

Political Participation and Feminist Consciousness Among Women Activists of the 1960s

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This paper examined the hypothesis that women who took part in student movements of the 1960s would be distinguishable from their contemporaries in terms of political ideology, political behavior, and feminism in middle age. Women who had been identified as student activists in public records during the late 1960s and early 1970s were compared to a sample of nonactivist peers. Although the two groups scored similarly on variables related to work and family arrangements, former activists scored higher on measures of leftist political orientation and political efficacy, reported greater political salience and collectivism, and reported greater current political participation. Although both groups reported high levels of feminist consciousness and identity, activists scored significantly higher. The difficulty of politically mobilizing women to combat gender discrimination is discussed in light of the discrepancy between consciousness and activism in the comparison group.

KEY WORDS: student activism, feminism, political attitudes, political participation

In the 1960s and 1970s, the University of Michigan was known for its students' idealism, activism, and commitment to social change. It was there, on the steps of the Student Union, that President John F. Kennedy delivered a speech announcing the formation of the Peace Corps in 1961. By the late 1960s, against the backdrop of larger national struggles to resist the Vietnam war and to liberate women, the school was a site of frequent student political demonstrations concerning issues both global and local in scope. For example, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a major anti-Vietnam war protest organization, was founded at the Univer-

sity of Michigan (Braungart & Braungart, 1991). Michigan students also organized the Black Action Movement (BAM), which led to major changes in the number of Black students admitted to the university (Brune, 1984; Cole, 1994). Such student activism, which took place on campuses across the United States, was in part responsible for bringing about sweeping social changes that increased opportunities for White women and people of color, groups that historically had been relatively disempowered politically.

Women were actively involved in student protest activity both at the University of Michigan and elsewhere during this period. However, their participation was often underrated within the organizations at the time (Evans, 1979) and has often been overlooked since by researchers who have studied the lives of student activists. This paper reports on a unique sample of women who were student activists while at the University of Michigan in the late 1960s and early 1970s and are now at midlife. As students, the women in our sample took part in political activities in a variety of domains: Some were members of SDS, the Committee to Free Angela Davis, the Cooperative Housing Movement, and the Tenants Union; others wrote editorials in support of the University's Child Care Action Group, started underground newspapers, or were arrested in campus protests. Many women who were politically active in Ann Arbor during this period report retrospectively that the experience had a lasting impact on their political and personal lives. One alumna in our sample wrote, "Living in Ann Arbor in the sixties and seventies had a great influence on my getting involved in anti-war activities, 'thinking politically,' and getting involved in the women's movement. All of this involved tremendous personal growth and feelings of empowerment." But were these sentiments shared by others? Do the activists, by virtue of their common experience, represent a subgroup within their generation whose distinctiveness has persisted across years of continuing social change and personal development (Mannheim, 1952)?

To explore these questions, we collected data from University of Michigan alumnae known to have been student activists in the late 1960s and early 1970s. At the same time, we conducted a follow-up panel in a longitudinal study of women graduates of the Michigan class of 1967 (Tangri & Jenkins, 1986); this provided a comparison sample of women who attended the same university at about the same time, but who were selected regardless of activist status.

The activists, by virtue of the historical period in which they came of age and the participatory role they chose to play in the events that unfolded during that time, are both similar to and different from others in their cohort. Because most college-educated women of this cohort were affected by the changes both heralded and engendered by the women's movement (Klein, 1984), we expected that in their personal and professional lifestyles, women activists would be similar to the women who were their less politically involved classmates. However, we expected that in their later political lives, women activists of the period would resemble their male counterparts whose later life outcomes have been documented in the literature

on student activists. In other ways, women who were politically active may be distinguished from both their female contemporaries and male activists: We expected them to have a pronounced and lasting commitment to the women's movement and to feminist ideology. In the next sections, we review the literature addressing each of these research questions.

General Cohort Effects of the Women's Movement

Both the activist and nonactivist women in this sample are members of an important cohort because of their developmental position with respect to the women's movement. These women were raised in working- and middle-class families during the 1950s, a fairly conservative period in the United States with respect to gender role expectations. By the time they graduated from college in the late 1960s and early 1970s, these expectations were undergoing a major revision as the second wave of the U.S. women's movement was gaining momentum.

Largely as a result of the women's movement, women's roles in homes and workplaces were transformed in the 1970s. Klein (1984), who studied the demographic and political changes in the lives of women over the 20th century, reported that by 1980 many women were leading lives that were widely discrepant from the norm of a generation earlier. This era saw delayed marriage, decreased birth rates, and a greater rate of participation of women in the labor force. Additionally, in the years that followed the height of the women's movement in the early 1970s, women narrowed the gap between their earnings and men's; by 1993, the female-to-male earnings ratio was 0.72, not significantly different from the all-time high attained in 1990 (Masumura, 1996). Ultimately, the women's movement was instrumental in passing legislation to fight gender discrimination in schools and workplaces, thereby increasing women's access to educational and occupational opportunities.

There can be little doubt that many women's lives were touched by the social changes created by the women's movement (Carroll, 1989); college-educated women were particularly well situated to reap many of these benefits. Thus, we expected that like many women of their cohort, activists and nonactivists both would have taken similar advantage of the new opportunities for career, education, and family arrangements that were made possible by the women's movement. We hypothesized that there would be few differences between the choices made by activists and the comparison sample concerning work and family.

