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WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL UNION LEADERSHIP: THE MASSACHUSETTS EXPERIENCE

DALE MELCHER, JENNIFER L. EICHSTEDT, SHELLEY ERIKSEN,
and DAN CLAWSON*

A 1989 survey of leaders of a sample of Massachusetts AFL-CIO-affiliated union locals indicates that although women are represented in these union locals' leadership in numbers nearly proportional to the female percentage of membership, they are under-represented in the most influential positions. Women are over-represented as secretaries and seriously under-represented as presidents; they chair many committees, but rarely the key grievance or negotiations committees. Minority women appear to be even more under-represented in leadership positions than are white women. Both male and female union leaders said they would like to see more women in leadership, but most of the men did not seem to view the need for more female leaders as urgent, since they indicated that women's issues were adequately represented by male leaders.

WOMEN continue to be seriously under-represented at the top levels of union leadership, despite an increase in

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Copies of the questionnaire and data are available from Dan Clawson, Department of Sociology, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003.

the female proportion of unionized workers. Only three of the 35 members of the AFL-CIO Executive Council are women, and only three AFL-CIO international unions have a female president (the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union, the Association of Flight Attendants, and Actors Equity). Despite growing awareness of the need for more women in leadership positions, the increase over the past decade in the number of women who hold national union office is far from dramatic. Some evidence suggests, however, that the increase in the representation of female officers at the regional or local level has outpaced that at the national level, holding hope for future increase at the national leadership level.

Although there have been a number of case studies of women in local unions, our understanding of the nature and scope of women's participation at the local level is still far from complete, and the subject merits further investigation for several reasons. First, the presence of female

officers quite likely benefits female union members. The contract is often negotiated, and usually administered and enforced, at the local level. Women's participation in these activities affects policies concerning such issues as sexual harassment, child care, and pay equity, and the presence of women in leadership stimulates greater union involvement by rank-and-file women (Heery and Kelly 1988). Additionally, as Needleman (1988) argues, women's participation at all levels of union activity and decision-making has the potential to strengthen the movement toward more internal union democracy, more rank-and-file involvement, and social activism within unions. Second, local leadership positions are a common route to national office. Women's rise to key local union offices, and acquisition of the needed skills and contacts in the process, shape future avenues to national leadership positions (Gray 1989; Koziara, Bradley, and Pierson 1982; Nelson 1989; Wertheimer and Nelson 1975).

The data employed in this study, derived from a survey of leaders of AFL-CIO-affiliated union locals, provide the most complete and current picture to date of the participation of women in local union leadership. Massachusetts is a good site for such a survey because it has a broad range of union settings, ranging from occupations with a long history of unionization to a large number of more recently unionized jobs in education, health care, and government service. We investigate not only the relative number of women in leadership positions, but the nature of those positions as well. We also report local union leaders' perceptions of specific barriers to women's participation in local leadership.

Previous Research

The Bureau of Labor Statistics ceased collecting official statistics on women's participation in unions in the early 1980s, making it difficult to accurately gauge the number of women who hold national and local leadership offices or the rate at which that number has been changing over the

past decade. Berquist (1974) analyzed BLS data for the years 1952–72 and concluded that although women had significantly increased their membership in unions, there had been little corresponding increase in their representation in higher elected or appointed positions. Baden (1986), in a study of 15 national unions and 2 national associations, found little significant change in female representation on these national governing boards between 1979 and 1985. Furthermore, of the 15 national unions, she found that only 5 were significantly committed to allocating the union's time and financial resources to women's issues.

Previous research has developed much more complete information on women's participation at the national level than at the local level, although fragmentary data indicate that women's participation is greater at the local level (Baden 1986; Berquist 1974; LeGrande 1978; Glassberg, Baden, and Gerstel 1980). Baden (1986) focused primarily on the situation of women in national leadership, but she found scattered evidence to suggest women's greater participation at the local level, particularly in public sector unions and in associations that have female majorities and engage in collective bargaining, such as the American Nurses Association and the National Education Association. Given the limited and provisional nature of Baden's data on locals, we are still left with no clear picture of what positions women hold at the local level, in what numbers, and under what conditions.

