CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2005, I was invited to attend a meeting of the Fargo Lions Club. I cautiously entered the hotel banquet room unsure of what this curious group of mostly middle aged business men could offer me. I sat quietly at a back table and listened to a rousing sing-along lead by Lion Lyle Swor, among the club’s longest-standing members. Later, I was introduced to the group by Lion Mona Tedford, a smart and fashionable downtown business woman.¹ What was this group really all about? As both a woman and someone under age thirty, would I have fun? Would I fit in? Was this really just some kind of social club for the offbeat businessperson? Although trepidatious, I ultimately decided to join and within just a few months, the club became a place for mentorship, socializing, networking with city and business officials, and a place where my own voluntary spirit flourished. I quickly rose as a leader within the club, and was named “Lion of the Year” by club members. My participation was fun and meaningful in an environment where I flourished.

As I eased into the regular routine of weekly club meetings and activities, I took for granted that it was a place where women succeeded as equal members and leaders. About thirty percent of the membership was female and all members were equally part of activities. It was not until I began visiting other clubs and got to know other Lions through regional conventions that I quickly learned other clubs were different. At two different forums I pointedly quizzed an International Director about what the organization was doing to recruit more women into international leadership positions. I did not find their answers satisfactory. The lack of female leaders is partly because

¹ In keeping with Lions nomenclature, members are referred to as “Lion.”
women have only been full Lions members for twenty-two years and significantly fewer women have begun to climb the long ladder into such positions. As the fastest growing segment of Lions membership, a new generation of women will be needed for international leadership positions. Tomorrow’s leaders will stand on the shoulders of the first generation of women pioneers who broke into the traditionally male association.

Lions Clubs International (LCI) is an international service club (sometimes called a civic club) dedicated to serving communities locally and globally. As of December 31, 2008, LCI had 1,308,037 members in 40,100 clubs in 205 countries.² Like Rotary International and Kiwanis International, service clubs are classified as mutual benefit organizations, or 501(c)(4) by the Internal Revenue Service. Because these organization are often overlooked in a nonprofit sector that emphasizes the charitable deduction, little academic attention is given to this important subsector.

The rationale for studying service clubs in particular is threefold. First, service clubs are a unique source for both philanthropy and social capital. Robert Putnam, in his seminal work on social capital, *Bowling Alone*, often refers to service clubs as a once dominant source of social capital. Although his study exposes a decline in civic engagement and club membership, he cites the work of Lions several times. He asserts,

> “Social capital can thus be simultaneously a ‘private good’ and a ‘public good.’ Some of the benefit from an investment in social capital goes to bystanders, while some of the benefit rebounds to the immediate interest in the person making the investment. For example, service clubs, like Rotary or Lions, mobilize local energies to raise scholarships or fight disease at the same time that they provide

members with friendships and business connections that pay off personally.”³

In other words, since service clubs provide both mutual and public benefit, they are among the best sources of bridging (between members) and bonding (among the community at large) social capital. They foster trust and collaboration that contribute to the vitality of communities. As Gene Kittler explains in the first history of Lions, “Clubs offer a philanthropy enriched by personal involvement.”⁴

Second, constitutional issues of freedom of association are uniquely applicable to mutual benefit organizations because they historically define membership by specific qualifications. While Rotary, Kiwanis and Lions clubs have existed for about a century, it was not until the 1987 seminal Supreme Court decision in Board of Directors, Rotary International v. Rotary Club of Duarte that women in the United States began joining such clubs as full members. Three Supreme Court decisions since 1984 have opened the once male-only club to women. As an innovation, how the Fargo Lions Club adopted this national change is the focus of this study.

A final rationale for this inquiry is the dearth of academic and practical research on 501(c)(4) organizations. Often referred to as a “dumping ground”⁵ or generalized as “advocacy organizations,” the IRS itself has described 501(c)(4) as a “catch-all for presumptively beneficial non-profit organizations that resist classification under the other exempting provisions of the Code. Unfortunately, this exists because ‘social welfare’ is

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inherently an abstruse concept that continues to defy precise definition.”6 Placing service clubs into context of this catch-all category will further understanding of the nonprofit sector’s great diversity.

Through a case study of the Fargo Lions Club, those three rationales converge to help explain what happened in the first years of women’s membership in the association.

These women are almost totally overlooked in the small body of literature that currently exists on service clubs and understanding this redefinition of associational freedom within the nonprofit sector is a unique contribution to philanthropic studies.

Methodically, I use a retrospective tracer study to reconstruct the sequence of events and decisions made by the Fargo Lions Club in response to the 1987 Supreme Court ruling.

How the club accepted and included women is traced through personal interviews with key members, contemporary news reports and archival records. In October 2008 I traveled to Fargo, North Dakota to conduct six in-depth personal interviews with two male members and four of the first female members. In addition, I used the Fargo Lions archival collection held by the Institute for Regional Studies at North Dakota State University.

Additional sub-questions that are examined include:

- Who were the women pioneers in the Fargo Lions Club after membership was opened to them in 1987?
- What prompted these women to join?
- What professions did they come from?
- What kind of obstacles, if any, did they face?
- How did the culture of the club change?

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Theoretically, I draw on diffusion of innovation theory to explain why the Fargo Lions Club was an early adopter of the innovation to admit women. Diffusion of innovation theory draws on both communications and sociology to explain the process by which change is communicated over time by members of a social system.\(^7\)

To understand service clubs’ place in the nonprofit sector, I will first examine service clubs generally as Internal Revenue Service classified 501(c)(4) organizations followed by their history. Next I will briefly relay the history of Lions Clubs International and the Fargo Lions Club. Next I will turn to the legal issues of freedom of association that brought about the ruling to include women and how that decision played out in the Fargo Lions Club. Finally, I will frame that change within the diffusion of innovation theory.

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CHAPTER 2: PLACING SERVICE CLUBS WITHIN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

A service club is a voluntary association of professionals who primarily exist to provide community service. Among the three major international associations, service clubs are hierarchically structured with an international governing body and local clubs organized by region. Some clubs use a classification system of membership (one member from each business or business sector in the community), although others do not. As 501(c)(4), service clubs are distinct from fraternal organizations and social clubs. Fraternal societies are usually affiliated groups of individuals based on ethnic, religious, or cultural similarities, and generally provide fellowship. Such groups are classified either as section 501(c)(8) or section 501(c)(10) depending upon if they provide life and health insurance to members.8 Clubs in which “commingling” of the members, i.e. personal contact and fellowship, plays a material part in the life of the organization are classified as 501(c)(7). Like most national sororities and fraternities, they are clubs organized for pleasure, recreation, and other nonprofit purposes. Service clubs would not qualify as either because they provide benefits to the community through volunteerism at the same time they foster mutual benefit among members.

The Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(4) provides tax exemption to: “Civic leagues or organizations not organized for profit but operated exclusively for the promotion of social welfare; and, local associations of employees, the membership of which is limited to the employees of designated person(s) in a particular municipality and the net earnings of which are devoted exclusively to charitable, educational, or recreational purposes.”9

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9 Reilly, Hull and Allen, 4.
Like 501(c)(3) charities, 501(c)(4) organizations may not inure to the benefit of stakeholders and are subject to Intermediate Sanctions; however, 501(c)(4)s are not subject to an operational test and greater lobbying activity is permitted. In other words, 501(c)(4)s are allowed to be action organizations. An action organization is defined by three types of activities: 1) it participates in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to a candidate, 2) its primary objective is attained only by legislation or the defeat of proposed legislation, and, 3) it advocates or campaigns for the its primary objective(s) rather than from engaging in nonpartisan analysis, study, or research.\footnote{\textquoteleft\textquoteleft IRS Action Organizations,	extquoteright\textquoteright \textsuperscript{10} Internal Revenue Service, Online.} The Sierra Club, for example, is among the best known 501(c)(4)s because of its large membership base and active grassroots lobbying.

