over the product, instead it's the process and the product.

Upreach and Outreach

Seager’s (1993) research on the environmental movement makes the link between the male-defined culture of the movement and the tendency for a professionalized movement organizations to distance themselves from the grassroots membership. Participants observed evidence of this phenomenon of professionalization both within the sustainable transportation movement and within their own organizations. Emily had the experience of seeing gender and diversity issues sacrificed within her organization in favour of looking “credible” to the mainstream. Wendy differed with her employer, a larger environmental organization, about the effectiveness of grassroots action. She noted that larger environmental organizations don’t always see grassroots activities as “effective,” “valid,” or “professional.”

Yvonne expressed that she would like there to be more connections between the grassroots organizations, like her own which are involved mostly in “outreach” and the groups that are involved in lobbying, or “upreach.” She noted that the experience and diversity of the people in her grassroots organization could help the political lobbying of the more professionalized groups and, conversely, saw the process of being involved in political lobbying as being very beneficial to the people in her organization.

The so-called “policy people” didn’t recognize the connections between the upreach (lobbying) and the outreach and attempted to force a false distinction between the two:

I think the most frustrating part is that some people, like the policy people, make an assumption that if you want to do a movement then you have no idea about policy – the assumption that if you want to build a movement that you don’t want to affect policy, which is really ridiculous because the whole idea of building a movement is so that more people have the expertise to make
demands on policy. It's a very insulting and trivializing assumption. . . . There's a lack of understanding that building the movement informs the policy and that building the movement allows people to actually be involved in the process of making change for themselves. So when it comes down to this false dichotomy of policy versus movement it becomes very destructive because the movement people are forced in to arguing for movement against policy, which is ridiculous because movement people aren't against policy (Amanda).

Again, in this case we see that women are attempting to resist male-defined dualisms that pit outreach against outreach by arguing for the important reciprocal relationship between the two.

The Knower and the Known

The dualism of knower/known suggests that those who know and those who are known are static opposites, but dialectical politics recognize that the two are mutually constituted. As Paulo Freire said, “without practice there’s no knowledge” (Horton and Freire, 1990: 98). The general image of the “knower” advanced by industrial patriarchal society is the middle-aged white male. The politics of knower/known suggests that one person holds the knowledge, an individualistic approach to knowledge production. Myles Horton remembered an enlightening experience early in his political life when he realized he could get help from other people to solve a problem:

I found I could learn things from other people that up to that time I thought I had to work out for myself. . . . it started a new kind of practice for me, an appreciation of having the group make a contribution instead of me as an individual. . . . Instead of feeling less confident I felt more confident, and it didn’t make me feel like I was dependent. It made me feel more independent, because it was a constructive experience (Horton and Freire, 1990: 47).
Or as Moira described her approach to organizing a conference or bringing a group of people together:

I don’t feel I have any more knowledge about any of these issues than anyone else, that’s part of why I wanted a process of bringing different people together, it’s important to involve other people and it’s important because I don’t know enough to come up with these ideas all by myself.

Yvonne would like the movement to recognize its stereotype of the knower (the middle aged white male) and the privilege of this position in our society. The knower/known dichotomy has a subject/object split which objectifies society’s most marginal. Certain kinds of knowing are better understood by the people who directly experience it – people who have experienced poverty have an understanding of it that those who have not will never be able to fully understand. Similarly, though white people can understand racism, people from racial minority groups have a first hand experience of racist oppression.39

Yvonne works to broaden the movement by finding ways to include society’s most marginalized, a difficult but crucial project for a movement that is mostly white and middle class. As someone who is doing okay, socially and economically, Yvonne has a limited first hand understanding of the constraints of our transportation system:

So what I know about the real constraints of our transportation system I haven’t learned through my own experience, I’ve learned that through listening to other people.

She works to create opportunities for more inclusive spaces, for broadening the movement, and for “objects” to become the “subjects” of the movement through community participation and action.

39 The recognition of the increased understanding of power that comes with oppression is called epistemic privilege.
Leaders and the Led

The practice of holistic politics blurs the distinction between the leaders and the led, refusing the dichotomy. Kate sees women in the movement as particularly skilled at defusing dualisms:

There's the people who are obviously the action people who seem to be able to get everyone, a lot of different groups, together doing things and people flock to them and use them as resources. And then there's the other side to it, when things are actually being done there's no real leader, the person who has set everything down, they've got the action plan set together, they're sort of the leaders on that and then when things are being done the leadership is sort of given up and they just become part of the group of people who get things going and work together.

At the end of the discussions between Myles Horton and Paulo Freire (1990) in We Make the Road by Walking, Horton quotes Taoist writer, Lao Tzu who said back in 604 B.C., “But the best leaders when the job is done, when the task is accomplished, the people will all say we have done it ourselves” (248). Horton spoke of his experience in creating the Citizenship Schools in the south with the Highlander Center. The concept spread around the south and he remembers meeting a woman on a back country road who told him she was a teacher, a Citizenship School teacher, and asked Horton if he knew what that was. “Tell us,” Horton said. She said: “Well, you know I started this. This is my idea” and described the Citizenship School. Horton asked, “Do you think anybody else knows about this idea?” She said, “No, but they will.” That is when Horton felt the program was successful, when this woman had taken the idea and internalized it, when it was no longer owned by one organization (Horton and Freire, 1990: 80).