Chaison and Andiappan's (1982, 1983, 1987, 1989) research on Canadian national and local unions represents the most systematic work available on women in union leadership. Their initial research agenda was twofold: to determine the characteristics of female leaders and their unions, and to explore the explanations offered by officers for the low level of women's involvement in national unions. In their sample of female national officers, women were more likely to be presidents (26.3%), vice-presidents (28.8%), or "others" (a category that included positions such as director, re-

gional coordinator, and general chairperson) than secretaries, treasurers, or secretary-treasurers (18.8%) (Chaison and Andiappan 1982:768). In their follow-up survey of local union officers, however, they found women more likely to be secretaries, secretary-treasurers, or treasurers, and less likely to be union presidents. Those who were union presidents tended to come from the smallest locals, and from locals with a large proportion of female members (1987:282).

National union female officers in Canada emphasized a number of barriers to women's full participation in the union. Among these were women's double duty at home and work and their lack of confidence and training (Chaison and Andiappan 1983). These personal and family-related barriers were also identified by local union officers in a later study (Chaison and Andiappan 1989); although a range of barriers was specified in the questionnaire, respondents stressed individualistic or personal factors and downplayed institutional barriers.

Chaison and Andiappan's research is a valuable contribution, but the political context in which Canadian unions operate is significantly different from that in the United States. Moreover, although the researchers believe their results are generalizable to the United States given similarities between the two countries' union traditions, structures, and governance, Canadian unions may differ from U.S. unions *vis-à-vis* female workers.

There are several important case studies of women in local leadership in the United States that laid the foundation for work to follow. In 1972, Wertheimer and Nelson began a three-part study examining barriers to women's participation in local unions in New York City. They obtained information from union leaders on the number of leadership positions held by women, and they compared leaders' explanations for women's relative underrepresentation with the views of union rank-and-file members. Their research focused on women's lack of confidence in managing union responsibilities. The authors urged greater use of labor education

programs, on the grounds that training would impart the skills and confidence necessary for higher office (Wertheimer and Nelson 1975; Nelson 1989).

Studies by Roby (1987), Roby and Uttal (1988), and Lawrence (1989) on union stewards offer a more contemporary examination of the concerns and experiences of women in local leadership. Because service as a steward is a common pathway to higher-level union positions, and because stewards play a key role in contract administration (see, for example, Cook 1984), the problems and perspectives of union stewards might illustrate the initial obstacles to early leadership experiences.

In a small and non-random sample of northern California union locals, Roby and Uttal (1988) found women were under-represented as union stewards. Once elected or appointed, male and female shop stewards had similar rates of participation, as measured by (1) union meetings attended, (2) other union positions held, and (3) participation in union activities. On a fourth measure, doing steward work outside of work hours, women had a significantly lower participation rate. Women's union activity was frequently constrained by family responsibilities, and often caused family conflict (Roby and Uttal 1988). Spousal support of union activities was a significant issue for female stewards, and many developed innovative, individualized strategies for managing their "triple duty" in job, family, and union work (Roby 1987).

A study by Lawrence (1989) of shop stewards in a large, public sector, white-collar union in Great Britain explored the influence of gender and occupation on union activism. Lawrence found significant differences between the situations of female and male shop stewards that might help to explain the underrepresentation of women as shop stewards in the local she studied. Male shop stewards tended to conduct their union business on work time, experiencing greater conflict between union and work demands and less conflict with home responsibilities. Female stewards tended to conduct union business

more frequently on their own time, resulting in greater conflict with family and personal time. Overall, men's jobs tended to support their union activity to a greater extent than women's jobs supported theirs.

Some studies not mentioned above have made valuable contributions to the subject of our investigation but differ from ours in that they were based primarily on anecdotal evidence, were case studies of particular unions, or were not exclusively concerned with women (Bell 1984; Bookman 1988; Gray 1989; Hoyman and Stallworth 1987; Sacks 1988). Wertheimer and Nelson's (1975) classic study of local unions was based on a limited number of locals in New York City and its data are now almost 20 years old. Baden (1986) employed recent and fairly complete data on national leadership for 15 unions, but severely limited data for unions at the local and regional level. Roby (1987) conducted three-hour interviews with stewards, but the trade-off for such thorough exploration is very limited sample size. Lawrence's (1989) study is of a single, white-collar local in Great Britain, and the applicability of her findings to United States locals is still to be tested. Chaison and Andiappan's research is the most comparable to ours, but it focuses on Canada rather than on the United States. Not since Wertheimer and Nelson's 1975 study has women's representation in the local leadership of U.S. unions been systematically examined.