Midlife Outcomes of College Student Activism: Political Attitudes and Behavior

Research exploring the later life outcomes of student activists of the 1960s paints a fairly coherent picture of student activists' political attitudes and behavior later in life. Consistently, findings indicate that the activists maintained a distinct set of political attitudes that are ideologically to the left of their former peers,

including those regarding free enterprise, assessment of the threat presented by communism, civil rights, women's rights, affirmative action, and political partisanship. Most of the studies showed that the former activists maintained a high level of political involvement relative to others in the cohort as well (Fendrich, 1974; Fendrich & Tarleau, 1973; Fendrich & Turner, 1989; Hoge & Ankney, 1982; Jennings, 1987; Marwell, Aiken, & Demerath, 1987; Nassi, 1981).

On the basis of this literature, we predicted that at midlife the women activists in our sample would be more politically involved than nonactivists, as evidenced by their attitudes and behavior. Specifically, we expected that the activists would feel more politically efficacious, would describe their political position as more liberal, and would rate historical events as more meaningful to them than would their nonactivist peers. Additionally, we expected that the activists would score higher on collectivism because of the importance of collective identity to social movement participation (Gamson, 1992; Gurin & Townsend, 1986). We also anticipated finding an overall pattern of increased political involvement among the former activists, including higher levels of participation in a variety of political behaviors, such as contacting local officials on social issues and attending protest meetings.

Additionally, we expected to discern differences in the domains of political involvements reported by women with different histories of social movement participation. Specifically, we expected the former activists to be more involved in a range of political activities, including electoral politics, nonparty political groups (e.g., unions, special-interest groups), and political demonstrations and protests. We also expected that because of their history of involvement, the former activists might be more likely to choose the political realm as a vocation or as an avocation. That is, we hypothesized that they would be more likely to choose a political occupation, and that they would be more likely to use their skills for social change outside of professional activities.

It is notoriously difficult to differentiate political activities from the nonpolitical. For example, organizational activities that are not explicitly political, such as running a PTA fund drive or managing a church soup kitchen, can help individuals to develop skills that are transferable to politics, and political mobilization may occur through nonpolitical institutions (Schlozman, Burns, & Verba, 1994). However, we wanted to rule out the hypothesis that the activists were simply "joiners" who tended to participate in more organizations in general; thus, we compared their participation to that of the nonactivists in a number of domains that were not explicitly political. We did not expect to find differences between the two groups' level of participation in social, professional, and recreational organizations; nonpolitical humanitarian work (e.g., volunteering at a food pantry); or work in organizations associated with one's children.

Gender-Specific Consequences of Student Activism

Although the social and political changes brought about by the women's movement created new possibilities for women in the public sphere generally, research suggests that the movement did not affect all women equally (Beck & Jennings, 1982). Not surprisingly, research suggests that changes based on movement activism and ideology were most pronounced in the lives of those women who reported that they found the movement to be subjectively consequential. Stewart and Healy (1989) found that women who indicated that the women's movement was quite psychologically meaningful and important to them were more likely to pursue nontraditional occupations and to combine work and family roles. Duncan and Agronick (1995) similarly found that the psychological meaningfulness attributed to the women's movement was correlated with higher educational and career attainment and income in two samples of college-educated women. Moreover, respondents who rated the women's movement as personally meaningful had more assertive, confident, and socially poised personality characteristics at midlife.

Several lines of research point to the hypothesis that the lives of women who were politically active during the 1960s would be particularly affected by the ideology and practice of the women's movement, whether or not their activism focused on the women's movement per se (e.g., Franz & McClelland, 1994; McAdam, 1992). First, there is some evidence that political involvement may be associated with consciousness raising with respect to gender, even in cases in which that activity is not explicitly focused on women's issues. For example, studies of women in coal mining strikes (Kingsolver, 1989; Maggard, 1990) demonstrated that participation in a local protest was likely to lead to broader gender and class consciousness. In addition, Marwell et al. (1987) found that former civil rights activists were more likely to endorse women's rights later in life. This suggests that political attitudes that were developed through participation in activist causes may transfer to other, potentially related domains.

Similarly, the few studies that have specifically addressed women's participation in political movements of the 1960s era suggest that women's experiences were associated with increased gender consciousness. Studies based on interviews with women who were active in the civil rights movement (Cole, 1994; Evans, 1979) and in the draft resistance movement (Thorne, 1975) have found that women often felt they were relegated to second-class status by the mostly male leadership, who assigned the women to menial, behind-the-scenes tasks. The paradoxical experiences of gender segregation and discriminatory treatment within organizations working toward equality and social justice has been credited with raising women's gender identity and consciousness; their segregation helped to develop their sense of their sex as a distinct group, and the ideology of these movements heightened their awareness of injustice or discontent. Such gender consciousness ultimately was instrumental in giving rise to the women's movement (Evans, 1979;

Thorne, 1975). This historical argument is supported by longitudinal research that followed student activists of this period into adulthood, which suggests that participation in the movements of this era had a long-term impact on both the later political participation and the personal development of the women activists, despite the discrimination they encountered.

For example, Franz and McClelland (1994) argued that the women's movement enhanced women activists' career paths; compared to male activists, women in their sample reported higher occupational status and less strain early in middle age. McAdam (1992) found that although participation in the "Freedom Summer" program of 1964 was predictive of later activism for men but not for women, women who participated in the program described the experience as more personally significant than did men. McAdam argued that the subsequent women's movement served to increase the participants' sense of themselves as political actors, thus coloring their later assessment of the significance of Freedom Summer. Finally, on the basis of interviews with women who had been either conservative or liberal activists during the 1960s, Braungart and Braungart (1991) argued that for many, such activism led to a long-standing political commitment that included political work on behalf of women. These studies suggest that for women, participating in any of the social movements of the 1960s facilitated the likelihood of becoming involved specifically in activities related to women's liberation.