However, not all 501(c)(4)s are advocacy or action orientated. The IRS further divides its two broad (c)(4) categories by organizational types: social welfare organizations, tenant and homeowner associations, some veterans groups, and various federal and state programs that relieve or improve social and economic conditions in communities. Even within these categories, social welfare organizations encompass a great variety of purposes and missions. The IRS provides six pages of examples that include such things as: a corporation that aids and promotes community redevelopment by providing loans to purchase or develop lands and facilities; a junior chamber of commerce that renders civic services for the promotion of the welfare of the community and its citizens (as a civic club that provides community service, it is the closest example to Lions clubs); and, an organization that maintains a system for storage and distribution
of water in order to increase underground water levels of a community.\textsuperscript{11} The many examples reflect that it is a catch-all, indeed.

The \textit{Nonprofit Almanac 2008}, the most recent and reliable data on the nonprofit sector prepared by the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) at the Urban Institute, reports all nonprofit 501(c) organizations together in its analysis. According to the most recent data available, approximately 1.4 million nonprofit organizations were registered with the IRS in 2006. This figure includes all 501(c)s, with the vast majority – 63\% – registered at 501(c)(3).\textsuperscript{12} Unfortunately the report does not further qualify how the remaining organizations are distributed, and an accurate number of 501(c)(4)s is nearly impossible to pinpoint. The NCCS search wizard divides nonprofits into three categories: public charity, private foundation (both 501(c)(3)), and other nonprofit. Although not clearly defined, “other nonprofit” arguably includes all 501(c)s other than 501(c)(3)s. A total of 443,087 organizations fall into the “other” category, but how many of those are classified as 501(c)(4)s is unknown.\textsuperscript{13}

The IRS definition of 501(c)(4) breeds confusion, and, as a result, research in the field is equally muddy. What research does exist on mutual benefit organizations is inconsistent at best. Perhaps the only study exclusively on 501(c)(4)s was done in 2001 by Urban Institute researchers Jeff Krehely and Kendall Golladay. They acknowledge that, “501(c)(4)s have not received much exclusive attention by the research

\textsuperscript{11} Reilly, Hull and Allen, 7-8.
\textsuperscript{12} Amy Blackwood, Kennard T. Wing and Thomas H. Pollack, \textit{The Nonprofit Sector in Brief}, The Urban Institute, 2008, 1.
\textsuperscript{13} Internal Revenue Service, Exempt Organizations Business Master File, October 2008.
community.”\textsuperscript{14} When 501(c)(4)s have been studied, it’s as part of a larger analysis of political activity or lobbying and does not consider 501(c)(4) separately from charities, labor unions or PACS. Their research was designed to better understand the various types of organizations classified as 501(c)(4)s using IRS data made available to the National Center for Charitable Statistics. Their reports concludes that, despite myth, only a small portion of 501(c)(4)s are actually advocacy related. For example, they found that, “some of the largest 501(c)(4) groups are health insurance providers, such as Delta Dental of Pennsylvania, Security Health Plan of Wisconsin, and the Health Plan of the Upper Ohio Valley.”\textsuperscript{15} Interestingly, their analysis removes local Lions and Rotary clubs because advocacy is not one of their main activities, and “keeping them in would bias the results for the advocacy sample.”\textsuperscript{16} While Urban Institute has not done further research on 501(c)(4)s since this study, it provides a clear picture of the sector as a “dumping ground.”

Nonprofit legal scholars James Fishman and Stephen Schwarz consider 501(c)(4)s in their discussion of the diverse family of non-charitable nonprofits, referred to en mass as mutual benefit organizations. Their definition of mutual benefit organizations are those that exist primarily to further the common goal of their members rather than the public at large. Because they are viewed as providing only an incidental public benefit, mutual benefit organizations may not be subject to the nondistribution constraint, and, of course, charitable contributions are not deductible.\textsuperscript{17} On the contrary, scholar Michael O’Neil, in

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 25.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 14.
\textsuperscript{17} Fishman and Schwarz, 980.
his comprehensive guide to the nonprofit sector, *Nonprofit Nation*, devotes a whole chapter to “Mutual Benefit” but excludes 501(c)(4)s. He considers (c)(4)s more like (c)(3)s in his analysis, and therefore does not define 501(c)(4)s as mutual benefit organizations. Appropriately, he notes the line between charitable and non-charitable groups is not always clear.

What research exists on 501(c)(4)s doesn’t necessarily include service clubs and when service clubs are included, they are often misunderstood as 501(c)(3)s. Further drilling down in the types of social welfare organizations, it is difficult to understand why service clubs, a sub-section of civic leagues, are classified by the IRS as such. Using Lions Clubs International (LCI) as a guide, the association was first granted tax exemption under Section 231(9) of the Revenue Act of 1926 which provided exemption for “clubs organized and operated exclusively for pleasure, recreation, and other nonprofitable purposes, no part of the net earnings of which inures to the benefit of any private shareholders.” The emphasis on recreation on pleasure in this definition is closer to today’s 501(c)7 organization than 501(c)(4) definition. However, LCI’s group exemption was reaffirmed under I.R.C. 501(c)(4) in August 1972.

Lions Clubs International’s IRS designation letters do not explain the reasoning behind that designation, but a rationale behind the 501(c)(4) status, rather than 501(c)(3), can be pieced together. First, local Lions clubs serve both their members and their community. By providing fellowship and social networks, clubs directly impact the well being of its members. In addition, Lions use their collective energy to promote social welfare in their communities. Through volunteering and fundraising, Lions often

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18 O’Neil, 209.
mobilize volunteers to get things done in cities large and small. Rarely can you drive into a new city without seeing a Lions road sign, or the work of Lions in a public park or other public accommodation. Serving both individual members and the community at large, service clubs like Lions are actually “mixed benefit” in nature. In 1968 Lions Clubs International created Lions Clubs International Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization through which it could funnel its charitable funds and provide local clubs with grants to accomplish major humanitarian projects. Both Rotary and Kiwanis have charitable arms as well.

Whether it’s called mixed benefit, mutual benefit, or social welfare, more research is needed on the full scope of 501(c)(4) as a subsector of the nonprofit spectrum. There is no doubt these organizations play an important societal role; from political advocacy to mobilizing local volunteers, 501(c)(4)s are worthy of further scholarly research. However, according to Krehely and Golloday, “researchers clearly need to use caution when working with these groups. It is a diverse class of organizations, some of which undoubtedly take full advantage of the unlimited lobbying that tax laws afford to these groups, while others are decidedly apolitical.” To be sure, 501(c)(4) represents a diverse group of organizations, activities, people and interests. A better scholarly understanding would benefit the entire philanthropic studies field.

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20 O’Neil, 225.
21 Krehely and Golloday, 25.
CHAPTER 3: HISTORY OF LIONS CLUBS INTERNATIONAL AND THE FARGO LIONS CLUB

In his history of *Service Clubs in American Society*, which heavily draws from the history of Rotary, historian Jeffrey A. Charles explains that service clubs first emerged among men as a mechanism for business promotion and peer-to-peer marketing. This is especially true of Rotary, the first service club established in 1905. At the time of its creation members were expressly expected to trade business with other members. But, as middle class America grew in numbers in the first part of the twentieth century, professional men turned away from once-popular fraternal organizations and the ritual and recreation they provided, and looked for associations that provided opportunities to serve their community. Thus the once business-focused Rotary, for example, amended its constitution in 1911 to remove “business interests” from its constitution. Kiwanis International began in 1915 in Detroit, Michigan, and followed by Lions International in 1917. They both were comprised of business men dedicated to community service. During huge population increases in urban areas, these clubs, argues Charles, “reorganized the local business community in ways that accommodated the social and economic trends of the twentieth century” by promoting main street boosterism. In other words, clubs made big business relevant locally as “voluntary proselytizers of the American corporate order, carrying modern business thought into towns and small cities.”