The Survey

Our own interest in collecting both demographic and attitudinal data for Massachusetts unions dovetailed with the agendas of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO State Labor Council and the Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD), an educational project jointly sponsored by the Massachusetts AFL-CIO, the greater Boston chapter of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), and the labor education programs at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, the University of Massachusetts-Boston, and Southeastern Massachusetts University.

Since 1987 WILD has conducted a week-end-long leadership development school for women actively involved in Massachusetts local unions. WILD and its sponsoring organizations needed reliable data on the extent and nature of women's local leadership participation to help reach potential participants, develop a base-line picture of women in leadership from which to assess progress in developing women as leaders, provide information to existing unions about training needs, and approach outside funding agencies for support for additional programming.¹

The Massachusetts AFL-CIO cooperated with all phases of the study: sample selection, questionnaire review, mailing and implementation, and review of results. Because the survey is intended in part for use in a second-phase project involving more intensive study of selected locals, and because our aim was to include a high proportion of all union members in the state, we intentionally over-sampled large locals and those with a high percentage of female members. In the spring of 1989, a total of 202 surveys were mailed to Massachusetts AFL-CIO-affiliated locals: 50 identified by knowledgeable observers as the largest locals in the state, 48 additional locals identified as having a predominantly female membership, and 104 selected randomly from the approximately 500 remaining locals.

As there is no publicly available, up-to-date list of union locals and leaders in Massachusetts, we used the Massachusetts AFL-CIO's list of local unions affiliated with the state federation. Because of the constraints imposed by the AFL-CIO's commitment to confidentiality, we worked with their list in the confines of their offices, and were not able to retain a copy of the list for our own reference. Mailings were sent from and returned directly to AFL-CIO headquarters. Accompanying the survey was a cover letter signed by Arthur Osborn, President, and Robert Haynes, Secretary-Treasurer, of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO. Surveys were mailed

¹ For a detailed discussion of WILD, see Gooding and Reeve (1990).

to the AFL-CIO contact names, usually the president, secretary, or treasurer. The accompanying letter was addressed to the president of the local.

The survey was designed and implemented following the Total Design Method outlined by Dillman (1978).² Ninety-four surveys were returned, for a 46.5% response rate. We believed the response rate for active locals was significantly higher, because a number of surveys were sent to apparently inactive locals.³ Despite the difficulties of working with a restricted list of union locals, our response rate was comparable to rates obtained in previous research (for example, Wertheimer and Nelson [1975]—55.5%; and Chaison and Andiappan [1982; 1987; 1989]—22–23%).

Local Characteristics

The responding union locals represent a broad cross-section of organized labor in Massachusetts. Almost half report 500 or more members, and three out of four have over 100. Forty percent have very few female members, but more than one in ten are predominantly (at least 75%) female.⁴ In a little over one-third of the

locals, racial and ethnic minorities are less than 5% of the membership, whereas in over one-fourth they represent more than 20%. In more than three-quarters of the locals, minority women constitute less than 10% of the membership. The locals are fairly evenly divided between the public and private sectors. A little over one-half of the locals represent workers in service industries, and the others are in more traditionally unionized industries, such as garments and textiles, manufacturing, transportation, and construction.⁵

The percentage of female members varies with commonly identified factors such as industry, sector, and the year the local was established. The type of work union members do makes a difference. Of the 43 locals representing maintenance and production workers, 47% have one-third or more female members, compared to 61.5% of the 39 locals doing professional, clerical, and service work. One in seven of the locals established in 1929 or earlier, but nearly two-thirds of those established after 1950, have one-third or more female members. Surprisingly, we found little difference between the public and private sectors: in 46.9% of private sector unions, 52.8% of public sector unions, and 36.4% of unions representing members in both the public and private sectors, one-third or more of the members are women. Private sector unions are more likely to have memberships that are at least two-thirds female.