Because of the literature that suggests that activism in other social movements is related to women's movement activism, and because of the demonstrated psychological effects of finding the women's movement influential, 1960s activism should enhance women's consciousness about gender and sexism. However, to our knowledge, no one has explored the relationship between feminist consciousness and student activism of the 1960s.

To understand this relationship, it is necessary to articulate a theory about the development of feminist consciousness; however, conceptions and definitions of this construct have been varied and complex (Buschman & Lenart, 1996). Two such conceptions are relevant to our current project. One common framework for understanding feminist consciousness is through social identity theory or models of group consciousness (Griffin, 1989; Gurin, Miller, & Gurin, 1980; Henderson-King & Stewart, 1994). Group consciousness is the belief that one shares similar interests with others in the social group, and it may include a tendency to act on the group's behalf. Gurin et al. (1980) argued that group consciousness also includes the belief that one's group is relatively disempowered because of structural constraints rather than because of deficiencies of the stratum's members, a set of beliefs sometimes called system blame.

Building on theory and research addressing the development of a positive racial identity in Black Americans, a second common approach treats feminist consciousness as a developmental process (Downing & Roush, 1985; see also Bargad & Hyde, 1991; Henderson-King, 1993; Rickard, 1989). The stage-based theory assumes that women begin the process of feminist identity development

from a state of passive acceptance of sexism and sex roles. In the next stage, revelation, some type of crisis encounter prompts women to recognize sexist inequality. Once women have worked through the resulting anger at men and guilt toward themselves, they may seek to strengthen their bonds with other women in order to develop their new identity; this third stage is called embeddedness-emanation. After this stage, women may become prepared to emerge from the safety of a women-centered environment. At stage four, they have synthesized the new identity sufficiently to evaluate men as individuals. Downing and Roush also theorized a fifth stage, active commitment, in which women take part in activism on behalf of feminist beliefs; however, for this sample of activist women we see merit in Rickard's (1989) argument that this stage represents a behavioral manifestation of the synthesis stage rather than an additional developmental stage of identity.

Because previous research indicates that the women's movement powerfully shaped the later political activities of women who were activists in the 1960s (Braungart & Braungart, 1991; McAdam, 1992), we predicted that at midlife the former student activists would report having been more involved in the women's movement and would score higher on various measures of feminist consciousness.

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.

To sample women who were politically active during the late 1960s and early 1970s, we reviewed archival documents relating to student protest between 1966 and 1973 at the University of Michigan and recorded the names of women who had taken part in such activity. Three archival sources were tapped to identify names of activists. First, we examined issues of the university's student newspaper, the *Michigan Daily*, between 1966 and 1973, searching for names of women who were participants in political activities. Most often, women were mentioned when their photographs appeared in stories related to student protest, when they were quoted as spokespersons representing political groups, and when they were interviewed by reporters because they were participating at the scene of a political event. Second, we consulted papers housed at the Bentley Library at the University of Michigan that were collected by Bret Eynon, and which were described in the catalogue as "relating to his interest in the radical causes and issues of the 1960s

and 1970s.” This archive contains a variety of primary sources relating to political groups spanning the period between 1966 and 1977, including rosters for some political organizations and local political publications. Women’s names appearing in the materials in this archive were recorded for possible inclusion in the sample. Third, women’s names were taken from a mailing list for a 1987 reunion of people who had participated in student movements in Ann Arbor during the 1960s.

Records kept by the university’s alumni association were consulted to verify that all women located through the archival search were alumnae of the Classes of 1967 to 1973, and to obtain current addresses for these women. Of the original 96 questionnaires mailed to good addresses, 39 women responded to our invitation to participate in the study, yielding a response rate of 41%. The response rate was similar for participants whose names were located through each of the three archival sources. Of the women who participated, 41% were located through the newspaper records, 33% were drawn from the Eynon archive, and 26% were from the 1960s movement reunion list. Participants located from the three archival sources did not differ significantly in their scores on any of the measures reported below, including self-reported levels of involvement in student activism; hence, despite the varied ways in which their names were located, the former activists subsample appears to be a relatively homogeneous group.

The response rate for the activist sample is best viewed in the context of other research attempting to follow up student activists from this era. Longitudinal studies, in which activists’ attitudes were first measured as students and again some time after graduation, have shown good response rates [Fendrich & Lovoy, 1988 (80%); Hoge & Ankney, 1982 (74%); Jennings, 1987 (82%)]. However, studies like this one, in which the first contact with the activists was made sometime after graduation, have reported substantially lower rates [Abramowitz & Nassi, 1981/Nassi, 1981 (29%); Fendrich, 1977 (two samples: 71% and 37%); McAdam, 1992 (51%)].

The sample of nonactivist women was drawn from the fourth wave of the Women’s Life Paths Study, a longitudinal study of women from the University of Michigan Class of 1967, initiated in 1967 by Sandra Tangri (Tangri & Jenkins, 1986). As had been done for the activist sample, current addresses for the alumnae were obtained with assistance from the university’s alumni association. Of the original 200 women in the sample, 107 participated in this wave and completed the relevant measures. Three of the original sample members had died, and 48 were not locatable; thus, the response rate from among those who received 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 (level of mother’s and father’s education, number of siblings, parents’ income, mother’s employment, and family religion).