Lions Clubs International began as a merger of several local clubs that quickly spread throughout the country. Melvin Jones, a successful Chicago insurance agent and

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member of the Business Circle of Chicago, a luncheon club for business men, was more concerned with bettering his community than using his club membership as a means for increasing business. Wanting to put these men’s drive, intelligence and ambition to work to help others, Jones convened a meeting of various Midwestern clubs in Chicago. Among those involved included the International Association of Lions Clubs based in Evansville, Indiana. Attendees ultimately agreed to align their club with the Lions, since it was already an international organization with service at its core. As the meeting concluded, represented clubs were folded into the International Association of Lions Clubs and all future clubs were organized under that name. At the heart of the association’s principle of service is a belief that “no club by its by-laws, constitution or otherwise hold out the financial betterment of its members as its objects.”

Unlike the origins of Rotary and Kiwanis, Gene Kittler explained in 1968, on the occasion of the organization’s fifty year anniversary, “Because the Lions objectives specifically prohibit the baiting of a prospective member with promises of financial benefits, the Clubs don’t restrict membership on a basis of business categories that would turn a club into a mutual back-scratching society.”

According to Charles, “by the early 1960s clubs had become a familiar part of a philanthropic organizational sector.” Kittler, a former Lions International Director, reflected this notion, perhaps at the height of the association’s membership. While The Dynamic World of Lions International is a generally positive look at the organization, Kittler’s descriptions of Lions and their work, paint a picture of what the membership

24 Kittler, 26.
25 Charles, 158.
looked like in its first fifty years (and probably continued until 1987): middle class, white, business men. His chronicle almost entirely dismisses the role of women except for infrequent mentions of wives as “Lions Ladies” who “feel the spirit of Lionism just as strongly as their husbands.”

When men began organizing service clubs, female membership was hotly debated, but eventually denied because, according to Charles, “the majority still could not envision women as social professional equals.” Additionally, “none of the men’s clubs acknowledged the influence of their feminine counterparts, and all three men’s clubs were anxious to lay claim to being the first organization dedicated to service,” despite the fact that women’s associations were serving communities for at least the previous century. In a fascinating historical tidbit, Lions historian Paul Martin, makes brief mention in the opening chapter that LCI’s original constitution passed in 1917 actually included both men and women as members. Two pages later he notes that the following year the constitution was amended to exclude women, but provides no contextual information as to what precipitated the change. In an article published, the only such recognition found in an official association publication, in the Lion Magazine in 1991 recognizes that the first Constitution did not exclude women but “this apparent oversight” was corrected the following year, and for the next sixty-nine years women were denied full membership rights.

26 Kittler, 168.
27 Charles, 30.
It took only four years before a Lions Club was established in Fargo, North Dakota, the first club in the state. Forty-two businessmen chartered the Fargo Lions Club on May 7, 1921. It held its weekly meetings on Mondays (as it still does) at the Fargo Commercial Club. Among the charter members were lawyers, surgeons, bankers, druggists, insurance agents, hotel executives, various other business executives, and “capitalists.” Ed Conmy was the Club’s first president and a year later he was elected District Governor, a position of great regional influence. As recorded in an undated club history, “Lion Ed claimed he was elected District Governor because he was an attorney for the railroad and had a traveling pass, but those that knew him did not agree.” The club quickly grew in both membership and activity. When membership became too large for the Chamber of Commerce building, the Club moved its meetings to the Powers Hotel where about 100 members could be served. The Club moved again in 1957 when the Hotel could no longer accommodate the growing membership, this time to the Town Hall, Gardner Hotel. Although the club has never specifically labeled itself as a downtown club, it has functioned as such since its meetings have never moved farther than a block off the business core of downtown’s Broadway, and the membership has generally attracted downtown professionals.

From its inception, the Fargo Lions Club has been a leader among clubs in the region. The Club has sponsored nine new clubs, and at least thirteen members have served as District Governor. The Club has been a leader within the community and epitomizes the Lions ideal that service is about getting up and doing something – not just

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31 Fargo Lions Club History. MS. 284. Fargo Lions Club Records. Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.
writing a check.\textsuperscript{32} Beginning in 1956, and for the next forty years, the Club presented “Teacher of the Year” to a Fargo public school teacher. The members who conceived of the award did so because they wanted to recognize excellence in education and it became the longest running club project.\textsuperscript{33} In response to a polio outbreak in the early 1950s, the club sponsored the Black Hills Passion Play, and used the proceeds to purchase an Iron Lung for the city of Fargo. The Club was also well known for its entertaining “charity balls” that featured such stars as Fred Waring, Montovani, Victor Borke, Guy Lombardo and the Great Dunninger. But, for many years, the club’s most successful fundraiser was selling “Nuts, Bulbs, and Brooms” door-to-door.\textsuperscript{34}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\textsuperscript{32} Kittler, 27.
\textsuperscript{34} Fargo Lions Club, The First Club in North Dakota. MS. 284. Fargo Lions Club Records. Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.
\end{thebibliography}
An especially important piece of Lions’ history is the work the association has done to combat preventable blindness and provide adaptive resources to blind persons. In one defining moment, the paths of Lions was set by one remarkable woman: Helen Keller. As a public advocate for the blind, deaf and mute, Keller was already a national figure, but her 1925 speech to the Lions International convention mobilized an international force. She came to the convention that year to raise support for her four-year-old nonprofit, the American Foundation for the Blind, which was raising funds for a $2 million endowment. Her brief remarks challenged the association, then only seven years old, to raise its sights and capacity for service: “I appeal to you Lions, you who have your sight, your hearing, you who are strong and brave and kind. Will you not constitute yourselves Knights of the Blind in this crusade against darkness?”

Since that legendary day in Lions history, Lions have considered themselves as Knights of the Blind with sight conservation at the core of its international service activities. Before 1925, work on sight issues and support of the blind had been done by many clubs, but Keller’s challenge made it an official priority. Following her speech at the convention, the association created a Department for Sight Conservation and Work for the Blind. Lions have been committed to sight programs ever since, supporting everything from the development and standardization of white canes for the blind to establishing leader dog schools and eye banks for eye tissue donation.

Helen Keller made her last major public appearance in 1961 at a Washington, DC Lions Club meeting. At that meeting she received the Lions Humanitarian Award for

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35 Kittler, 105.
lifetime service to humanity and for providing the inspiration for the adoption by Lions International of sight conservation and aid to blind programs. She was further honored in 1971 when the association declared June 1st as “Helen Keller Day,” encouraging Lions around the world to participate in sight-related service projects in her memory. The same year, Lions of Alabama dedicated the Helen Keller Memorial Park on the grounds of her birthplace.\(^3\) Today, clubs remember her through their own service projects including various scholarships and camps for blind adults and children that are named for her. She continues to be a symbol, beacon, rallying-point and inspiration that guide Lions in their fight against blindness. Today’s Lions have taken on the important task of preserving her memory among a generation of young people who may not otherwise learn about her.

But, for all that admiration, and despite the honorary membership bestowed upon her at the 1925 convention, she could have never been a member in her own right. And yet, since 1925 the most venerated individual by Lions worldwide was, and still is, a woman.

Legally, women were excluded from Lions Clubs for seventy years because private clubs were allowed to discriminate based upon associational freedoms. While the right to associate seems to be an inherent American value, the right as it relates to public and private associations has been legally refined in the last twenty-five years. Constitutional issues of freedom of association are uniquely applicable to mutual benefit organizations because they often define membership by specific qualifications. Specifically, three Supreme Court decisions since 1984 have opened once all-male clubs to women.