Unionized minority women are concentrated primarily in the public sector and service work, particularly health care. Three of the five locals in which minority

² An initial mailing was followed in one week by a postcard reminder, three weeks later by a new letter and second survey to those who had not responded, and seven weeks later by a third letter and survey to those who had still not responded. Dillman suggests that the third mailing be sent by certified mail; we did not do so both for reasons of cost and to avoid annoying local union officials.

³ Although we do not have a copy of the list of locals we surveyed (since all work was done in the Massachusetts AFL-CIO office), many of the surveys were sent to addresses out of state, and in many cases multiple copies of the survey were sent to a single address with a single contact person. We believe that a substantial number of those locals are no longer active, or never received the survey. If such locals were eliminated, our response rate would probably be closer to 55%.

⁴ In our sample, large locals are much more likely than small locals to have memberships that are at least one-third female. In locals with fewer than 250 members, only 24% (9 out of 37) had one-third or more female members; in locals with more than 500 members, 72% percent (28 out of 39) had one-third or more female members. Minorities as well as women are more likely to be found in large than in small locals, but the size of the local is not as strongly

related to the proportion of minorities as to the proportion of women.

⁵ Because we intentionally over-sampled large locals and those believed to have high proportions of female members, our sample cannot be taken as representative of the "average" Massachusetts local. Most union members in Massachusetts, however, are in large locals (Massachusetts AFL-CIO information). Thus, our sample probably is a roughly representative portrait of the average member's local in Massachusetts. The characteristics of the population of all locals in Massachusetts are unknown, however, so it is impossible to determine to what extent our data accurately represent all locals.

women constitute 50% or more of the members are in health care, and the other two are in manufacturing and communication. Twenty locals reported no minority women, 36 reported up to 15%, and 15 reported between 25% and 90%. All 17 locals reporting greater than 10% minority women in the membership have at least 35% female members, and most are large locals with more than 500 members.

Women in Top Level Leadership

The simplest and most basic indicators of women's involvement in local leadership are quite encouraging. In the locals that responded to our survey, women constitute 32.4% of members and 28.2% of the top four elected officers. Thus, relative to their rank-and-file presence, women are somewhat under-represented in local union leadership; but they fare much better at the local level than at the national level, in this respect. (See Table 1.) The under-representation of minorities is much more marked: minorities account for 18.7% of the membership of local unions, but only 7.6% of (the top four elected) officers; and for minority women the figures are 10.1% and 3.8%, respectively. The same pattern emerges for stewards and members of executive boards: the percentage of women in these positions approximates the percentage of women in the rank-and-file membership, but minorities are seriously under-represented.⁶

When we examine the *kinds* of offices held by women in the locals we surveyed, however, our conclusions about relative equality must be qualified considerably. Union offices vary in influence, power, and

potential for advancement; a concentration of women in relatively marginal positions indicates limited progress. In the locals responding to our survey, the distribution of women among the top four elected offices is uneven. Although women hold 28% of all union offices, they are 14% of local presidents, 25% of vice-presidents, 27% of treasurers, and 51% of secretaries. Women are substantially over-represented as secretaries and under-represented as presidents.

The percentage of female members is by far the best predictor of the percentage of female officers, with a correlation of .73. The other factors examined were union growth, growth in the number of female members, the year the local was established, the percentage of minority members, the size of the local, the wage level of the members, the percentage of members attending meetings, and public versus private sector. None of these factors was correlated at a level of .35 or higher with the percentage of female officers.

Despite the high correlation between the percentage of women members and the percentage of female officers, half of the variance in the latter remains unexplained. It may be that women are over-represented in locals with a majority of female members and under-represented among officers in locals with a minority of female members; that is, they may need to reach some "tipping point" in the general membership before they can gain access to leadership positions. To test that possibility, we repeated our analysis of women in leadership looking separately at locals with differing proportions of female members (Table 2). We excluded locals with no women and used four categories for the remaining locals: those with less than 10% female members, those with 10–39.9% women, those with 40–59.9% women, and those with 60% or more women.

