Meanings of Political Participation Among Black and White Women:
Political Identity and Social Responsibility

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This study examined the correlates of midlife political participation among 64 Black and 107 White women of the college classes of 1967-1973. Compared with White women, Black women scored higher on political participation, generativity, power discontent, and social responsibility. Factor analysis of personality and political attitude variables yielded three factors labeled Political Identity, Power Discontent, and Social Responsibility. Adult political participation was regressed on level of student activism and index scores of political identity, power discontent, and social responsibility. For both racial groups, social responsibility was associated with midlife political participation. For White women, political identity was also related; for Black women, student activism bore a significant relationship. The findings suggest that Black and White women's historical and political contexts imbued their political activities with different meanings.

During the late 1960s and the early 1970s, three social movements simultaneously developed and gained momentum in the United States: resistance against the war in Vietnam; the women's liberation movement; and the Black power movement, which grew out of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The goals and tactics of these latter two movements shared much in common: Each aimed to redefine the roles and broaden the privileges of historically disadvantaged groups and work to accomplish these ends through the redefinition of the constituent groups' identities and political consciousness (Carroll, 1989; Cohen, 1985; Morris, Hatchett, & Brown, 1989). The emphasis on the transformation of the identity and consciousness of individual group members is well captured by each of the movements' best known slogans: The Black power exhortation that "Black is beautiful" rejects a conferred stigmatized racial identity, whereas the feminist assertion that "the personal is political" recasts women's private experiences within the traditional family in terms of public relations of power.

Given the focus of both the women's movement and the civil rights movement on issues of group identity, it might be expected that these movements would have had different meanings and hence different long-term impact for individuals of different social groups. Much of the research on these two movements has been framed theoretically by Mannheim's (1928/1952) essay on generations (e.g., Braungart & Braungart, 1990; Jennings, 1987), which argued that periods of youth movement result from the combined effects of the circumstances of the historical moment in which a cohort comes of age, the shared cultural experiences of the cohort, and the particular demographic characteristics of the cohort. Although the members of a generation may be influenced by the same historical events, Mannheim (1928/1952) suggested that within any birth cohort there are subgroups, or "generation units [who] work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways" (p. 304). Thus, for example, Stewart and Healy (1989) pointed to the difference in the meaning of the Vietnam
War for those who fought it and those who opposed it (despite the fact that it was laden with meaning for both groups). Although several researchers have explored the long-term impact of the social movements of this era on those who participated as compared with those who did not (e.g., Abramowitz & Nassi, 1981; Fendrich, 1974, 1976, 1977; Franz & McClelland, 1994; Hoge & Ankney, 1982; Jennings, 1987; Nassi, 1981; Nassi & Abramowitz, 1979), little of this research has addressed the unique experiences of women or explored the differential effect of participation in these movements on the later lives of Black and White protesters. The present study addressed these gaps in the literature, exploring the ways in which social movements, coinciding with personal development, may be related to differences in political belief and involvement for members of divergent subcultures with distinct political statuses.

Student Activism Among Women and African Americans

Sherkat and Blocker (1994) found that women were relatively underrepresented among movement activists of this era; however, this difference was largely accounted for by differences in gender socialization (including political efficacy and religiosity) and lower rates of college attendance. In contrast, studies based on interviews with women who were active (Cable, 1992; Thorne, 1975) suggest that many women were dissuaded from participation by being relegated to the most trivial and menial tasks by the mostly male leadership. Longitudinal research that followed the activists into adulthood suggests that despite the fact that women faced gender discrimination even within lib­er­a­tory social movements, participation in the movements of this era had a long-term impact on both the later political participation and personal development of the women who were activists.

Franz and McClelland (1994) found that at 41 years of age, women who were activists as students seemed better adapted than did their male activist peers, both in terms of occupational status and levels of strain reported; they speculated that the women’s movement empowered women and increased their opportunities for satisfying work lives. McAdam’s (1992) research following up applicants to the Freedom Summer program of 1964 found that women were less likely to participate in the program, in part because of gender discrimination in the application process. However, among those who did participate, the experience was deeply meaningful. Indeed, despite the fact that participation in the program was predictive of later activism for men but not for women, women described the experience as more personally significant than did men. McAdam attributed the source of this discrepancy to the different historical meaning of Freedom Summer for men and women. Because the development of the women’s movement subsequent to the Freedom Summer program heightened the women’s identities as activists, they accorded their Freedom Summer experience greater personal significance in their retrospective biographical accounts than did their male peers. Braungart and Braungart’s (1991) findings based on interviews with women who had been active in both left- and right-wing organizations during the 1960s similarly suggest that the movements had a long-term impact on women’s commitment to women’s political concerns; they observed that, in addition to pursuing the ideological commitments of their youth, many of the former activists from both groups had also become active in women’s issues.