\(^3\) Martin and Kleinfelder, 42.
The modern era of anti-discrimination law can be traced to *Brown v. Board of Education* in which the Supreme Court desegregated public schools in 1954. Since then, anti-discrimination has been firmly rooted in American public policy. By the 1970s most states had public accommodation laws, although most had exclusions for private clubs, and by 1988 thirty-three states had public accommodation laws that prohibited sex discrimination. Generally, while state public accommodation laws parallel federal laws, state laws are often more rigorous in their efforts to eliminate discrimination. According to the *Duke Law Journal* in 1970, “a broadening of the scope of public interest and a corresponding narrowing of protected private interests have led to increased municipal, state, and federal limitations on ‘permissible’ or legally protected racial and religious discrimination.” At that time clubs were considered private if membership was selective and those members controlled and owned club facilities. Social clubs – notably suburban golf and country clubs, fraternal societies, athletic clubs and downtown or city clubs – generally met these two criteria. Nevertheless, even in 1970 there was a grey area when it came to service clubs. While they are not specifically mentioned in the Journal’s analysis, like those groups previously mentioned, new service club members are usually invited and sponsored by existing members, and generally clubs have an inclusionary policy towards membership (among men only during this time), and local clubs are administered by members who control club finances, membership policies and projects.

The Journal once mentions “service organizations” among social clubs that are “permanent” in American culture – those clubs lasting beyond the lifetime of its

members. As we will see, “the history of these more permanent voluntary associations coupled with available evidence concerning the extent of their racial and religious discrimination provides the background for any discussion of their alleged constitutional right to restrict membership arbitrarily.”

Service clubs provided that opportunity in the following decade.

The Duke Law Journal acknowledges in 1970 that because “the right to freedom of association is not specifically mentioned in the Constitution, its boundaries must be gleaned from a series of Supreme Court cases recognizing the right.”

Freedom of association was first identified in *NAACP v. Alabama* (1958) when the Supreme Court ruled that the NAACP was not required to surrender its membership lists to the state of Alabama. The Court based its decision on a combination of the First and Fourteenth Amendment, noting that group action may be essential for effective advocacy. Justice Harlan, writing for the Court, noted,

“It is beyond debate that freedom to engage in association for the advancement of beliefs and ideas is an inseparable aspect of the ‘liberty’ assured by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which embraces freedom of speech. Of course, it is immaterial whether the beliefs sought to be advanced by association pertain to political, economic, religious or cultural matters, and state action which may have the effect of curtailing the freedom to associate is subject to close scrutiny.”

In doing so, the Court determines that a constitutional right to freedom of association only exists when the exercise of another first amendment right is impeded by

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39 Ibid, 1187.
40 Ibid, 1191.
the associational restraint. In recognizing that “the right to freedom of association is limited by both the nature of the organization’s activities and the reasonableness of the restriction sought to be imposed,” the Court laid the ground work for future cases. The decision implies that the legislature’s interest in eliminating discrimination may trump a group’s freedom of association, thus building momentum for the Jaycees & Rotary cases of the 1980s when the political and social climate was ripe to further refine restrictions on association to eliminate gender discrimination.

Societal and business evolution during the 1970s set in motion a series of cases in which the Supreme Court considered the rights of expressive associations. First, Roberts v. United States Jaycees serves as a “point of orientation” in which the “Court established a comprehensive framework for analyzing future claims of associational freedom.” The facts and circumstances begin in 1974 and 1975, respectively, when the Minneapolis and St. Paul chapters of the Jaycees began admitting women as regular members, in violation of the national association’s bylaws. In question was the Minnesota Human Rights Act which prohibits discrimination in places of public accommodation. When the national association withdrew the clubs’ charters, members of both clubs filed discrimination charges with the Minnesota Department of Human Rights. Between 1978 and 1984 the case went back and forth on appeal in the lower courts before the Supreme Court agreed to hear it. In its decision, the Court considered at what point government can intervene in the broad range of individual relationships between intimate association (i.e. family relationships) and expressive association. Examining the facts and circumstances, the

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43 Ibid, 1215.
Court determined that Jaycees was a large and unselective group, which welcomed the participation of strangers, and, as such, it was not private enough to qualify for constitutional protection.

The Court concluded that the Minnesota Human Rights Act as applied to the Jaycees and similar clubs did not violate its members’ expressive association. Justice Brennan, writing the majority opinion, employed a balance-of-interest test to explain Minnesota’s interest in protecting its female citizens from discrimination justified the infringement of Jaycees members’ expressive freedom. Because Jaycees was a large and unselective group, the public accommodation law applied. He wrote:

“The Minnesota Act protects the State’s citizenry from a number of serious social and personal harms. In the context of reviewing state actions under the Equal Protection Clause, this Court has frequently noted that discrimination based on archaic and overbroad assumptions about the relative needs and capacities of the sexes forces individuals to labor under stereotypical notions that often bear no relationship to their actual abilities … The act reflects the State’s strong historical commitment to eliminating discrimination and assuring its citizens equal access to publically available goods and services.”

Brennen also noted how their decision reflected recent societal changes:

“This expansive definition reflects a recognition of the changing nature of the American economy and of the importance, both to the individual and to society, of removing the barriers to economic advancement and political and social integration that have historically plagued certain disadvantaged groups, including women … The State has advanced those interests through the least restrictive means of achieving its end.”

Finally, “the Jaycees has failed to demonstrate that the Act imposes any serious burdens on the male members’ freedom of expressive association.”45

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In her concurring opinion, Justice O’Connor dismissed the compelling interest test used by Brennen. She wrote, “The Court entirely neglects to establish at the threshold that the Jaycees is an association whose activities or purposes should engage the strong protections that the First Amendment extends to expressive associations.” Instead of concentrating on the state’s interest in eliminating discrimination, she prefers to focus on the commercial nature of Jaycees clubs, employing the “expressive-commercial” test: “In my view, an association should be characterized as commercial, and therefore subject to rationally related state regulation of its membership and other associational activities when, and only when, the association’s activities are not predominantly of the type protected by the First Amendment.” She contends that because Jaycees, as the Junior Chamber of Commerce, is first and foremost organized to promote business management practices, it is a business association and not an expressive one. Because club activities include business training for members and employers often pay the dues of its employees, a substantial part of Jaycees’ mission and activities were commercial. Since commercial speech receives a much lower level of constitutional protection than expressive or political speech, public accommodation laws apply.

Three years later, the Supreme Court came to the same decision in *Board of Directors, Rotary International v. Rotary Club of Duarte*. In 1977 the local Rotary Club of Duarte, California admitted three women into active membership. When Rotary International terminated the club’s charter, the club and two of its female members filed complaint in California Superior Court alleging that Rotary International’s actions violated the Unruh Civil Rights Act (California’s public accommodation law). Using the

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framework set out in *Roberts v. Jaycees*, the Supreme Court affirmed the Court of Appeals decision that Rotary clubs are like business establishments and therefore must adhere to the provisions of the Unruh Act.\(^{47}\) Like Jaycees clubs, Rotary clubs are more public than private in nature due to their size and otherwise inclusive nature. The Court notes that clubs range in size from fewer than 20 to more than 900, activities to support membership growth are strongly encouraged, outside guests (including women) are welcome to participate in club meetings and clubs generally conduct their business in a public atmosphere (rather than in private). Additionally, Rotary did not adequately prove that their freedom of association would be significantly infringed by the inclusion of women. On the contrary, Justice Powell, delivering the Court’s opinion, believed that by “opening membership to leading business and professional women in the community, Rotary Clubs are likely to obtain a more representative cross-section of community leaders with a broadened capacity for service.” Finally, as in the Jaycees case, the infringement of expressive freedom is justified because it serves California’s compelling interest to eliminate discrimination against women.\(^{48}\)