As Table 2 indicates, contrary to the hypothesis, women are over-represented in leadership in locals with very *few* women, and are under-represented in the leadership of every other kind of local. In locals with less than 10% female members,

⁶ Unions were asked to report on all elected positions. We have included in our analysis the four offices for which information was reported by at least 50 locals: president, vice-president, treasurer, and secretary. When respondents listed more than one vice-president or secretary, we used the information given for the first person listed.

We do not discuss business agents because only 45 locals provided information on that office, and the term "Business Agent" appears to have been interpreted differently by different locals.

Table 1. Women and Minorities as a Percentage of All Members and of Officials in Massachusetts Union Locals, 1989.

<i>Description</i>	<i>All Women</i>	<i>All Minorities^a (Male and Female)</i>	<i>Minority Women</i>
All Members	32.4	18.7	10.1
Total for Top Four Elected Positions			
President	28.2	7.6	3.8
Vice-president	14.1	5.4	3.3
Treasurer	25.0	8.0	2.3
Secretary	26.7	7.0	2.3
Stewards	50.7	10.7	8.0
E-Boards ^c	31.4	13.3	N.A. ^b
	35.7	11.2	N.A.

^a "Minorities" includes African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and "other."

^b Due to length and space limitations, the survey did not request information on the proportion of stewards and executive board members who were minority women.

^c There were more missing data for these positions than for the top four elected offices. We presume that some locals do not have E-boards. In addition, some respondents may have been unsure of the exact figures and skipped the question rather than provide their best estimate.

women are 3.2% of members and 10.7% of top elected officers; in contrast, at the other end of the range, in locals with 60% or more female members, women are 79.1% of members but only 69.4% of top officers. This finding is counter-intuitive, and we have no good explanation for it. Note, however, that because of the small numbers involved, even a single female officer has a noticeable impact on the results for locals with very small female memberships. Eight of the nine female officers in those locals, moreover, are secretaries or treasurers.

The four categories of union locals differ significantly in terms of the kinds of offices held by women. Although in all categories women are over-represented as secretaries and under-represented as presidents, a tipping point is evident in the offices of president and vice-president. With but one exception—a female president of a local with a membership that is only 5% female—every female president and vice-president is in a local containing at least 40% female members. The average female president represents a local with 66.9% female members; the average

Table 2. Women as a Percentage of Local Members and of Local Union Officers by Gender Composition of Local, 1989.

<i>Description</i>	<i>Locals with 0.1–9.9% Female Members</i>	<i>Locals with 10–39.9% Female Members</i>	<i>Locals with 40–59.9% Female Members</i>	<i>Locals with 60–100% Female Members</i>
Members	3.2	24.1	45.6	79.1
Top Four Elected Positions	10.7	17.0	35.2	69.4
President	4.3	0.0	12.5	52.9
Vice-President	0.0	0.0	34.8	81.2
Treasurer	18.2	21.4	31.8	53.3
Secretary	23.5	50.0	68.4	92.9
Stewards	5.3	9.2	30.5	66.5
E-Board	5.0	16.1	31.8	73.5
Number of Locals	23	14	24	17

Note: Six locals that did not report the percentage of women in the local and ten others that reported no female members are omitted from this table.

female vice-president, a local with 49.1% female members.

Stewards and Committee Chairs

Two influential leadership positions within the local union besides those of the top four elected officers are steward and committee chair. Each leadership position in the union derives authority and power from differing functions. Alice Cook's (1962) classic analysis of the dual structure of union government posits two systems of governance within unions: (1) elected officers and an executive board govern intra-union affairs, and (2) stewards and the grievance committee are concerned with employer relations and the collective bargaining agreement. Cook argues that in U.S. unions power accrues to those who negotiate and administer the contract—a view that puts union stewards and negotiating and grievance committee chairs at center stage, alongside the local president.

Because the terms and enforcement of the collective bargaining agreement significantly affect women's working conditions, stewards and negotiating and grievance committee chairs can influence how unions address the most pressing concerns of women in the work force. Stewards in particular can significantly affect the daily employment experience of female workers, and the position of steward is a good locus from which to develop a power base within the union.