Little research has explored racial differences in the impact of the social movements of this era. Fendrich (1976, 1977) compared a sample of White male students from the early civil rights era with a contemporaneous sample of male African American alumni from the same school 10 years after graduation. He found that variance in the degree of student activism predicted later leftist attitudes and political behavior among both the Black and White alumni. However, Fendrich (1976) also found that student activism was a stronger predictor of adult participation in leftist politics for White men than for Black men.

Taken together, these few studies suggest that civil rights activism in the 1960s bears a weaker relationship to adult political participation for women and for African Americans than it does for White men in this cohort; however, this is not because women were relatively unaffected by their experience. On the contrary, we argue that because women and African Americans bore a different, and more direct, relationship to the civil rights and women’s movements, variables other than student activism might be equally important in predicting their continued participation later in life.

Predicting Midlife Political Participation

We expected that White women who graduated from college in the late 1960s would view the women’s movement as having had a strong effect on their lives and that the civil rights movement would have been significant as well (see evidence from another similar sample presented in Stewart & Healy, 1989). In contrast, because the leadership of the women’s movement was dominated by White women and much of the movement’s energy focused on issues of much greater interest to middle-class White women than to any other group (e.g., the critique of the middle-class domestic role of housewife), we expected that Black women graduating from college during this same era would view the women’s movement and the civil rights movement as having been less important influence. Instead, because of the importance of the civil rights movement to African Americans in general (see Schuman & Scott, 1989), we expected that Black women would perceive this series of events as having had an important influence on their later lives. We anticipated that for both groups, though, involvement in political activity in late adolescence would be related to their identities and later lives.

Two separate lines of theory and research suggest that student movements of the 1960s that focused on gaining rights for women and African Americans would strongly affect or politicize the identities of members of those groups who were on college campuses at that time. First, theory and research in social psychology indicate that a central mechanism through which social movements mobilize is the creation of a collective identity that not only enlarges individual identity but also connects the participant to the social group, cementing his or her commitment (Gamson, 1992). When individuals share a common identity, and hence a sense of common fate with a group, they act to protect group interests (Gurin & Townsend, 1986).
Theory and research that specifically address the women's movement and the civil rights–Black power movement similarly emphasize the centrality of collective identity. Cross (1991) observed that the Black power phase of the Black social movement attempted to transform the stigmatized Black identity into a new one based on pride in African American culture and experience; he argued that this pattern of transformation characterizes the development of individual Black identity as well (this premise has been extensively tested empirically; see Helms, 1993; Ponterotto & Wisc, 1987). More generally, Cohen (1985) argued that recent political struggles, notably feminism, differ from earlier forms of leftist movement in that they invoke an activist identity that shapes and is shaped by participants' own experiences of group identity, rather than being strictly based on class membership (see also Mueller, 1987).

Second, research based on a model of life span development suggests that the period of late adolescence and young adulthood is a critical time for the development of identity, including the commitment to values, ideologies, and groups. Stewart and Healy (1986, 1989) suggested that events of historical significance during this period are likely to affect cohort members' developing identities. Speaking specifically of this cohort, Erikson (1968b) argued that the student movements represented an attempt by that generation to develop its own ideology and rituals of passage, making the connection between identity development, social change, and political participation explicit. This premise found empirical support in Duncan and Agronick's (1995) longitudinal analyses based on women of this cohort. They found that women who actively explored different identities available at age 21 (i.e., who were classified in the stages of identity achievement and identity moratorium) rated the women's movement as being more personally meaningful at midlife. Similarly, Jennings's (1987) study of the "protest generation" found evidence both for the persistence of the hypothesized "cohort" definition through the life course and for a particularly strong shaping effect of cohort or generation for those who participated in student activism. This influence is thought to be quite general and diffuse, including and integrating particular attitudes and stances toward social life (e.g., social dominance orientation; see Prato, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius, Prato, & Bobo, 1994).

We use the term political identity to describe a pattern of beliefs related to the social and structural relationships that connect the individual to social groups: specifically, that human existence is interconnected, that disadvantaged groups are limited by systemic obstacles rather than individual shortcomings, that the political realm is personally relevant and meaningful, and that collective actions are the best responses to social problems. Because college-educated Black women of this cohort were expected to be powerfully influenced by both the civil rights and women's movements, whereas White women were expected to be more strongly influenced by the women's movement, we hypothesized that Black women would show a higher level of political identity but that political identity would be associated with midlife political activism for both groups.