Kimberly McGovern’s analysis in the *Harvard Women’s Law Journal* explains the only way in which Rotary would have been able to claim the suppression of its expressive rights under Unruh. If an all-male group advocated the view of male-superiority, then its expression would be impinged upon by a requirement to admit women. Such a group, however, would be defined as a political association and its expressive speech would be protected. Applying the Unruh Act in this case would in fact

\(^{47}\) The California Court of Appeals begins its opinion in this case: “Incredibly, 14 years before the start of the 21st century and 210 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence we still find ourselves having to write an opinion defending the right of American women to equal opportunity in a secular organization of approximately 20,000 clubs with more than 900,000 members.”

change the ideas expressed by the group since its objective, exhibiting male superiority, is gender specific. The key to public accommodation versus expressive association is the nature of the organization. In service clubs like Rotary, Jaycees and Lions, sex-based exclusion is not justified because being a woman does not determine your point of view on issues of concern to the association as a whole. 

In the following year, the Supreme Court again ruled that private clubs’ exclusion of female members is not protected under freedom of association. In New York State Club Association v. City of New York, the Court considered New York City’s Local Law 62, which extended its public accommodation law to any “institution, club or place of accommodation [that] has more than four hundred members, provides regular meal service and regularly receives payment for dues, fees, use of space, facilities, services, meals or beverages directly or indirectly from or on behalf of nonmembers for the furtherance of trade or business.” The law targeted New York’s large all-male lunch clubs, and 125 of those clubs launched a consortium to fight the law on a facial challenge, challenging that the law is always, and therefore under all circumstances, unconstitutional and void. Justice White, in the Court’s opinion, used the framework set out in Rotary and Jaycees to determine that the New York Law does apply to the largest of clubs. Therefore, the Court was not persuaded by the Association’s facial challenges because the Local Law 62 is not under all circumstances unconstitutional. In short, the law does not affect in a significant way the ability of individuals to form associations that will

49 McGovern, 138.
advocate public or private viewpoints, nor does it require the clubs to abandon or alter any activities that are protected by the First Amendment. 50

Three times the Supreme Court has considered the expressive freedom of mutual benefit organizations, and three times it has determined that large clubs which function as public accommodations cannot restrict membership based on sex. The Jaycees decision did not have the sweeping national effect that the Rotary case generated. Writing in 1984 after the Jaycees case, legal scholar Douglas Linder, in the Michigan Law Review, noted that the case probably would not result in a large number of association abandoning their discriminatory membership policies. Linder optimistically calls for clubs to use the decision as an opportunity to reevaluate their membership practices, yet realistically (and correctly) admits that was unlikely to be the case. But, at the time of the Jaycees decision, the Rotary case was already in litigation in the lower courts, and it wasn’t until the Rotary decision that most service clubs (Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis) changed their membership policies. 51 Next, we will look at how that change plays out in the Fargo Lions Club.

51 Linder, 1898.
CHAPTER 5: LIONS CLUBS INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

In response to the Supreme Court’s *Rotary* decision in May 1987, Lions Clubs International almost immediately began encouraging clubs in the United States to invite women as full members. The association formally adopted the inclusionary policy the following July when 26,000 Lions who attended the 1987 International Convention in Taipei voted to amend the International Constitution and By-Laws, removing “male” as a condition of members in Lions Clubs. Personal interviews with members of the Fargo Lions Club provide the following information of the inclusion of women on the local level. Unless otherwise noted, these interviews supply the primary source information.  

Fargo Lion Neil Jordheim, as club president, participated in the historic vote in Taipei. What was both legally and socially inevitable for Americans, required careful politicking among international members. The question of female membership came up for vote at the previous year’s convention, but it was easily defeated. In the year that passed, lobbying among American Lions laid the ground work for the upcoming change. Lion Neil recalls, “When you think about the 120 countries represented at the time, many of those countries did not recognize the rights of women. For us bold Americans to come in there to say this is what we have to do to survive” was not warmly accepted. Ultimately, American Lions made a significant political concession: in exchange for women’s membership, the association would elect non-North American Lions into its international leadership. Previously there had never been a non-North American president of LCI, and within a few years several directors from other parts of the world were elected into top

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52 Personal interviews with members of the Fargo Lions conducted October 21-24, 2008. Interview questions are provided in the appendix.
leadership positions. Additionally, the Constitutional change was carefully worded to simply remove the word “male” and did not make female membership a requirement. These compromises made it possible for the Americans to get what they needed and the vote passed with seventy-seven percent of the vote.

At the local level, momentum for a policy change was building among Lions clubs even before the Supreme Court’s Rotary decision. Lion Neil, who was president of the Fargo Lions Club in 1987, explains that while the Rotary case was going through the court system, corporate America was pushing for women’s membership in service clubs. Specifically, the Fargo Lions Club had several active members who were asked by their employers to advocate for female membership in the club. This was not unique to the Fargo Club, as large companies across the country felt that it was important for their female employees to be part of clubs with other professionals – not just female professionals or male business leaders. This reflected that women were integral members of corporate America – fifty-six percent of the women in 1987 were employed – and they were increasingly moving into management positions and active in their communities. A story from the New York Times in May 1987 confirms this assertion. The story includes a statement by the Duarte California Rotary Club President who noted that the club had difficulty attracting and retaining members in the 1980s because many corporate

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53 Jordheim’s claim cannot fully be substantiated with LCI records. In fact, LCI was lead by non-Americans as early as 1924 by a Canadian president, followed by a Cuban in 1945, a Chilean in 1955, and a Swede in 1961. What is more likely to have been discussed in the negations is the inclusion of presidents from Africa and Asia.

employers stopped reimbursing employees for dues to clubs that excluded women. Lion Neil recalls, that because women were equals in the workplace, there was a strong consensus among professionals in Fargo, and across the nation, that women should be invited to join Lions.

Previously, whenever a woman was interested in joining Lions, she was referred to the local Lioness club. While ladies auxiliaries, mostly comprised of the wives of Lions members, existed for many years, the association formally developed the Lioness program in 1975. Lioness clubs for women were strongly tied to an existing Lions club. In fact, Lioness clubs were not chartered and received only a certificate of organization from LCI. A (male) Lion was appointed as a liaison to the Lioness club and strong cooperation between the two clubs was encouraged. Within three years, 2,000 Lioness clubs were established with 35,000 female members. When women were invited to join as full Lions members, the association first committed to supporting the Lioness program and initial evidence suggested that the policy change did not lead to a decline in Lioness membership. According to an article published in 1989, “the intent of the International Board of Directors is to support the Lioness Clubs Program indefinitely.” At the time, there were 5,795 Lioness clubs with 150,670 members in 100 countries. But as LCI adapted to a more inclusive membership, participation in Lioness clubs declined while women in Lions leadership positions increased. Ultimately, in July 1992 the association discontinued the Lioness program. Some Lioness clubs simply folded their membership into the sponsoring Lions club while others continued to function as women’s only club.