Because of the importance to union women of the steward position, the percentage of female stewards relative to the proportion of union members who are women is a significant indicator of women's inroads into local union leadership. Again, our data show that the female proportion of stewards is nearly the same as the female proportion of rank-and-file members (31.4% and 32.4%, respectively; see Table 1). Also as before, however, this ratio varies among groups of locals classed by female percentage of membership (Table 2). In all but the first category (0.1–9.9%), women are even more under-represented as stewards than they are in

the top four elected offices. Even in locals where women constitute a clear majority of the membership (60–100%), they hold fewer steward positions (66.5%) than would be expected based on their membership (79.1%).

The findings for committee chairs echo those for the four top elected offices. Women chaired 23.5% of the 268 committees listed by our survey respondents; but chairs of committees providing visibility, access to information, and contact with other union leaders were substantially less likely to be occupied by women. For example, women chaired 100% of the women's committees, 57% of the education committees, and 35% of the publicity committees, but only 7% of negotiation committees and 5.6% of grievance committees. Again, women appear to have been largely excluded from influential contract bargaining and administrative positions. (See Table 3.)

Table 3. Committee Chairs of Massachusetts Union Locals, by Gender, 1989.

Committee	Number of Locals with Committee	Percentage of Committee Chairs Who Are Women
Negotiations	58	6.9
Grievance	54	5.6
Health and Safety	37	8.1
Education	21	57.1
COPE	20	10.0
Publicity	20	35.0
Women's Committee	14	100.0
Affirmative Action	10	20.0
Other	34 ^a	47.1
TOTAL	268	23.5
Total number of minority committee chairs for all committees in all locals ^b (10.4% of all committee chairs)		
	28	

^a The survey contained space for locals to list two additional ("other") committees. Some locals listed two "other" committees, some one, and some none.

^b Due to space limitations, the survey did not request separate information on race for each committee. We did, however, ask for the total number of minorities serving as chairs in all committees combined.

Minority Women in Union Leadership

Minorities, whether men or women, are seriously under-represented in the top four leadership positions.⁷ Not surprisingly, minority women are significantly less likely than other women to hold these positions. Table 1 shows that minority women constitute only 3.8% of all the top four elected officials in our sample. These 13 minority women are all in eight locals, five of which are in the health care industry and all of which have memberships with at least 15% minority women (data not shown in the tables). In our sample, three presidents, two vice-presidents, two treasurers, and six secretaries are minority women. The only three minority female officers not in health care locals are secretaries in a manufacturing local, a broadcast local, and a local representing phone company workers. Six of the thirteen minority female officers are found in only two locals. In one large local in which 90% of the members are minority women, all four top elected officers are minority women, and in another large local (with more than 1000 members) the president and vice-president are minority women. All three minority female presidents head large health care locals with memberships that are at least 40% minority women and 50% women.

In seven other locals, minority women constitute at least 25% of the membership but hold no elected offices. Minority women reportedly make up 50% of the membership in two of these locals, 30% in two others, and 25% in the remaining three. Only one of these locals has fewer than 500 members, and only one (with a membership that is 40% female) has fewer than 50% female members.

Views of Local Leaders

In addition to assessing women's access

⁷ The survey instrument was not structured to obtain the data that would be needed for a thorough analysis of the leadership experience of minority women. Nonetheless, because we are interested in this subject and because very little has been published on it, we attempt to draw some qualified conclusions from our limited data.

to leadership positions, our survey also asked respondents to indicate their perceptions of the level of and reasons for women's and men's participation in the union. Previous studies have suggested that women's participation in union leadership is limited not only by structural disadvantages such as job segregation, women's greater responsibility for household and family, and times and locations of union meetings, but also by attitudinal biases of both union leaders and members (Wertheimer and Nelson 1975; Chaison and Andiappan 1989).

In evaluating these data, it is important to remember that all of the 94 respondents are leaders in their own locals and 66 of them are men.⁸ Therefore, if there are locals in which significant numbers of women wish to be active but are hindered from doing so, those women will not be responding to this survey and their views are not likely represented. A complete analysis will require a survey of local union members (the second phase of our project), in order to compare their responses to those of their leaders. The attitudes of local leaders, however, provide some interesting and suggestive findings.