Power discontent, or dissatisfaction with the power one's group holds relative to other groups, provides an affective component to political participation. This construct taps the individual's view of her own personal stake in political action and was hypothesized to be related to level of midlife political involvement. We anticipated that Black women would have higher levels of power discontent than White women because they suffer both race- and gender-based disadvantages (consistent with the racial differences found by Gurin, Miller, & Gurin, 1980) but that power discontent would play a similar role for both groups of women in motivating political participation. Both Gurin and Townsend's (1986) group consciousness model and Crosby's (1976, 1982) and others' (e.g., Gurr, 1968, 1970; Runciman, 1966) relative deprivation models assume that a sense of grievance is an important precondition for political mobilization.

The construct of power discontent, like much of the traditional research on social movement participation, is based on a conceptualization of participants as being motivated primarily by their own personal material interests (hence the classic "free rider" problem; see Olson, 1965). However, more recently, scholars have argued that individuals profit from movement participation not only through the tangible achievements won but also in terms of the development of a shared collective identity, and this felt connection to others may motivate individuals to act on behalf of group interests (Gamson, 1992). This observation suggests that a final aspect of political participation concerns the desire to act individually for the benefit of the larger group and the belief in one's own ability to do so effectively; we label this construct social responsibility.

The notion of social responsibility was addressed empirically in a few articles during the 1950s and 1960s; however, recent research on this topic has been scant except in discussions of the related notion of generativity (for exceptions, see Chebat, 1986; Witt, 1990). Early research by Gogh, McClosky, and Mehl (1952) and by Berkowitz and Lutterman (1968) painted a distinctive portrait of the socially responsible personality. Such people are concerned with social and moral issues, are committed to working for the good of groups rather than just for personal gain, and have a sense of trust in society in general. In this way, they may be considered generative, which is in part defined by a "belief in the species, concern for the next generation, [and the] cultural demand" that individuals contribute their resources to the long-term societal good (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992, p. 1004). Socially responsible people demonstrate a form of personal efficacy in the public realm that Gogh et al. (1952) characterized as "greater poise, assurance and personal security" (p. 77). Perhaps most importantly, they may be described as having a strong sense of community; they are active participants in their communities, representing the antithesis of the alienated citizen. In addition, these researchers speculated that socially responsible individuals are likely to be highly conventional, by virtue of their respect for and attention to communally held social values and norms. However, they recognized that other forms of social responsibility might exist, in particular one characterized by the willingness to participate in principled dissent, seen in the examples of Abraham Lincoln and Mahatma Gandhi (Berkowitz & Lutterman, 1968).

Social responsibility is related to the Eriksonian (Erikson,
The concept of generativity, particularly as it may be expressed in political activity, was explored throughout the adult life span, peaking at midlife (Conway, 1985; Milbrath & Goel, 1982). This pattern is largely attributed to the decreased demands of family life that may be experienced during this period. Similarly, Flacks (1988) argued that people participate politically to the extent that such activities may be negotiated with the responsibilities of daily life. However, these mundane concerns are not incongruent with the argument that generative concern may press individuals to act politically: Such relaxation of the everyday demands of family life may allow individuals to consider what their contributions to future generations will be (McAdams, 1988) and what they can create that will "outlive the self" (Kotre, 1984). Indeed, research has demonstrated that midlife adults express higher levels of generative concern than do either older or younger respondents (McAdams, de St. Aubin, & Logan, 1992).

In the present study, we operationalized social responsibility to include the elements of political efficacy, sense of community, and generativity; we hypothesized that this measure would be related to higher levels of political activism for both White and African American women. Because there is considerable theoretical and empirical literature linking these constructs to midlife personality in general (see, e.g., Erikson, 1968a; Haan, 1989; Mitchel & Helson, 1990; Neugarten, 1968)—although there is virtually no empirical evidence from Black samples—we did not anticipate racial differences.

This study tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. At midlife, Black women who were young adults during the social movements of the late 1960s and the early 1970s will report that the civil rights movement had a larger impact on their lives than did the women's movement. Conversely, we expect that White women of this cohort will endorse the women's movement as having had a greater impact on their subsequent lives than did the civil rights movement.

Hypothesis 2: Level of political participation at midlife will be predicted by student activism for both Black and White women.

Hypothesis 3: High scores on measures tapping the construct of political identity will be associated with midlife political participation in women of both racial groups.