56 Martin, 172, 272.
using the name Lioness as an affiliate of their sponsoring club. In 1996 LCI instituted the Lioness Bridge Program in which 5,000 Lionesses took the opportunity to transition into full-fledged Lions Club. Still today, Lions are encouraged to invite Lionesses into Lions membership. It is described as a “win-win” situation: the clubs gain members for their service projects while the new members receive voting rights, membership benefits, and the eligibility to apply for grants from the Lions foundation.⁵⁸

The termination of Lioness clubs just five years after the constitutional change reflected how quickly and easily women integrated into club life. By September 1987 more than 2,500 women in the United States and 1,100 women overseas joined Lions clubs, and by 1992 women’s membership totaled almost 40,000.⁵⁹ In every official Lions publication, women’s membership was warmly embraced and their contributions in revitalizing club activated widely acknowledged. As women’s membership continued to increase, official publications acknowledged, “women’s involvement in Lionism contributes to the overall strength and health of the organization as a whole.”⁶⁰

In the first two or three years the tone in official publications was one of adapting to change. Without singling out the membership of women as a sticking point, International President Austin Jennings in his 1988 inaugural address discussed the importance of adaptability as the key to Lions’ future success. At the heart of his address is the claim that resisting change will stagnate clubs at the very least and at worst lead to dissolution. In order to “survive as a viable force in the field of voluntary” service, he asserted, Lions must embrace change. Since the biggest change in Lions at the time was

⁶⁰ Ibid, 40.
the inclusion of women, it can be surmised that this was his attempt to convince resistant male Lions of the importance of women’s membership. With general membership trends declining, women were seen as a key to overall survival of Lions. As Lion Neil conveyed, since women were already integrated into the business community and in all other sectors of society, it was only right that they join Lions; and, had they continued to be excluded, it’s fair to assume clubs’ vitality and relevancy would have quickly declined.

The following year, International President William L. Woolard’s inaugural address challenged Lions clubs to embrace change as the key to their future. Focusing on the “key to the door of tomorrow,” is Woolard’s emphasis on programs to combat youth drug abuse, finding a cure for diabetes, and aligning the work of the Lions Foundation to fund sight conservation initiatives. His goals, however, were specifically addressed with a call to increase membership: “We must share the privilege of membership. For two years now, every Lions club has had the right to invite women into full membership. Thus far, approximately 20,000 women have accepted. While that total may seem impressive, we must remember that we have nearly 40,000 clubs. Certainly there are many more women who are anxious to serve as Lions. If you have not yet invited women in your community to join your club, please do so as soon as possible.”61 Some years later, Lions historian Paul Martin quotes Woolard’s enthusiastic claim that, “The 1987 decision to admit women was one of the smartest things we’ve ever done.”62

62 Martin, 273.
CHAPTER 6: FARGO LIONS RESPONSE

In most every way, the Fargo Lions Club maintained “business as usual” after the policy change to the extent that the first women were folded into the club without much resistance or fanfare. At the time, the club was going through a larger transition to modernize and women’s membership was only one small piece of that puzzle. As Lion Neil explained, the club was facing pressure from local companies to be more inclusive, at the same time it was looking to attract younger members from the business community. The club had decided to move its weekly lunch meetings to the Radisson, which resulted in an increased cost of food. Overall, the feeling of the club was beginning to change as younger members came into leadership positions. The club lost some members who used the location change as their excuse, but as Lion Neil presumed, they were ready to wash their hands of the club because they didn’t want to make that transition into a more modern organization. Some left legitimately because they didn’t think the club would be the same anymore, but ultimately the club attracted more members because it was recruiting both men and women. Because a majority of members were white collar professionals from the downtown business community, it was an easy transition.

Changes within the local business community were also affecting membership. Lion John Dobbs recalled that Northwestern Bell, the old telephone company, was deemed a monopoly and subsequently forced to break up into smaller Bells. It was a big organization with a lot of people on the executive management staff that moved back and forth between Fargo and Omaha, Nebraska. Northwestern Bell paid the dues of all its employee members, but when the company was broken up it immediately stopped paying
the dues of its employees which prompted other companies to follow suit. Subsequently, the Club lost some members because their employers no longer supported their membership fees. In addition, Lion Neil recalls that there had been a movement afoot begun by the large corporations AT&T, IBM, and the telephone companies, to push for women’s membership. The Fargo Lions had several very active members who had been asked by their companies to push female membership in the service clubs. It was a national drive to exert its influence in every service club because women were already in management positions, and the companies wanted these female leaders to be active in their communities and rubbing shoulders with other business leaders, not just other female business leaders.

When discussion came before the Fargo Lions Club, members were generally favorable, although some older members resisted. Lion John, a member since 1984, was vocal in advocating women’s membership. He recalled:

“I took the position that ‘hey folks, this is what’s going on. Service clubs are going to begin to involve women. We can do one of two things: we can either put our head in the sand and hope it goes away and it won’t, or we can go out and make an effort to go out and recruit the strongest women in the community because other clubs are going to be doing that. If we don’t some of the stronger women are going to be recruited to other service clubs’.”

Before Lion Neil returned from the 1987 International Convention, Lion Fred Walsh had already invited the first woman to join.

Lion Fred, a long-time member of Lions and theatre arts professor at North Dakota State University, invited Lynn Dorn to join the Club. Ms. Dorn, the University’s women’s athletics director, remembers Lion Fred as a “classic soul, very committed to women with a vision beyond his age.” As the first member to officially invite a woman,
he epitomized what Lion John believes about the club: “Ours is a pretty good group of
open-minded, enlightened people. I think it always has been.” As the first female
member, Lion Lynn doesn’t remember any resistance to the extent that it was not even
significant. There was no “welcome to the first women” celebration. Like all members
she went through the traditional club induction ceremony without any special recognition
that she was the first female. She remembers, “it was very seamless.” Board meeting
minutes from August 19, 1987 reflect her feeling. Without any special recognition, the
minutes read, “Member Approval: Lynn Dorn has been recommended for membership by
Fred Walsh. Motion made by Lechner, seconded by Roggensack to accept the
application. Carried.” And so this simple yet historic vote by the Fargo Lions Board of
Directors paved the way for the club’s emergence as a modern organization.

Lion Jane Pettinger shared Lion Lynn’s experience. In 1987 Lion Jane was
working for the local United Way and as part of her job she maintained a database of
local agencies and clubs that supported the work of nonprofit organizations. She
contacted Lion Neil as president of the club to confirm the club’s contact information.
Since Lion Neil and his wife Nancy knew Jane’s parents and he was familiar with Jane’s
work, contacting him in a professional capacity sparked his invitation. When she decided
to join, Lion Jane does not remember any resistance among the membership. “When I
joined, the previous women helped me legitimize. I’m not a trendsetter. But I was there
every week, at the socials, at the service activities. I was able to do anything I wanted
with the Lions clubs. It fed me well, socially and otherwise.”

Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.
For a natural “joiner” like Lion Mona Tedford, membership was vibrant and fun. She joined in 1990 at the invitation of Lion Gary Hansen who was leaving their employer, Norwest Bank (now Wells Fargo), to help start Heartland Trust. He had lunch with Ms. Tedford one day and said, “Ok, I’m no longer going to be the Norwest person in Fargo Lions. You are. You’re going to come with me to this meeting. Submit your dues on your expense report.” Ms. Tedford wasn’t opposed to the idea although she wasn’t really looking to join a service club. “I went there and loved it. It was just a matter of the first person to ask.” Like the others, she did not experience any resistance from the Lions members and Lion Gary nurtured her membership.

“I was completely accepted and embraced. I was young and didn’t have children. I had more time to do things. I was working on “Nuts, Bolts, and Brooms,” our big fundraiser. I was a co-chair of that early on, I was Tail Twister early on. I was Rookie of the Year … I was probably only on a couple of committees ... I felt fully integrated from day one. I remember early on, Jane and I were both expecting in 1993, the two of us were co-chairing Nuts, Bolts, Brooms. We were up doing some announcements [in front of the club meeting] and were both visibly pregnant. There was that spark or chemistry and it was very funny, whatever we were doing …. And everyone was laughing. Something about “here we are, heavy with children, out hauling nuts bulbs and brooms.” Dave Butler stood up and said, “there were members of this club who were very against having women in the club, but this just goes to show how much life and energy the expansion of our club brings.” I had heard this before. There were members who left before I came, and everyone still there was very supportive and I had heard that the club was the better for it.”