One of the tensions in social movement practice is around recognition. If you are a good leader no one will know it, your work will be invisible, you will not own it – but others will. This is a key issue for people who work in community organizing and need to pay the
rent and feed their children: when it comes to getting paid work, unseen and unrecognized work can be a disadvantage.

I realized that [those movement people] . . . didn’t know the kinds of work I had done. A lot of the work I had done was really unseen and unrecognized. So, it makes you feel not like doing as much of that kind of work which I think is very helpful work for the movement as a whole (Emily).

There is a tension between doing work that is very useful in movement building but is unseen, unrecognized work and therefore, playing a more high profile role may be more useful in building your career than in building the movement.

At the organizational level as well, the focus on recognition often works against doing things that are constructive to movement-building.

Some of the bigger environmental groups [including my own] are leery of having their thunder stolen by putting a lot of effort into the work of small grassroots groups and I think that attitude on the part of my employer is really unfortunate . . . that you do not fritter away your energies in the work of coalitions that will not bear the name [of our organization] because we cannot afford that you spend your time doing such things (Wendy).

The tension between public recognition and the need for the often unseen work of social change sees movement organizations protecting their turf and leaning towards self-promotion instead of transformation.

It’s like using the same old techniques of having your own little pocket of money and doing your own thing and not looking at how we can do things more effectively by doing them together (Moira).

The data show that this dynamic is very much at work within the sustainable transportation movement. Women with holistic approaches are trying to transcend the organizational turf wars and build projects where organizations do come together.
I’m trying to say that you could both make bigger turf if you got together on this (Amanda).

Centralization and Decentralization

Within the dichotomy of centralization/decentralization, dialectical politics transcend this dualism as they work to create a multi-centred movements. In doing this, they resist false choices between structurelessness and hierarchy. Moira described the balance between centralization and decentralization at her organization and within the broader movement:

We could be more systematic and get a lot more done in some ways, but then maybe we would lose the enthusiasm – we have to find a balance.

Emily contrasted two coalitions she was involved in, one using a centralized model and one that works in a more decentralized way. She noted that in the more decentralized group there were more opportunities for women to participate:

[The one coalition] seems to be more of a hierarchical model, a more formal and less empowering kind of model. . . . whereas [with the other coalition] there’s a consciousness within that organization of wanting to make sure that women have a voice.

There is a tension within the movement between the pressure to increase effectiveness by having a well-developed strategy and the need to keep the agenda open enough to bring in new people, new ideas, and not have an over-controlling group.

In relative terms I’m really pleased about the transportation movement because of it’s willingness to embrace inclusive process and . . . not have one controlling group (Amanda).
And as women with holistic approaches resist the inclusion-versus-hierarchy debate they move forward with their attempts to build a multi-centred movement, where diversity is a strength and resource, not a weakness.

Conclusion

Even though public dialogue on women or holistic politics within Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement is absent (except for at the individual level between women), the data show that women are, in fact, practicing holistic, transformative politics within their movement work. Much of women’s concern for their recognition and influence is expressed as concern for building and maintaining better politics and affecting substantive social change.

The dominant political culture of the movement is, in part, shaped by the undertow of male-defined culture that exists within the movement. Women are developing holistic practice and politics in spite of the ongoing influence of male-defined norms and the movement’s general reluctance to value the importance of outreach, open agendas, openness to new ideas and people, and cultural difference. Holistic politics demonstrate that a project is very much a part of the people involved and must build on people’s strengths and interests; and the importance of having fun in the process. As well, these politics open up the possibilities for dialogue on women’s participation and perspectives.

In their efforts to build a multi-centred, diverse movement, women are attempting to transcend the male-defined dualisms of ends and means; thinkers and linkers; leaders and led; knower and known; product and process; and centralization and decentralization in ways that strengthen both the transformative politics of the movement and women’s recognition and power within the movement. Recognizing the importance of women, the holistic politics they practice, and the diversity and grassroots activity they value, opens up opportunities to strengthen the transformative politics of Toronto’s sustainable transportation movement.
Appendix A – Letter to Participants

July 6, 1994

Dear

I am a graduate student in the department of Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. This letter outlines my M.A. thesis project in which I hope you will agree to be a participant. I am interested in studying the dialogue on gender, process and holistic politics within urban social movements, with a focus on the sustainable transportation movement in Toronto. Part of the research for this study involves my interviewing approximately eight women who are/have been active in this movement and you have been recommended to me as one of these participants.