Hypothesis 4: Black women will endorse higher levels of power discontent than will White women; however, power discontent will be associated with midlife political participation for both groups.

Hypothesis 5: Social responsibility will be related to midlife political participation for both Black and White women.

Method

Participants

The study was based on responses to mailed questionnaires administered to two samples of women who were alumnae of the University of Michigan. The measures discussed here were embedded in a larger questionnaire that included items pertaining to respondents' occupational and family history, health, and life satisfaction; thus, the questionnaire was not obviously focused on political attitudes and behavior.

First, the measures discussed here were administered to the White women in the sample as part of the fourth wave of the Women's Life Paths Study, a longitudinal study initiated in 1967 by Tangri (1969). Current addresses for the alumnae were obtained with assistance from the University of Michigan's alumni association. Of the original 200 women in the sample, 107 participated in this wave. Three of the original sample members had died, and 48 were no longer locatable; thus, the response rate from those receiving the questionnaire was 72%. Follow-up respondents in this wave did not differ from nonrespondents from the initial sample on six demographic variables available from the 1967 wave: levels of mothers' and fathers' education, number of siblings, parents' income, mothers' employment, and family religious because the original longitudinal sample did not include any African Americans. Six African American participants from the same era were recruited through the assistance of the alumni association, including a solicitation in the university's Black alumni newsletter. Because of the method of recruitment, there was no way to compute a response rate analogous to that for the longitudinal sample. Women who graduated between 1967 and 1973 were included in the sample, because substantial numbers of Black women were recruited to the university only beginning in 1970. The data were collected through questionnaires mailed to the respondents in the fall of 1992.

Preliminary analyses indicated that the Black and White samples were comparable on most demographic variables. There were no significant differences between the groups' mean levels of education, personal income, and number of children. However, the White women in the sample were more likely to be married or living with a partner (84% for the White women vs. 56% for the Black women), t(1, 166) = 15.90, p < .001, but the difference was not large. Because of the discrepancies between the two samples on the mean and the variance of age, we performed analyses to determine whether there were significant age differences within the African American sample on the variables of interest; t tests comparing older and younger African American women (based on a median split) revealed no significant differences in their mean scores on student activism, adult political participation, political identity, power discontent, and social responsibility. Thus, the African American sample was treated as a single cohort.

Measures

Impact of the movements. To assess racial differences in experiences of the civil rights and women's movements, we asked respondents whether they had participated in each movement and to rate the impact of these movements on their lives on a scale ranging from 1 (very little) to 5 (very much).

Student activism and adult political participation. Student activism and adult political participation were measured as continuous variables on the basis of self-reports of the frequency with which respondents engaged in specific political behaviors. The scale was developed by Fendrich and Lovoy (1988), who found that former civil rights activists and student government leaders reported higher levels of political involvement on this measure than did their less active classmates 10 years after graduation.

For the measure of student activism, we asked respondents how often as college students they had engaged in each of nine different political behaviors that Fendrich and Lovoy (1988) characterized as protest and community activism. They responded on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (never) to 3 (regularly). Responses were summed and divided by the
number of items; therefore, scores ranged from 0 to 3. The behaviors were as follows: joined in a protest march, attended protest meetings, participated in any form of political activity that could lead to arrest, was a candidate for office, worked with others on local problems, formed a group to work on local problems, contacted local officials on social issues, contacted a local state or federal official about a particular personal problem, and went with a group to protest to a public official. Because this measure was administered retrospectively, we calculated its correlation with an item administered to the White sample in 1970 measuring exposure to the women's movement. The item asked how they had "heard about the new women's rights movement." Responses ranged in proximity to the movement: from a low score of 1 (through the media) to high scores of 4 (attended activities) and 5 (had helped organize for the movement). This item was treated as a continuous variable assessing relative proximity of exposure to and involvement in the women's movement; its correlation with student activism was .70 ($N = 85, p < .001$). This single item served only as a proxy for a measure of involvement; however, it lent some support to the validity of the retrospective measure of student activism.

Adult political participation was defined as encompassing a wider array of behaviors, including participation in the electoral process, and was measured similarly by using an expanded list of 17 political behaviors. All of the behaviors listed above were included in this measure as well as items tapping party and campaign work (e.g., "took an active part in a political campaign" and "participated in a political party between elections") and political communication (e.g., "kept informed about politics" and "sent messages to a political leader when they were doing well or poorly"). Respondents were asked to indicate how often they had engaged in each type of behavior during the past 2 years. As before, responses were summed and divided by the number of items. Internal consistency reliability ($\alpha$) for the student activism measure was .85; for the adult political participation index, it was .87.