Table 4 shows that with regard to women's participation in union leadership, virtually all respondents—women as much as men—agree that “our local has made an effort to encourage more participation by women in the local” and that “more women should take initiative in pursuing leadership positions.” Three out of four of both male and female respondents agree that “the union should do more to help women enter leadership positions.” A similar proportion agrees that “the local *leadership* wants to see more women in leadership positions,” although in this case men are 11% more likely than women to agree. (See Table 4.) Thus, there is a high level of agreement that

⁸ Of the 94 respondents, there were 30 presidents, 2 vice-presidents, 14 secretaries, 15 secretary-treasurers, 3 treasurers, 6 business agents, and 16 other officers. Eight respondents did not indicate an office held.

Table 4. Attitudes of Local Union Leaders, by Gender of Respondent, 1989.

Survey Statement	Percent Agreeing	
	Men (N = 66) ^a	Women (N = 24) ^a
<i>Efforts by Locals</i>		
Our local has made an effort to encourage more participation by women in the local.	89	92
The local leadership wants to see more women in leadership positions.	81	70
The union should do more to help women enter leadership positions.	76	74
<i>Level of Women's Participation</i>		
There are not enough women in elected leadership positions in your local.	67	30*
There are not enough women in appointed leadership positions in your local.	42	27*
<i>Barriers to Women's Participation</i>		
More women should take initiative in pursuing leadership positions.	98	95
Women who are single parents have difficulty paying for babysitters so they can attend union activities.	68	68
Most women have less time than men have for union activities because of homemaking and childcare responsibilities.	58	70
Women have more difficulties attending union activities in the evenings or directly after work.	48	59
The families of many men do not support their involvement with the union.	50	40
The families of many women do not support their involvement with the union.	55	52
Most women are less interested in the union than men are because their main commitment is to family.	40	58
More women than men use any extra time they have to do volunteer work in their community, schools, church, or synagogue.	30	59**
Women feel less competent to assume leadership roles.	36	52
<i>Male Leaders</i>		
Women's concerns are accurately represented by male union leaders.	63	27**
The union is run by an informal circle of men who do not encourage women's participation.	15	26

^a Four respondents did not report their gender.

* Difference between men and women statistically significant at the .05 level; ** at the .01 level.

unions should incorporate women and that they are making an effort to do so, but that accomplishing this goal will require more from the locals and from female union members.

Half of the female respondents are in locals in which women hold at least two out of four officer positions. This fact helps explain a somewhat counter-intuitive finding: male respondents are much more likely than women to agree that there are not enough women in *elected* leadership positions (67% versus 30%), and are somewhat more likely to agree that there are not enough women in *appointed* leadership positions (42% versus 27%). Further, male respondents believe women face greater barriers in gaining

access to elected positions than they do in gaining appointed positions (67% versus 42%, a 25% difference). These male respondents, who are themselves leaders in the union and responsible for appointing members to leadership positions, thus apparently believe that the membership is a greater source of difficulty than the leadership. In contrast, the percentage of female respondents who indicate that there are too few women in elected positions is very close to the percentage who indicate that there are too few women in appointed positions (30% versus 27%).

Are the perceptions of the male respondents correct? Does the available evidence indicate that their locals have fewer problems achieving appropriate female repre-

sentation in appointed positions than in elected positions? We do not have data on all appointed offices, but the data on committee chairs provide one important test. Although not shown in Table 3, in the locals with male respondents, women are 27.3% of the members, 19.3% of elected officers, and 18.2% of (appointed) committee chairs. The available evidence thus indicates that, contrary to the male respondents' perceptions, in their locals women are no better represented in appointed than in elected positions. This apparent misperception is particularly disturbing since male respondents presumably have more influence over appointed positions than over elected positions.

When presented with statements that bear on the explanation for the low level of women's involvement in the union, male and female respondents diverge in several important respects. Women are more likely than men to recognize barriers posed by women's primary responsibility for household and family care. More women than men agree that these family commitments might conflict with scheduled union activities that occur after work or on weekends. When the double burden is unavoidably visible, however, men and women are in accord: 68% of both groups agree that the responsibilities of single parents—particularly single mothers—make it difficult for them to participate fully in the union. Female respondents are more sensitive than male respondents to women's lack of confidence in their own leadership abilities.