All of the women in both the activist sample and the nonactivist comparison sample were White. The activists were born significantly later than the comparison sample; however, the difference was not large [on year of birth, activists, $M = 1948$,

SD = 3.02; comparison group, $M = 1945$, $SD = .43$; $t(142) = 10.85$, $p < .001$]. Because of the discrepancy between the two samples on age, analyses were performed to determine whether there were significant age differences within the activist sample on the variables of interest. When the sample was divided into older and younger activists (median split), t tests revealed no significant differences in their mean scores on demographic variables and on the variables measuring political attitudes and behaviors, with one exception: Younger activists began their careers at an earlier age [younger activists, $M = 25.3$, $SD = 3.3$; older activists, $M = 29.1$, $SD = 6.6$; $t(34) = 2.14$, $p < .05$]. Consequently, the activist sample was treated as a single cohort.

Measures

Personal and Professional Characteristics

Respondents reported the age at which they first married and first gave birth (if applicable); whether they had raised children, and if so, how many; their marital history; and the hours per week spent caring for home and dependents. Similarly, they reported their history of work and education, including the age at which they began their careers; their highest completed degree (rated as follows: 1, bachelor's level; 2, some graduate work; 3, master's level; 4, doctoral level); the hours per week spent at their jobs; and the importance with which they regarded advancement in their fields, rated on a scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important). Additionally, those working full time were asked to report their annual salaries on a scale from 1 (under \$20,000) to 11 (\$140,000 and up).

Political Attitudes

Respondents completed the following four measures of political attitudes:

Right-left orientation was rated by respondents on a scale from 1 (very conservative) to 5 (radical).

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). Respondents rated five items, such as "I feel like I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues which confront our society," on a 7-point scale from 0 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Internal consistency based on the combined samples was acceptable ($\alpha = .79$).

Political salience was assessed with a measure adapted from Stewart and Healy (1989) in which respondents were asked to judge how personally meaningful they found each of 14 historical events of the 20th century, such as the Great Depression, the Vietnam war, and the freeing of Nelson Mandela ($\alpha = .84$). Respondents rated each event on a scale from 1 (not at all personally meaningful)

to 3 (very personally meaningful). Responses were summed and divided by the number of items.

Collectivism (Lykes, 1985; Ryan, Lykes, & Bertner, 1983) was assessed with nine items ($\alpha = .68$) that were worded either as proverbs (e.g., “ ‘Paddle your own canoe’ 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 life”). The respondents were asked to endorse their agreement on a 7-point scale, scored so that lower scores indicate individualism and higher scores indicate collectivism.

Political Participation

Three measures of retrospective and current political participation were administered:

Student activism was measured as a continuous variable, using a variation of a measure developed by Fendrich and Lovoy (1988). Respondents were asked how often during their college years they had engaged in each of nine behaviors that are characteristic of student activism, including protest (e.g., “attended protest meetings”) and community activism (e.g., “formed a group to work on local problems”). They indicated their responses on a scale from 0 (never) to 3 (often); internal consistency was acceptable ($\alpha = .89$). Responses were summed and divided by the number of items; scores therefore ranged from 0 to 3.

Current political involvement was measured on the basis of respondents’ reports of a wide range of political behavior (Fendrich & Lovoy, 1988). This variable was important because previous research has shown that over the life course, patterns of political involvement change in response to the demands of different life stages (Jennings, 1979). The current political participation index included 17 items measuring the following types of involvement: protest (e.g., “joined in a protest march”), community activism (e.g., “contacted local officials on social issues”), party and campaign work (e.g., “took an active part in a political campaign”), and political communication (e.g., “informed others in my community about politics”). Respondents were asked to indicate how often they had engaged in each type of behavior over the past 2 years on a scale from 0 (never) to 3 (often); internal consistency was acceptable ($\alpha = .88$). Responses were summed and divided by the number of items; scores therefore ranged from 0 to 3.

Political and organizational behavior was assessed with an open-ended measure. Respondents were asked to describe their activities for each of the years between 1981 and 1992. For each year, they were given approximately 1.25 inches of open space to record their responses to the prompt:

Please indicate as fully as possible the places you have lived and the activities that have occupied your time each year for the last 12 years. Some examples might be: “Got divorced and went to work for March of

Dimes working on legislation for funding”; “Took a course in modern dance at the ‘Y’ while living in California—also decided to apply for teaching jobs”; and so on. We know that in some cases you will have difficulty recalling your activities; however, we would appreciate as much detail as is possible. One way of recalling might be to locate a pivotal event that you do recall, and then work backward and forward in time from it.

The examples did not suggest that respondents should either emphasize or limit themselves to descriptions of political activities; hence, this may be a less reactive measure of political and organizational involvement than those that explicitly ask respondents to self-report specific behaviors. Because constraints of time and space delimited the number of activities from each year that could be reported, it can be argued that the activities mentioned by the respondents are those that hold particular meaning for them.

In keeping with the argument made by Schlozman et al. (1994) that no empirically clear line can be drawn between activities that are political and those that are not, we defined a broad range of content-coding categories to capture the political and organizational involvement reported by the participants. Moreover, because other scholars have argued that women often seek nontraditional outlets for their political participation, particularly during their child-raising years (Jennings, 1979; Randall, 1987), it is appropriate to begin from a broad definition of political and organizational involvement.

Responses were content-coded for the following categories of political and organizational behavior: traditional political activity (e.g., voting and campaign work); membership in political groups other than political parties (e.g., unions, special interest groups); taking part in demonstrations (e.g., labor strikes and pro-choice rallies); holding a job with a political focus; using skills for social change outside of an organization (e.g., writing an editorial or creating a piece of art with a political message); nonpolitical humanitarian work (e.g., fund raising or working for the Red Cross); social, recreational, or professional organizational involvement; and involvement with children’s or school organizations (e.g., PTA, Girl Scouts). The first four relevant activities mentioned each year were coded. Coding was performed by an advanced undergraduate who was unaware of group membership and was checked for reliability against coding by the first author. Interrater reliability ranged from 88 to 97%. Four categories—traditional politics, demonstrations, having a political job, and using skills for social change—were each reported by fewer than 10% of the respondents; thus, scores for these categories were summed into a composite variable, “other political activity.”