Lions Jane and Mona shared the first female club presidency, and in later years, both went on to serve a full year in the leadership post. Lion Jane was reluctant to step in line for the Club presidency, not only because it was a five year commitment to rise through the leadership structure at the time, but also because she did not care to be seen as a trendsetter. But, even when she has not held an official leadership position, she has
always been considered a leader in the club because of her regular attendance at meetings and she “never hesitates to stand up and speak.” When describing the landscape of women in Lions today, Lion Mona believes that service clubs feel a tremendous need to get things done and will rely more and more on women as the traditional male Lion ages.
CHAPTER 7: FARGO LIONS AS INNOVATORS

When asked about her time as a member of the Fargo Lions, Lion Katherine Tweed enthusiastically declared, “I like being a woman in Lions.” As the personal stories in the previous chapters have explained, women were warmly embraced into all activities of the club. Indeed, it has become a place where women like Lion Katherine have thrived. To fully understand how and why women were quickly embraced into club life, we turn next to diffusion of innovation theory. Sociologist Everett Rogers’s work *Diffusion of Innovation, Fifth Edition* provides the framework in which to map the adoption of change within the Fargo Lions Club. Rogers, who began research on innovation in the 1950s among corn farmers in rural Iowa and subsequently developed the field through fifty years of diffusion research, is widely considered the seminal expert on diffusion theory. While most innovation research focuses on new technologies and is quantitative in nature, his analysis applies to this qualitative study. According to Rogers, “Diffusion is the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system.”64 Each key word, or piece, of the definition provides deeper levels of insight that explain this innovation in five steps.65

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64 Rogers, 5.
65 Rogers, 170.
The following diagram illustrates the five steps of the innovation decision process.\textsuperscript{66}

\begin{itemize}
\item Knowledge
\item Persuasion
\item Decision
\item Implement
\item Confirmation
\end{itemize}

\textbf{The Innovation Decision Process}

- Mass Media
- Interpersonal Communication
- May 1987 - Supreme Court
  July 1987 - LCI vote
- August 1987 - Fargo Lions accept Lynn Dorn as first female member

Perceived characteristics of the innovation:
1. Relative advantage
2. Compatibility
3. Complexity
4. Trialability
5. Observability

\textsuperscript{66} Adopted from Rogers “Model of Five Stages in the Innovation-Decision Process,” 170.
First, innovation is an idea or practice that is perceived as new. In this case the inclusion of women in Lions Clubs International is certainly an innovative practice since it prompted legal action and a Supreme Court decision to change the long-standing all-male clubs. While some innovations happen spontaneously and others are planned, this innovation was an authoritative innovation made by the Supreme Court. Had service clubs continued to exclude women they certainly would have been subject to significant lawsuits. As previously explained, shortly after the Supreme Court decision in May 1987, Lions Clubs International unofficially began encouraging clubs in the United States to invite women into membership, and two months later at the July 1987 International Convention it made that policy official by amending the association’s constitution. However, LCI did not force any club to accept women, and most clubs stayed all-male for months or years after the policy change. The New York Times reported in December 1991 that women still faced barriers to membership in service clubs. At the time, LCI “proudly notes that 4,571 of its chapters have at least one female member. But 10,492 remain all male.” Clearly, it was quickly adopted by about one-third of clubs.

Communication channels are the means by which information about the innovation is delivered from one individual to another. In May 1987, news about the Supreme Court decision was largely translated through mass media channels. Several national and regional news stories reported the Supreme Court decision. An Associated Press article dated March 31, 1987 traced the legal journey that brought Rotary to the Supreme Court followed by the May report that the “High Court Rules That Rotary Clubs

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67 Rogers, 12.
69 Rogers, 18.
Must Admit Women.” In the wake of the decision, on May 5th the Minneapolis/St. Paul Star Tribune examined whether or not women would actually join local service clubs. The article suspects that female executives are already over-committed in the community and when asked, several women declined the initial invitation to join. A few days later on May 8th the New York Times headline claimed “Breaking Rotary Barrier: Matter of Survival for California Club.” On June 3rd, the Star Tribune reported that the Downtown Kiwanis Club of Minneapolis admitted its first woman. The club had actively petitioned Kiwanis International to change its policy and ultimately admitted its first woman after the Supreme Court decision but before Kiwanis International officially changed its policy.

We also know from mass media that other clubs in the region were less quick to change. The South Forks Lions Club of Grand Forks, North Dakota, the state’s second largest city seventy miles north of Fargo, remained male-only until January 1988. According to the Grand Forks Herald on October 14, 1987 no woman had yet joined a local service club although “the Kiwanis, Jaycees, Lions and Rotary clubs say they would welcome them.” The article quotes a South Forks Lions member who explained that the club was undertaking a membership drive so it would be “any time” before a woman joined. Resistance, they noted, was not expressed by the male club leaders but by women who did not want to attract attention as a pioneer. In a follow-up article published January

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24, 1988, the South Forks Lion had admitted its first woman, Norma Swank. According to the story, Lion Norma joined partially because she considered herself a pioneer, although she acknowledged that it would take time for the club to be more sensitive to male-centric language. At the time, the Grand Forks Lions Club, with eighty male members, had yet to attract a woman, although a club representative said most members were in favor of their inclusion.

Once information about the innovation is widely known via mass media, the information spreads among members within the group via interpersonal communication. Members of the association generally, and the Fargo Lions Club specifically, shared information and exchanged opinions about the innovation at weekly club meetings and other informal gatherings. Face-to-face interaction among members is perhaps more important than the mass media communication because it is through personal contact that individuals generally persuade or dissuade others of the innovation’s merits. Within the Fargo Lions Clubs specifically, that interpersonal communication is considered homophily: communication within a social system in which members share similar characteristics. As Rogers explains, “when they share common meanings and a mutual sub-culture language, and are alike in personal and social characteristics, the communication of new ideas is likely to have greater effects in terms of knowledge gain, attitude formation and change, and overt behavior change.” This is especially true of a Lions Club since the previous male members generally all came from the business sector and through weekly interaction following Lions customs and traditions unique to the

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76 Rogers, 19.
association, such as “Tail Twisting,” that generated camaraderie and a shared sense of purpose.

The next piece of the diffusion puzzle is the time frame, which identifies the Fargo Lions Club as an early adopter. As previously explained, the Supreme Court made its decision in *Rotary* in May 1987, followed by the association’s official constitutional change in July and the first woman in the Fargo Lions Club in August. Over the course of four months the club and its members went through what Rogers identifies as the five steps of the innovation-decision process.\(^7^7\) The first step is knowledge, or when the innovation is first learned of, usually through mass media channels. Second, through interpersonal communications, members made a positive or negative opinion of the innovation using the power of persuasion. Next, an official decision was made by the association (July) and later by the Fargo Lions board of directors action to accept the first female member (August). That decision was implemented by the active recruitment of female members and initiation of Lion Lynn Dorn. Finally, through the confirmation stage, the innovation decision was reinforced as women quickly became engrained into the fabric of the club’s culture. The innovation-decision period, or the length of time to pass through this process, was only a matter of months.