I would like to conduct a tape recorded interview with you for about one hour. In that interview I will ask you about your experiences working in the sustainable transportation movement. The interview questionnaire will be made available to you prior to the interview, should you wish to read it over in advance. I will transcribe the tape of the interview and I will analyze it along with the transcriptions of the other interviews. Then, I would like to interview you again for about half an hour. In the second interview I would like you to comment on the transcription of the first interview (adding or changing anything you like).

After about three months, I will invite you to a roundtable discussion with all of the participants in the study at which I will present the preliminary findings of my research and ask for feedback from you. This meeting is optional – you can still be a participant in the study and choose not to attend the group discussion. All meetings will be scheduled at your convenience. In addition, any child care or transportation costs incurred from participation in this research project will be reimbursed. After its completion, I will provide you with a written summary of the study.

I am not interested in evaluating your work, values or perspectives. I want to know what you think are the barriers (and the opportunities) to advance a dialogue on gender, process and holistic politics within the sustainable transportation movement. I hope that what is learned from this project will be useful in the work of the participants as well as to the groups and organizations of the movement.

Please understand that your name, the names of others you mention and names of any organizations you discuss will be disguised in all data. The final report will be written, as far as possible, to disguise the identity of yourself, others and any organizations. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you do, I will consult with you about what you would like me to do with the data I have collected from you. Only myself and my thesis supervisor
will have access to the raw data. In addition to being used as thesis research, this data may be included in future published write-ups of the research findings.

Thank you for considering this request for your participation in my research study. I would be pleased to discuss this further with you, my telephone number is ---------. I will contact you in the near future to confirm/decline your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Lisa Caton
M.A. Candidate

Reply requested (below)
July, 1994

Dear Lisa:

I have read your letter of July 4, 1994 describing the thesis research you plan to do on the sustainable transportation movement in Toronto. I agree to participate. It is clear to me that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that I will have the opportunity to remove or edit any data in my interview transcript.

Signature: ________________________________

Name: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________

Sorry, I am unable to participate in the study ____ (check here).

Name: ________________________________
Appendix B – Semi Structured Interview Questionnaire

Distributed in advance of the interview to participants who were interested in seeing the questions in advance.

Introduction to the study:

I am interested in women’s experiences and impressions of working within the sustainable transportation movement in Toronto. This study investigates the barriers and supports in the movement to advance a dialogue on process, holistic politics, transformative visions and gender politics. It is my hope that this research will contribute to research on social movements in general as well as to the work of the participants and to the further development of the movement. In this interview I hope you will reflect and draw upon on your experiences in the movement, using as many examples as you wish to illustrate your points.

Interview questions:

1. What has been your involvement in the sustainable transportation movement?

2. Have you ever felt isolated in the work you are doing?

3. Can you think of any times when you have felt that your perspective or your work has been trivialized, undervalued and/or marginalized?

4. Do you remember any times when you have felt frustrated, saddened or disappointed by the direction and/or dialogues of transportation groups?

5. Can you think of any particular examples of when you have felt that your perspective and your work has been valued, supported and/or promoted?

6. What are the groups and/or people of the movement with whom you feel the most comfortable and supported?

7. How have the transportation groups you are involved with dealt with issues of process, coalition politics and gender politics?

8. What is your perspective on the role of leadership within the movement?

9. What do you like best about being involved in the sustainable transportation movement?

10. Are there any issues you would like to raise that haven’t already been touched upon?
[Asked by researcher at end of interview – after asking permission of interviewee. Not distributed in advance.]

**Validation** (for researcher bias):

1. How have you experienced me?
2. How free have you felt to express your own thoughts and feelings?
3. At any time during the interview did you feel that I expected a certain answer or that there was a right or wrong answer implied by the question?
4. What additional feedback would you like to give me about this interview?

**Background**: Date of Birth; Country of Birth (when moved to Canada); First language; Occupation(s)
Appendix C – Follow Up Letter to Participants

March 15, 1996

Dear

In summer, 1994 you took part in interview research for my study of the sustainable transportation movement in Toronto. This study is a thesis, the final part of my M.A. degree at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (O.I.S.E.). Enclosed are my notes from our discussion for your review.

I hope you will take the time to review the enclosed interview transcript. As outlined in my earlier correspondence, your name has been replaced with a code, as have the organizations and individuals we spoke about. If you have any difficulty making out the codes, please phone me and we can go through the notes together.

Last year, I took a year off from my studies to work with the Community Economic Development (CED) Secretariat; one of the projects I worked on was related to our work on sustainable transportation as it focused on CED and sustainable transportation. For this reason, my thesis is a year behind schedule and my timeline for completion is now fall, 1996.

Later this year I will invite you to a roundtable discussion with all of the participants in the study at which I will present the preliminary findings of my research and ask for feedback from you. This meeting is optional – you can still be a participant in the study and choose not to attend the group discussion.

I would like to thank you very much for your participation in this study so far, your reflections and insights at our interview have made this a very rewarding project. If you have any additional comments or reflections on what we spoke about at our interview, please call me at ---------.

Yours, &tc.,

Lisa Caton
M.A. Candidate
References