Participation in the Women's Movement

Participation in the women's movement was assessed on the basis of a single item that asked respondents whether they had taken part in the women's movement; if so, they were asked to indicate in which of the following seven ways they had participated: marching and demonstrating, financial support, moral support, organizational work, supporting political candidates, a leadership role, or some other way. These types of participation were summed to create a measure of engagement that ranged from 0 (noninvolvement) to 7 (involvement in the entire spectrum of activities).

Feminist Consciousness

Three measures of feminist consciousness were administered:

System blame (Gurin et al., 1980) gauged the extent to which respondents located the cause of inequalities experienced by women within social and political systems, rather than within individuals. Respondents rated seven items, such as "If women don't advance in their jobs, it is because there are barriers which keep them from getting ahead," on a 5-point scale from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree); internal consistency was acceptable ($\alpha = .73$).

Effect of the women's movement consisted of one item that asked respondents to judge the movement's effect on their own lives, using a 5-point scale from 1 (very little) to 5 (very much).

Feminist Identity Scale (FIS) items assessed the extent to which respondents' attitudes corresponded to the revelation, embeddedness-emanation, and synthesis stages of feminist identity development described by Downing and Roush (1985). Respondents completed 32 items from the FIS (Rickard, 1989; see Henderson-King, 1993, for justification of this measure). Each of the subscales achieved acceptable levels of internal consistency (for revelation, $\alpha = .82$; for embeddedness-emanation, $\alpha = .76$; for synthesis, $\alpha = .78$). Respondents' mean scores on each of the subscales reflected the extent to which their attitudes corresponded to those characteristic of each stage, and ranged from 0 to 4.

Reflections on the Impact of the Movements

Participants were also asked to respond to the open-ended prompt: "Looking back over your life to date, what impact have the student protest movements of the '60s and '70s had on you? Were they important to you later in life?" Some responses to this question are quoted below to illustrate the quantitative findings from the entire sample.

RESULTS

As a validity check on our sampling procedure, participants located through the archival search were compared to the longitudinal sample on retrospective accounts of their student political participation. Participants located through the archival search did indeed report much higher levels of student activism than did the comparison group [activists, $M = 1.56$, $SD = .53$; comparison group, $M = .34$, $SD = .32$; $t(139) = 16.61$, $p < .001$]. Moreover, it appeared that few women in the longitudinal sample could be considered student activists: The respondents scoring highest on student political participation in the longitudinal subsample scored at only the 26th percentile for the archival subsample.

Family and Career Roles

At midlife, the former activists were very similar to their less active counterparts in terms of family and career patterns (Table I). The women in both groups were equally likely to be currently married; however, the activists married slightly later in life. (Both groups were overwhelmingly heterosexual; only one respondent from the activist sample and two from the comparison sample reported their sexual orientation as lesbian or bisexual.) About one-third of the activists had ever been divorced, as compared to about one-fourth of the comparison group; however, this difference was not significant. Additionally, there were no differences between the two groups on any variables related to motherhood. Most of the women in both groups were mothers, first gave birth around the same age, and were raising, on average, two children.

With respect to education and career, the groups were again strikingly similar. Women in both groups were equally likely to be currently working for pay (87% of the former activists and 85% of the comparison group were employed). Compared to their former classmates, the activists had attained comparable levels of education, began their careers at the same age, and, for those currently working full-time, earned similar salaries. Although working women in both groups spent a comparable number of hours at work each week, the activists rated career advancement as significantly more important to them than did the comparison sample.

Political Attitudes and Behavior

As we hypothesized, the activists' responses on the scales measuring political attitudes indicated a pattern of politicization that distinguished them from the women who had been their classmates. A multivariate analysis of variance assessed group differences in political attitudes. All of the hypothesized group differences in political attitudes emerged (Table II). On the scale of right-left political orientation, activists' mean scores corresponded, on average, to liberal, whereas the

Table I. Mean Differences Between Activists and Comparison Group on Personal and Professional Characteristics

Characteristic	Activists (<i>n</i> = 39)	Comparison group (<i>n</i> = 106)	Significance of differences
Marriage and family			
Currently has spouse or partner	72%	83%	$\chi^2 = .15$, ns
Age at first marriage	26.38 (5.45)	24.17 (4.09)	$t(128) = 2.42^*^a$
Ever divorced	33%	28%	$\chi^2 = .95$, ns
Is a mother	92%	86%	$\chi^2 = .30$, ns
Age at birth of first child	29.80 (5.86)	29.11 (4.93)	$t(117) = .63$, ns
Number of children	1.76 (1.27)	1.82 (1.16)	$t(143) = .23$, ns
Occupational/educational			
Personal salary (full-time workers)	3.82 (2.23)	4.29 (2.99) ^b	$t(120) = .83$, ns
Highest degree	3.24 (1.44)	2.96 (1.38) ^c	$t(142) = 1.04$, ns
Hours/week at job	39.64 (15.93)	38.99 (14.59)	$t(120) = 2.0$, ns
Age at which first career began	26.97 (5.34)	26.20 (6.14)	$t(133) = .67$, ns
Importance of advancement in field (1–5)	3.83 (.88)	2.99 (1.50)	$t(140) = 3.19^{**}^a$

Note. Values in parentheses are SDs; ns, not significant. N's may vary slightly in each analysis due to missing data.