The final piece of Roger’s diffusion of innovation definition is the social system, or the group of “interrelated units that are engaged in joint problem solving to accomplish a common goal.”\(^7^8\) In this case, two important social systems co-exist: Lions Clubs International as the umbrella association and the Fargo Lions Club. While the Fargo Club

\(^{77}\) Rogers, 20.
\(^{78}\) Rogers, 23.
was on board with the association’s policy change, it is presumable that such co-existing social systems are not always in agreement, as evidenced by the Rotary International’s legal action against the Rotary Club of Duarte, California. An important element of the social system is the opinion leaders who influence others’ attitudes and behavior about the innovation’s adoption.79 As a model for including women, Lions John Dobbs, Neil Jordheim and Fred Walsh were well-respected opinion leaders of the Fargo Lions who actively advocated for and invited women into membership. As described by Rogers, their leadership is “earned and maintained by the individual’s technical competence, social accessibility, and conformity to the system’s norms.”80

The Fargo Lions Club as an early adopter is considered an innovator. Innovators are generally active information seekers, maintain extensive interpersonal networks in and outside of the club, have a high degree of mass media exposure, are open to new ideas, and could project or visualize how the change would enhance the club. Rogers identifies five characteristics of the innovation which made it so easily accepted by the Fargo Lions Club. First, is the relative advantage, or the degree to which the innovation is better than what superseded it. Since members of the Fargo Lions advocated the inclusion of women and Lion Neil cast a positive vote at the Lions International Convention, it is no doubt that the consensus of the club was that the inclusion of women had a strong relative advantage. Second, the inclusion of women was compatible with the existing values and needs of the club. The women who first joined were successful business women who easily fit into the club’s ethos and the respected opinion leaders who invited women further legitimized their presence. Next, the complexity of an innovation is

79 Rogers, 27.
80 Rogers, 27.
negatively related to its rate of adoption. In this case, the innovation was neither complex nor difficult to make and since the members sought women to invite it was quickly accepted. Next, Rogers describes observability, or the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others. While members of the Fargo Lions were among the first to adopt the innovation and therefore did not likely observe other clubs with women, the members did observe women’s participation in the workplace and in other aspects of their social lives, positively relating to its rate of adoption. The final characteristic Roger describes is trialability, or the degree to which the innovation can be tried on a limited basis. This notion is the least applicable to the Fargo Lions because the innovation was made by the authority of the international association, it was not necessarily triable. On the international level, trialability was perhaps unnecessary because the Lioness program exposed most Lions to the work of women, whether or not a specific club sponsored a Lioness group (the Fargo Lions Club did not). While technically the club could have decided to reverse back into a male-only club, it was clear that because the other characteristics were so strongly positive, that was very unlikely.

As these various factor came together in the summer of 1987, the Fargo Lions became an innovative and inclusive club. Today women comprise a third of the club’s membership and they hold a variety of formal and informal leadership positions. In short, the club epitomizes Rogers’s summary of innovativeness: “Earlier knowers of an innovation, when compared to later knowers are characterized by more formal education,

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81 Rogers, 257.
82 Rogers, 258.
higher social status, greater exposure to mass media channels of communication, greater change agent contact, greater social participation, and greater cosmopoliteness.”\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{83} Rogers, 217.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Women have made their mark on the Fargo Lions Club. In short, the first women to join were successful business women from professions such as banking, nonprofit administration and higher education. With one exception, they generally came to the club at the invitation of a well-respected member. Only Lion Katherine sought out a service club to join, and asked long-time member and club leader Lion Lyle, who she knew through her church, about membership. The club quickly embraced their presence and nurtured their participation. The consensus was that the club was a better club because of it. As of July 2008 255,000 women belonged to Lions Clubs International, approximately twenty percent of the total membership. Yet, seventeen percent of United States clubs remain all-male. Further research is needed to understand why over 1,000 clubs continue to exclude women. While these clubs may exist in small, rural or isolated communities, others may operate side-by-side to an all-female club in the same community.

As instruments of social capital and free association, the study of philanthropy must continue inquiry into the dynamic world of mutual benefit associations. As a single case study, the experience of the Fargo Lions is not generalizable on a larger scale; additional case studies would be needed to confirm what has been described here. As a retroactive tracer study, this study has two major limitations. First, because it has been over twenty years since the innovation, it is dependent on recollections of interviewees and may not fully capture relevant activities and decisions that occurred long before the diffusion process began. I acknowledge that each of the individuals I interviewed many

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84 Martin and Kleinfelder, 178.
have had personal variables that could have affected their memory and experiences as a member. Second, diffusion studies are often criticized for having a pro-innovation bias. As a woman and member of this club, I did experience what Rogers describes as “the implication in diffusion research that an innovation should be diffused and adopted by all members of a social system, that it should be diffused and adopted by all members of a social system, that it should be diffused more rapidly, and that the innovation should be neither re-invented nor rejected.”

I tried to account for this bias by cross referencing archival materials and historical sources. However, these limitations do not affect the application of the theory in this case. In fact, it suggests that diffusion of innovation theory can be used to explain and understand social change. It is a theoretical tool that needs further testing, but one that can be useful in future qualitative and quantitative studies of social change.

What was a significant Supreme Court decision on the national level was a natural and uncontroversial change in a community where women were already fully integrated. Obviously many clubs, including some not far from Fargo, have yet to invite women and risk the ability to attract new members that may eventually force dissolution. Female members have transformed the Fargo Lions into an energetic club with capacity to take on many of the community’s needs through volunteerism and grant making. As an innovator, it serves as a strong example to those clubs who have yet to modernize. The Fargo Lions make the Lions motto “We Serve” relevant for the 21st century.

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85 Rogers, 106.
APPENDIX

Women Pioneers of the Fargo Lions Club
Interview Questions ~ Fall 2008

Personal experience/background

What are your first memories of service/volunteering? Do you have recollections of your family’s involvement with nonprofits, volunteering, or community service?

Growing up, did you have family members who were active in civic clubs?

What are your personal philanthropic values? What influenced them?

What influences you to support a cause?

How are decisions about giving made in your household?

Who are some of the volunteering role models that have influenced you?

Experience as a Lion

How long have you been a member of Lions and when did you join?

What prompted you to join Lions?
  - Who invited you?
  - How did you know that person?

What, if any, resistance did you face from
  - male members?
  - family members?
  - business colleagues?
  - other women?

Conversely, were there people who supported you?

Tell me about your career/profession at the time you joined
  - Were you a member of a civic group or professional club before joining Lions?

What were your perceptions of the club before and after you joined?

Talk about your experience as a woman in the first year or two of your membership.
What have been some of the long-term benefits of being a member?

What are some of the challenges you face as a female member and club leader?

What do you see in the next 5 to 10 years for the landscape of women in Lions?

How do you influence other women to join and/or rise as leaders within the club?

Anything you’d like to share?

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Male Members of the Fargo Lions Club
Interview Questions ~ Fall 2008

Personal experience/background

What are your first memories of service/volunteering? Do you have recollections of your family’s involvement with nonprofits, volunteering, or community service?

Growing up, did you have family members who were active in civic clubs?

What are your personal philanthropic values? What influenced them?

What influences you to support a cause?

How are decisions about giving made in your household?

Who are some of the volunteering role models that have influenced you?

Experience as a Lion

How long have you been a member of Lions and when did you join?

What prompted you to join Lions?
  Who invited you?
  How did you know that person?

Tell me about your career/profession at the time you joined
  Were you a member of a civic group or professional club before joining Lions?

Talk about your experience as a Club president and a leader within the club.
Tell to me specifically about the mood/feeling within the club when Lions International changed its policy to admit women. Were there heated debates among the board? At regular club meetings?

Did attendance at meetings change? How did the change effect membership acquisition & retention?

Did club activities change to accommodate the interest of women?

How long was the time of adjustment after women started to join?

What do you see as the pros and cons of female membership? Has your view changed over time? How?

What are some of the challenges you think women face as a members and club leaders?

What do you see in the next 5 to 10 years for the landscape of women in Lions?

What has your personal position been in terms of influencing women to join the organization and assume leadership responsibilities?

Anything else you’d like to share?
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