Political identity. Political identity was conceptualized as the belief that the political realm is personally relevant and meaningful, human existence is interconnected, collective actions are the best responses to social problems, and disadvantaged groups are limited by systemic obstacles rather than individual shortcomings. Five measures were used to operationalize this construct.

Political salience. Political salience was assessed using a measure adapted from Stewart and Healy's (1989) study, in which respondents were asked to judge how personally meaningful ($1 = \text{not at all}, 2 = \text{somewhat}, 3 = \text{very})$ they found each of nine historical events of the 20th century, such as the Vietnam War and the freeing of Nelson Mandela. The reliability of this nine-item scale was .76.

Collective orientation. Collective orientation was measured using a scale adapted from studies by Lykes (1984) and by Gurin et al. (1980) to measure the extent to which the respondents believed that human existence is essentially relational, rather than individualistic (Lykes, 1984). Seven items, stated either as provisos (e.g., "tackle your own cance is a good principle to live by") or as generalized ideas about human nature and existence (e.g., "if you think about life, you realize that each person is a separate individual leading his or her own individual life"), were rated on 7-point scales ($1 = \text{strongly disagree}, 7 = \text{strongly agree})$. Two items were taken from the 1972 National Election Study (Gurin et al., 1980); these assessed agreement with collective action as a strategy to improve the social and political situation of Blacks and women. The reliability of the resulting nine-item measure was .70.

System blame. Two measures of system blame, one pertaining to race and the other to sex, developed by Gurin et al. (1980), gauged the extent to which respondents located the cause of social inequalities within social and political systems, rather than within individuals (on 7-point Likert-type scales). Seven items measured system blame with respect to inequities experienced by women ($\alpha = .72$); eight items assessed system blame with respect to inequities faced by Blacks ($\alpha = .76$).

Left-right ideology. Finally, left-right ideology, the position on the left-right political continuum, was rated by respondents on a 6-point scale ranging from very conservative to radical. Because the movements under study were generally associated with "left" political attitudes (see Jennings, 1987), women's endorsement of these political attitudes is an important component of their politicization by these events. High scores corresponded to a liberal or leftist political orientation; low scores indicated more conservative views.

Power discontent. An affective sense of relative deprivation, or grievance, was expected to be related to political involvement. This component was operationalized as power discontent and was assessed using items developed by Gurin et al. (1980). Respondents were asked to judge the relative amount of influence in American life and politics held by various groups. Specifically, they were asked to judge the relative power held by women in general (gender-based) and by women of their own racial group (race- and gender-based) on a scale ranging from 1 (low discontent) to 5 (high discontent).

Social responsibility. Social responsibility was conceptualized as including the generative desire to improve the world for future generations as well as a sense of political efficacy (or empowerment) and a feeling of connection to a community. A six-item version of the Loyola Generativity scale (McCormack & de St. Aubin, 1992; Nakagawa, 1992) was administered to measure generativity. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the six items on 7-point scales. Items tapped generative concern with making a contribution that extended beyond the self through teaching ("I have important skills that I try to teach others"), caring for future generations ("If I were unable to have children of my own, I would like to adopt children"), or through the products of one's creative endeavors ("I have made and created things that have had an impact on other people"). Internal consistency reliability of this scale was .70.

Internal political efficacy. Internal political efficacy, the sense that the individual can successfully affect the political system relative to the ability of other individuals to do so, was measured using a scale developed by Craig and Maggiotto (1982). The five-item measure asked participants to rate their agreement with statements like "I feel like I could do as good a job in public office as most of the politicians we elect." They responded on scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The internal consistency of the measure was .76.

Sense of community. Sense of community, encompassing feelings of community attachment and belongingness, was chosen to capture the communal aspects of social responsibility and was measured using a scale developed by Bachrach and Zautra (1985). Respondents were asked to select the community that was most important to them and to rate eight attitudes toward this community on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). Items concerned the sense of community belongingness, connection, and contentment as well as the feeling that one shares communalities with others in the community. Reliability for the eight items was .84.

Intercorrelations among the variables hypothesized to predict midlife political participation are presented in the Appendix.

Results

First, we consider evidence that the proposed predictor variables did assess the underlying constructs: political identity, social responsibility, and power discontent. Next, we examine evidence for racial differences in political activism and in the measures of personality, attitudes, and political identity. Finally,
we present the pattern of relationships between the hypothesized predictors and midlife political participation.