^aVariances are significantly different; however, a *t* test calculated using an algorithm for unequal variance yielded the same results.

^bScale ranged from 1 (under \$20,000) to 11 (\$140,000 and up); 4 corresponds to \$40,000–50,000.

^cScale ranged from 1 (B.A. or B.S.) to 4 (M.D., J.D., or Ph.D.); 3 corresponds to M.A.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

comparison group characterized their own position as closer to moderate. Although both groups reported high levels of internal political efficacy, the scores of the activists were significantly higher, approaching the ceiling of the scale. Activists scored higher on political salience, indicating that they found a wide range of historical events significantly more personally meaningful than did their former classmates. This effect was even more marked if only the events from the 1960s era were considered [activists, $M = 2.58$, $SD = .33$; comparison group, $M = 2.18$, $SD = .33$; $t(142) = 5.8$, $p < .001$]. Finally, activists endorsed a more collectivist view of human relations than did their counterparts.

Next, activists were compared to their less active former classmates on current political activity. As mentioned above, the activists recalled engaging in significantly more college protest activities than the nonactivists. The activists also reported higher levels of midlife participation on the measure adapted from Fendrich and Lovoy (1988), but by this time the difference had narrowed from what it was in college [activists, $M = 1.45$, $SD = .52$; comparison group, $M = 0.92$, $SD = .49$; $t(138) = 5.57$, $p < .001$].

Table II. Multivariate Analyses of Variance on Political Attitudes

Characteristic (possible range)	Activists (<i>n</i> = 33)	Comparison group (<i>n</i> = 102)	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Right-left orientation (1–5) ^a	4.27 (.67)	3.23 (.95)	14.80	.000
Internal political efficacy (0–35)	25.12 (5.13)	21.57 (5.40)	4.36	.039
Political salience (9–27)	2.25 (.31)	1.95 (.38)	10.03	.002
Collective orientation (0–54)	31.33 (7.93)	26.01 (7.05)	6.52	.012
Total			4.89	.001

Note. In all analyses, age was included in the model as a covariate. Values in parentheses are SDs.

^aHigh scores correspond to more liberal positions. N’s may vary slightly in each analysis due to missing data.

We then compared the two groups on the basis of the political and organizational participation coded in their year-by-year activities. Because the frequency distribution for each of the types of participation was skewed toward nonparticipation, a nonparametric statistic was used to test the hypothesis that former activists are currently more involved in political and organizational activities (Table III). As hypothesized, the Mann-Whitney U-test indicated that activists reported significantly greater participation in group memberships as well as other political activities (including traditional politics, taking part in demonstrations, holding a political job, and using skills for social change). However, as hypothesized, the groups reported comparable levels of participation in activities that could be described as nonpolitical humanitarian work, and in social, professional, and recreational organizations. Finally, the comparison group reported a marginally higher rate of participation in organized activities related to school or children.

The Women’s Movement and Feminist Consciousness

As we predicted, the former activists reported a significantly higher level of involvement in the women’s movement [activists, *M* = 4.89, *SD* = 1.67; comparison group, *M* = 2.39, *SD* = 2.20; *t*(142) = 6.39, *p* < .001]. The two groups were similarly divergent in their scores on measures of feminist consciousness. A multivariate analysis of variance (Table IV) revealed group differences on the system blame measure, indicating that the activists were significantly more likely to attribute women’s occupational and educational difficulties to systemic barriers rather than to the shortcomings of individual women. The activists also rated the women’s movement as having had a significantly more powerful effect on their lives. The activists scored higher on the two highest-stage subscales of the FIS, embeddedness-emanation and synthesis. The content of the items measuring the revelation stage mainly concerns anger at men for discrimination; the groups received similar scores on this subscale.

Table III. Mean Rank Differences Between Activists and Comparison Group on Political and Organizational Behavior Variables

Variable	Mean rank		Significance of differences
	Activists	Comparison group	
Political behavior			
Group memberships	91.58	69.85	$p < .001$
Other political activities	86.42	68.79	$p < .01$
Organizational behavior			
Nonpolitical humanitarian	78.99	74.27	ns
Social, professional, or recreational	73.81	76.09	ns
Related to school or children	66.54	78.65	$p < .10$

Note. N's may vary slightly in each analysis due to missing data.

DISCUSSION

These activists, located through public records documenting their political participation some 25 years earlier, took an active part in the unique historical moment of the 1960s era. Like the women who were their classmates, they faced an array of new opportunities for work achievement and family life that were made possible in part by the women's movement. Like the men who were their colleagues in activism, they experienced a political "baptism" that was predictive of their later political involvement. Yet in other ways they were distinctive from each of these groups of their peers. Their experiences as active participants in social change movements on behalf of their own and others' groups were related to their personal identification as feminists; for many there was a lasting commitment to feminist ideology and action. As one former activist in our sample wrote, "[The student protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s] are the major shaping event of my life.

Table IV. Multivariate Analyses of Variance on Feminist Consciousness

Variable (possible range)	Activists ($n = 33$)	Comparison group ($n = 102$)	F	p
Effect of women's movement (1–5)	4.68 (.70)	3.43 (1.33)	14.85	.000
FIS: revelation (0–4)	2.17 (.66)	1.98 (.69)	.65	ns
FIS: embeddedness-emanation (0–4)	2.52 (.78)	2.10 (.77)	9.31	.003
FIS: synthesis (0–4)	3.23 (.55)	2.98 (.54)	6.33	.013
Total			5.17	.000

Note. In all analyses, age was included in the model as a covariate. Values in parentheses are SDs. N's may vary slightly in each analysis due to missing data.