Probably because of the small sample, statistically significant differences between the answers of male and female respondents were found on only a few survey items—specifically, the following statements: there are not enough women in elected or appointed leadership positions ($p < .05$); more women than men use extra time to do volunteer work in their community, schools, church, or synagogue ($p < .01$); and women's concerns are accurately represented by male union leaders ($p < .01$). Perhaps more striking than these differences between male and female respondents, however, is their

consensus on one crucial question: virtually all respondents (95% of women, 98% of men) agree that more women should take initiative in pursuing leadership positions.

The most interesting difference in responses between men and women concerns the need to have women in leadership positions, as indicated by the response to the question of whether "women's concerns are accurately represented by male union leaders." Sixty-three percent of men, but only 27% of women, agree with this statement, a difference of 36%. A much smaller but still noteworthy difference is found in reactions to a stronger statement: "The union is run by an informal circle of men who do not encourage women's participation." Only a minority of respondents agree with this statement, but women are more likely to do so (26%) than men (15%).⁹

Conclusions

Although there is evidence that the presence of women in local union leadership positions has increased relative to the female percentage of rank-and-file union members over the past few years, our research underscores the importance of several considerations besides simple proportional representation. First, our findings, in conjunction with those of previous studies, suggest that women are less well represented in leadership at the national level than at the local level. Second, although our survey of officials at AFL-CIO-affiliated locals in Massachusetts shows that women fill leadership positions in those locals in numbers nearly proportional to their membership, our results also show that women are more commonly found in relatively marginal positions than in influential positions—secretary, for ex-

⁹ Preliminary analyses indicate that the respondent's gender and the percentage of women in the membership are the best predictors of the respondent's views. Local characteristics such as the percentage of female officers, type of work, public versus private sector, year the union was established, and extent of membership growth bear little relationship to leadership views. See Eriksen (1991).

ample, or chair of the education committee, rather than president, or chair of the negotiation committee (a finding consistent with Chaison and Andiappan's [1987] findings in their study of women in local leadership of Canadian unions). We find, too, that women are under-represented as stewards—an influential position that is a traditional pathway to higher office. Third, minority women in our sample appear to suffer even greater marginalization than women in general, usually gaining elected positions only in unions with significant proportions of members who are also female minorities. Overall, the positions that women hold only minimally afford them experience, visibility, or the opportunity to make contacts or do favors essential to moving up into more responsible and influential positions.

Most union leaders in our sample, both male and female, express a wish for more participation by women, and feel that their local has made an effort to incorporate women as leaders. But there is clearly room for more progress, particularly in promoting women to higher office, recruiting them into key lower-level leadership positions, and providing leadership and skill training to assist them.¹⁰

¹⁰ As part of our survey, respondents were asked to identify the skills they believed were required for effective leadership and to indicate which skills would be most useful to their members. Although the responses to these questions are not central to our concerns here, several results are noteworthy. Union building (activating the membership) and bargaining and contract administration were the two

Almost all local leaders in our sample feel that the union is making an effort to incorporate women, but that women themselves could do more to become leaders.¹¹ With respect to the perceived urgency of the need for more women in leadership positions, however, male and female respondents appear to part ways. Sixty-three percent of male respondents agree with the statement that "women's concerns are accurately represented by male union leaders," compared to only 27% of female respondents. It seems unlikely that leaders who think they are adequately representing the needs of their female constituents will see a compelling need to encourage women's involvement in more influential leadership positions. For women to be encouraged and enabled to fully participate in union leadership there must first be a sense that it is important for women to do so. Communicating to union leaders the importance of increasing the numbers of women in union leadership remains a significant task for the labor movement and labor educators.

sets of skills the respondents deemed necessary for local leaders to possess. Labor education programs most frequently requested were programs on political action, building membership involvement, grievance handling, negotiating contracts, and stewards' training. Locals also expressed interest in programs on specific topics such as alcohol and substance abuse, the introduction of new technology, and pay equity.

¹¹ For a compelling alternative vision of what unions must do, see Feldberg (1987). Cobble (1990) provides historical evidence that supports Feldberg's analysis.

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