**Structure of Predictor Variables**

The five variables assessing political identity, the two assessing power discontent, and the three assessing social responsibility were factor analyzed using varimax rotation. Because the two samples were relatively small, they were combined for this analysis. Results presented in Table 1 show that the variables did load onto three distinct factors (accounting for 55% of the variance). Moreover, all but one variable (system blame for sex) loaded onto one and only one factor at above .40; system blame for sex loaded on both Political Identity and Power Discontent. Because all but one of the variables showed a clear pattern of loading on a single factor, and the exception made conceptual sense, indices of standard-scored scales were created, combining the standardized individual measures to create overall measures of Political Identity, Power Discontent, and Social Responsibility. System blame for sex was included in Political Identity for conceptual clarity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Identity</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective orientation</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System blame: Sex</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System blame: Race</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-right ideology</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Discontent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender within race</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Responsibility</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generativity</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of community</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Factor loadings in boldface type indicate variables included in scale scores. Factor 1 = Political Identity; Factor 2 = Power Discontent; Factor 3 = Social Responsibility.

Racial Differences in Political Activism and Predictors

The results of analyses pertaining to student activism and participation in the civil rights and women's movements are presented in Table 2. Beginning with participation in the movements, a chi-square analysis showed that significantly more White women than Black women participated in the women's movement; however, a t test indicated that the groups rated the effect of the movement on their lives as equally important. Not surprisingly, significantly more Black women reported having participated in the civil rights movement than did their White counterparts; similarly, Black women rated the movement as having had a greater effect on their lives.

T tests showed that compared with their White classmates, Black women participated in more student activism and reported higher rates of midlife political participation; however, at midlife, the difference in their rates of participation had narrowed.

Multivariate analyses of variance assessed racial differences in political identity, power discontent, and social responsibility. As shown in Table 3, the hypothesized racial differences in political identity and power discontent were revealed; also as hypothesized, there was no racial difference in social responsibility. All of the indicators of political identity were significantly different in the two groups, except for collective orientation.

On power discontent, the measure of within-race power discontent showed a racial difference (with Black women endorsing higher discontent with the power of their own group than did White women); there was no racial difference for the measure of discontent with the power of women in general. It should be noted that both groups reported high levels of both types of discontent.

Additional analyses revealed that Black women's scores on three of the five variables constituting political identity—political salience, system blame for race, and collective orientation—showed significantly less variance (i.e., were more homogeneous) than White women's scores, using Levene's test for equality of variance (Norusis, 1990): for political salience, $F(1, 167) = 4.21, p < .05$; for system blame, $F(1, 161) = 4.85, p < .05$; and for collective orientation, $F(1, 142) = 3.85, p = .05$. There were no differences in the two groups' variance on political orientation and system blame with respect to sex.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>White women</th>
<th>Black women</th>
<th>Significance of differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participated in women's movement</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>$\chi^2(1, N = 167) = 5.67^{**}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate effect of women's movement</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>$F(1, 164) = 0.40, ns$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in civil rights movement</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>$\chi^2(1, N = 168) = 33.88^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate effect of civil rights movement</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>$F(1, 165) = 108.54^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of student activism</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>$F(1, 157) = 93.17^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of midlife activism</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>$F(1, 160) = 4.11^*$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05.  **p < .01.  ***p < .001.
Multivariate Analyses of Variance on Political Identity, Power Discontent, and Social Responsibility

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
<th>White women</th>
<th>Black women</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political identityb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Power discontentb</td>
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<td>6.65</td>
<td>.002</td>
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<td>Social responsibilityc</td>
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<td>Sense of community</td>
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<td>ns</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1.28</td>
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Note. Scores for collective orientation and generativity are aggregates of standard-scored items, with means of 0 and standard deviations of 1.

For F values, dfs = 1, 139. For F values, dfs = 1, 154. For F values, dfs = 1, 151.

Correlates of Midlife Political Participation

Table 4 presents the simple correlations of student activism and the index scores of political identity, power discontent, and social responsibility with midlife political participation for the two samples separately by race. For both groups, student activism and midlife social responsibility were significantly and positively correlated with midlife political participation; for the White women, political identity was also a significant positive correlate.

Midlife political participation was regressed on level of student activism and the index scores of political identity, power discontent, and social responsibility, separately by race. These results are presented in Table 4 as well.

For White women, the multivariate model explained 29% of the variance in midlife political participation. Political identity and social responsibility were significantly related to midlife activism. Note that although level of student activism was significantly and positively correlated with midlife activism, when all variables were included in the model, student activism was not a significant predictor of political participation at midlife.