They shaped my personality, my goals, my vision. It was a thrilling time to come of age, to be a female, to find out it was okay to be bright, successful and independent. I found my confidence through my participation in the movement.” Of course, because of the cross-sectional design of this study, we cannot know whether the activists’ midlife attitudes and political behavior were caused by their student activism: Earlier experiences, such as childhood political socialization, may have led to both their activism and the attitudes and continued participation we observed at midlife. However, the results do suggest that women who were student activists in the 1960s have maintained a distinct ideological and participatory outlook into midlife; in Mannheim’s (1952) language, they may represent a distinctive generational unit.

Women from the activist and comparison samples were more similar than different on the family and work variables. Both groups appeared to have lifestyles that reflected the changes brought about by the women’s movement (with relatively late childbearing, few children, and high rates of workforce participation), suggesting that the cohort effect in the work and family domain may have overwhelmed any activism effect (see, e.g., Stewart & Ostrove, 1993, for a description of cohort differences in work and family that were an effect of the women’s movement).

The two groups also did not differ much with respect to education and occupation. Although some previous research reported that later in life, former student activists were less financially prosperous than their nonactivist peers (e.g., McAdam, 1989; Nassi, 1981), like Franz and McClelland (1994) we found no such difference in personal income among the women in our samples. We did, however, find that former activists placed a higher value on advancement in their careers than did nonactivists. Perhaps the income discrepancy between activists and nonactivists is more true of men who were active than of women, and opportunity for advancement represents a concern with occupational achievement among women that is not necessarily reflected in increased salary. This is consistent with Franz and McClelland’s (1994) finding that women who participated in the social movements of the 1960s were marginally higher in occupational achievement than those who did not, whereas the reverse was true among men. The importance the activists in this sample placed on work achievement could be related to their higher level of feminist consciousness, discussed below.

Striking differences between the two groups emerged in the domains of political attitudes and political behaviors. The activists reported political values and beliefs that consistently distinguished them from the comparison group. This general pattern of politicization was well captured by one activist respondent who wrote, “[Student movements] shaped my attitudes toward authority and traditional middle-class values.... I learned the importance of community, strength of organized groups, the glorious serenity of making a commitment to something you believe in, deciding to accept the consequences and follow through.” This respondent felt not only that her participation shaped her political attitudes and orientations, but that the effect of the movements endured in her life. Although it is not

possible to know whether these attitudes predated their activism, it is nevertheless compelling that such attitudes, consistent with their student activism, persisted over 25 years.

Activists also reported a pattern of elevated political participation. At midlife, relative to their former classmates, the former activists scored higher both on spontaneous open-ended descriptions of political activities over the past 12 years and on standard closed-ended measures of current political activity. Former student activists were more likely to mention being members of political organizations and engaging in other political activities, such as traditional party politics and using skills for social change. The two groups did not differ in the extent to which they engaged in nonpolitical humanitarian activities or in social, professional, or recreational activities. Women who were not activists during college were marginally more likely than the activists to mention activities related to school or their children. This suggests that the activists' greater involvement in political activities was not simply attributable to a predisposition to take part in group activities of all types; these women, who for the most part were mothers and were employed in full-time jobs, also found the time to participate in a wide variety of political activities. Moreover, we detected these differential patterns of participation in both a traditional questionnaire and a content analysis of spontaneously reported activity.

This study suggests that the activists' political behavior and attitudes are relatively similar to those of their male counterparts, as described by other researchers (Fendrich, 1974; Fendrich & Tarleau, 1973; Fendrich & Turner, 1989; Hoge & Ankney, 1982; Jennings, 1987; Marwell et al., 1987; Nassi, 1981). However, our findings with respect to feminist ideology and activism suggest that the activists were in some ways different from both their female classmates and potentially from their male activist peers. The activists in our sample were identified through archival records documenting student protest on the Michigan campus during the late 1960s and early 1970s; the records showed that women who responded to our solicitation for research participants had taken part in a variety of political causes, many of which were *not* explicitly feminist in nature. Yet the activists reported retrospectively that they also took part in the women's movement—through marching, organizing, donating money, and in other ways—to a greater extent than did those in the comparison sample. Of course, the design of our study makes it impossible to know whether their feminist activism is a precursor or an outgrowth of their wider political involvement, or whether their participation in both political domains took place concurrently.

In addition, we found that student activism was associated for these women with feminist ideology at midlife. Former student activists scored higher than the comparison group on a number of different measures of feminist consciousness: They were more likely to attribute women's occupational and educational struggles to sexism than to the shortcomings of individual women; they felt a greater personal effect of the women's movement in their lives; and they scored higher on both the embeddedness and synthesis subscales of the FIS, suggesting a greater involvement

in women's cultural activities and a greater likelihood of evaluating all people as individuals. Interestingly, the two groups did not differ on the revelation subscale of the FIS, which implies that the women in both groups had equivalent levels of noticing and being angered by sexism.

Although the activists generally scored higher on these measures of feminist consciousness, the means of both groups were close to the high ends of the scales on system blame and the higher levels of feminist identity development; thus, both the activists and nonactivists in our sample expressed a highly developed feminist consciousness. Yet the activists' pattern of political behavior was strikingly different from that of the comparison group. This recalls the classic observation that ideology alone is rarely enough to motivate active participation in the political process (Olson, 1965).

Sigel's (1996) research may shed light on this seeming paradox. Her interviews and survey research findings indicated that American women in general are highly aware of discrimination and express a great deal of anger about the discrimination they encounter. However, few of the women in her sample either advocated or took part in political action to redress these problems (see also Crosby, Pufall, Snyder, O'Connell, & Whalen, 1989). Sigel theorized several possible explanations for most women's reluctance to become politically active. First, women's sex role socialization traditionally has worked against their political participation; however, the activist women in our sample received political socialization in young adulthood that may have overridden their earlier sex role socialization and developed in them the skills for their continued involvement. Second, women may generally feel powerless to create change; again, this is not true of the activists in our sample, who scored high in political efficacy. Third, the American emphasis on individualism does not promote taking collective action on behalf of group interests, whereas the activists reported higher levels of collectivism than their peers.

Thus, the political socialization and general political consciousness that the former student activists bring to their sense of feminist consciousness may be a resource that fuels their continued involvement. These findings suggest that activism can be understood as a set of resources—particular attitudes, skills, and behaviors—that are learned in young adulthood and can persist even in the face of the demands of adult life. In this way, the former activists still appear to represent a coherent generational unit with an enduring set of political attitudes and commitments, “work[ing] up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 304).

In some ways, our finding that student activists score higher on measures of feminist consciousness raises as many questions as it answers. The finding confirms that activism and feminist consciousness are related, but it does not suggest a clear mechanism for how they are related. Such a relationship should not be surprising, for a number of reasons outlined earlier, but our data do not allow us to posit definitively the route by which this connection occurred, and this is an area ripe for future research.

This is one of the first studies to examine the long-term psychological correlates of student activism among women, and it is unusual in comparing college student activists and nonactivists from the same university. However, this study, like any other, has several limitations related to sampling and design. First, the low response rate among the activist sample is of some concern. Fendrich and Lovejoy (1988) offer some discussion of this phenomenon: they speculated that activists who were less alienated from the university were more likely to participate in their study of male activists. Elsewhere, Fendrich also offered data suggesting that student protest leaders were actually less likely to take part in his study (Fendrich, 1977). Thus, Fendrich and Lovejoy argued that their sample, if biased, was biased against the hypothesis of finding that the activists constitute a distinctive generational unit. The same can be said of our sample. To further investigate this, we analyzed the respondents' ratings of how they felt about the university, both when they were students there and in retrospect, on a 5-point scale. Although activists had been marginally less positive about the university as students [activists, $M = 4.11$, $SD = .86$; comparison group, $M = 4.37$, $SD = .67$; $t(142) = 1.92$, $p = .06$], there was no difference between the groups' current ratings [activists, $M = 4.21$, $SD = .93$; comparison group, $M = 4.29$, $SD = .79$; $t(142) = .51$, not significant]. These high ratings suggest that the activists who took part in our study are perhaps not the most alienated from the university; thus, any bias in our sample related to response rate could be expected to mitigate against confirmation of our hypotheses.

Second, it is unclear how these results might generalize to women at other universities in other parts of the country, or to women who did not attend college. Further, this sample tells us nothing about the experiences of women of other racial or ethnic groups whose experience was likely very different (see Cole & Stewart, 1996, for a discussion of a contemporaneous sample of middle-aged, college-educated African American women). Third, we have had to rely on women's retrospective reports of their political involvement, which may be subject to the inaccuracies of memory. However, despite our relatively small sample, we were able to show clearly that even at midlife, women who were independently documented in public records as activists in college were very different in their political attitudes and current political behaviors from women who had not been activists. The consistency and magnitude of the differences suggest that future research in this area is warranted.

In conclusion, our results imply that although many women were personally affected by social protest during this era (indeed, the effects of the women's movement in shaping gender roles and expectations were evident even in our nonactivist sample), the movements had the greatest long-term impact on the identities, ideologies, and political behavior of those who were politically active during the time. Women's experiences in the student movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s shaped them personally in enduring ways, and were influential as well in their continuing political participation. We argue that rather than "selling

out,” as popular opinion holds, women who were activists in the 1960s maintain a commitment to the ideals and practices of their young adulthood, even at midlife.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Much of this paper was completed while the first author was a visiting scholar at the Henry A. Murray Research Center at Radcliffe College, Boston, MA. A version of this article was presented at the 104th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada, August 1996. This paper benefited greatly from Abigail Stewart's and M. Kent Jennings' insightful comments on an earlier draft. We thank the staff of the Women's Life Paths Study, as well as Lauren Duncan, for help in collecting and coding the data for this study; Betsy Weller, Adina Lipsitz, and Kari Tervo for their able research assistance; Sandra Tangri for allowing us to participate in the follow-up of the longitudinal study of the Class of 1967; Carol Hollenshead and Jean Manis of the Center for the Education of Women at the University of Michigan for their help in conducting the follow-up; and Carol Hollenshead, Rebecca Head, Barbara Murphy, and Barbara Robinson for their help in locating the former activists. The longitudinal sample data collection and the analyses were supported by a research grant from the Henry A. Murray Research Center at Radcliffe College (which has archived previous waves of the study) and grant RO1-MH47408-01A1 from the National Institute of Mental Health. Collection of data for the activist sample was supported by grants to the first author and Jill Allen from the Center for Afro-American and African Studies and Women's Studies Program at the University of Michigan, the Ford Foundation, and the Grants-in-Aid Program of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, and to Abigail Stewart from the University of Michigan Julia Lockwood Prize. Send requests for reprints or further information to Elizabeth R. Cole, Psychology Department 125-NI, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. E-mail: cole@neu.edu.

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