For Black women, this model predicted 36% of the variance in midlife political participation. For this group, level of student activism and social responsibility were significantly related to midlife political involvement. Note that for Black women, political identity was not significantly associated with midlife activism in the bivariate correlation nor in the multivariate model.

Discussion

These findings support the notion that Black and White women of this generation were similarly affected by some historic events of this era but there were important differences between them as well. Although White women were more likely to have participated in the women's movement (as expected), both groups rated the women's movement as having had a similar, moderate impact on their lives. As predicted, Black women were more likely to have participated in the civil rights movement and rated the movement as having had a much stronger impact on their lives than did White women. The finding that Black women were similar to their White counterparts on measures of the impact of the women's movement and power discontent with respect to sex is particularly noteworthy. It contradicts the popular perception that Black women are relatively unconcerned about gender issues because of their overriding concern with racial injustice. It supports, instead, the contention that African American women have a "multiple (political) consciousness" corresponding to the "multiple jeopardy" they experience as members of two relatively disempowered groups (King, 1988).

For both racial groups, the construct of social responsibility, including midlife generativity, contributed to political involvement, independent of its relationship to political identity. The multivariate analysis suggests that within both racial groups, those who are politically active at midlife are those who are empowered by a sense of personal efficacy to create change, who feel a strong connection to the communities to which they belong, and who are concerned with making a lasting contribution to future generations. This finding casts both midlife political involvement and its student antecedent in a positive light, in contrast to the stereotype of activists as malcontents (see, e.g., Rothman & Lichter, 1982).

As expected, political identity showed a significant relationship to White women's midlife political involvement. However, for Black women, the index score based on the political identity variables was not related to midlife political activism. This finding should not be interpreted as suggesting that Black women in the sample were not politically conscious; indeed, they scored significantly higher than their White counterparts on all but one of the political identity variables. Rather, political identity did not distinguish the activists from the less active among Black women. Black women's higher endorsement of
historical events as personally meaningful and their more homogenous scores on the political identity variables of political salience and system blame with respect to race suggest that, in general, Black women in the sample shared a relatively politicized identity or worldview.

Unexpectedly, level of involvement in student activism was not a significant predictor of White women's midlife political participation, although it was predictive of Black women's political involvement later in life. Considered together with the findings concerning political identity, this suggests that among White women, the politically active were discernible from their less active peers by their level of politicization; among Black women, those who were active politically were characterized by their continuity of participation over time, rather than by a distinctive ideology.

For both groups, power discontent (the sense of personal grievance on behalf of one's group) was unrelated to midlife political participation, perhaps partly because power discontent was generally so high within the sample; the average rating for both racial groups on both types of discontent was more than 4 on a 5-point scale. It is important, though, that power discontent was not related to midlife political participation, because it supports Crosby's argument that a sense of collective grievance is often not readily or directly translated into political action (see especially Crosby, Pufall, Snyder, O'Connell, & Whalen, 1989).

We cannot assume that the findings of this study can be readily generalized to Black and White women at other places and in other times. Nevertheless, the findings presented here have important implications for thinking about the meaning of Black and White women's political involvement and thought and may serve as an important source of hypotheses for future study. The findings suggest not only that Black and White women may have different ideological perspectives on race and gender politics but also that ideology itself may have a different relationship to political participation for Black and White women. This may be due, in part, to the ways in which Black and White women experienced the significant movements of this era, particularly the civil rights movement and the women's movement.

The women's movement emphasized the importance of transformation of ideology, making consciousness raising a principal part of its practice (Popkin, 1990). Hence, it is not surprising that among White women in the sample, political identity was significantly related to midlife political participation, independent of its correlation with earlier political activism during the college years. In contrast, although the Black power movement of the late 1960s emphasized the importance of consciousness raising, the movement was actually an outgrowth or later phase of the civil rights movement (Morris et al., 1989), which historians view as the expression of a long-standing shared culture of ideological and, at times, behavioral resistance among African Americans (Harding, 1991). In this cultural context, ideology may not be the most important determinant of political involvement; instead, cultural norms may support continued commitment to political participation. Many Black feminist theorists have called for work to deepen our understanding of the distinctive ideology of African American women (King, 1988; Robinson, 1987); this study underscores the importance of this line of research.

These findings also suggest that greater study of the relationship between political activism and social responsibility in women is warranted. Some feminist scholars have argued that women are predisposed to work to maintain peace and to use the tactics of nonviolent action as a natural extension of the work that they do within families; this could be understood as a form of social responsibility, particularly in its generative aspects (Elshtain, 1982; Ruddick, 1985). However, others have argued that this view is limiting in its essentialism (Lott, 1990); moreover, the diversity of political positions taken by women belies this argument (Tilley & Gurin, 1990). Instead, the relationship between women's social responsibility and political activism might be better understood within particular social and historical contexts. For example, Kerber (1980) argued that the concept of "republican motherhood" arose in the earliest years of the American republic, specifying that women's political role in the new polis was to educate their sons to perform as virtuous and public-spirited citizens.

Research in disciplines outside of psychology supports the contention that political participation among African Americans may be related to a sense of social responsibility. First, several African American feminist theorists have posited that social responsibility is a key component of Black women's activism (e.g., Collins, 1990; hooks, 1984). They have conceptualized African American women's activism as an extension of the daily resistance that was historically necessary to ensure the well-being of their families under oppressive conditions. Thus, Black women's activism is grounded in their desire to ensure the survival of their immediate and extended families. Second, the idea that all striving represents a struggle toward the larger goal of racial uplift (Giddings, 1984), long cultivated in Black communities, is inherently generative. In this context, political activism can easily be understood and experienced as generative behavior. Finally, within African American culture generally and within Black activist cultures particularly, the community has popularly been viewed as a kind of extended family (see Harding, 1991); thus, Black women may be especially likely to view political activity as an appropriate domain of generative endeavor.

Although there is less theoretical work explicitly addressing the ways in which race might shape the political values of White women, a number of scholars have written about women in general in terms that apply to contemporary White women in particular. For example, in discussing gender differences in political participation, Jennings (1979) commented that "the rearing of the young is still predominantly the prescriptive and descriptive province of mothers. Becoming involved in the politics of education serves as an extension of this primary role" (p. 769). The traditional role for women as homemakers and culture bearers may, then, have permitted women to gradually become politicized through work taken on at first as part of their roles as mothers, on behalf of their own children. Consistent with this notion, Franz and McClelland (1994) found that at age 31, White women who had been active in social movements of the 1960s rated "the importance of teaching children the value of
being free to develop one's full potential” (p. 203) more highly than did their less active peers. Viewing the question of the role of gender socialization in shaping political participation more broadly, Constantini and Craik (1972) commented that political activism in women (implicitly or predominantly White) is experienced as service to others and a “labor of love” whereas it is experienced by men as a “vehicle for personal enhancement and career advancement” (pp. 234–235).

In short, social responsibility played an important role in both Black and White women's midlife political participation, but cultural and other factors may have operated differently to link these two domains for these two groups. Moreover, it is important to clarify whether gender is indeed an important moderator of this relationship. Even if social responsibility is an equally important factor in Black and White men's political participation, perhaps the specific racial and gender-based socializations they experience shape their understanding of social responsibility in ways that are consequential for their political activities.

In response to crises pertaining to poverty, violent crime, and corruption among political elites, there have recently been bipartisan calls for a reexamination of the values of obligation, citizenship, and social responsibility. These range from George Bush's entreaty to the “thousand points of light” to a recent conference sponsored by the Clinton Administration on “Character Building for a Democratic, Civil Society.” This study suggests that further research on this topic as it relates to personality development is desirable. On the basis of 25 years of follow-ups of Black and White male activists who were veterans of the earliest phase of student movements in the 1960s, Fendrich (1993) observed that in adulthood the former activists were “ideal citizens,” more socially and politically active than others of their generation, including former student government leaders. He argued that this continuity of participation resulted because “political identities and commitments originate in collective political experience, not the other way around. The problem is not the political apathy of individuals, but the poverty of collective opportunities to act democratically” (Fendrich, 1993, p. 144).

Our findings, based on women of a later cohort, support this argument and the notion that identity (in this case, political identity) may be an important source of continuity in political behavior. Moreover, they indicate that the concept of social responsibility, encompassing a commitment to one's community and to future generations, taken together with a sense of political efficacy or empowerment may be an important mediator between active political participation in young adulthood and in midlife. In other words, participation in student activism may, in part, produce a sense of commitment and capacity to act, which in turn promotes active political participation later in life. In this light, student protesters may be seen not as society's malcontents but as tomorrow's exemplars of social responsibility.

References


### Appendix

#### Intercorrelations and Standard Deviations Between Independent Variables, Separately by Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>-.02</td>
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<td>10. Sense of community</td>
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<td>.16</td>
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**Note:** Correlations for the Black sample are above the diagonal and correlations for the White sample are below the diagonal. Because of missing data, ns for the Black sample ranged from 59 to 64; ns for the White sample ranged from 90 to 105.

*p < .05.  **p < .01.  ***p < .001.

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