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ABSTRACT

In depth interviews were conducted with a reputational sample of 40 New Jersey white women known as highly involved activists in the civil rights movement for this study. It aimed: (1) to develop theory on the relationship between white women's active participation in a minority movement and their roles as women; (2) to note the relationship between awareness of racial injustice and the discovery of structures through which the individual could act, (3) to note linkages between participation in civil rights and other movements; and (4) to examine the assumption that white activists as a group were estranged by the black power phase or lost their commitment to the cause of racial justice. A small number of the women interviewed came from socialist or labor backgrounds; more came from families having a religious or humanistic ethic stressing individual worth. Among the findings of the study are the following: (1) little conflict was reported between activism and the mother role; (2) the husband-wife relationship was not affected in a consistent way, (3) many activists had yound children and did not work full-time while active; (4) most became aware of the need for black leadership; and (5) many continued their activism by finding new supportive roles to play. (Author/AM)

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INVOLVEMENT IN CIVIL RIGHTS:

THE CASE OF WHITE WOMEN

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INVOLVEMENT IN CIVIL RIGHTS: THE CASE OF WHITE WOMEN*

Rhoda Lois Goldstein

Introduction

This paper is part of a larger study of the involvement of a category of participants -- white women -- in the civil rights movement. The women are what Alphonso Pinkney has termed "civil rights radicals" as opposed to "civil rights liberals" (Pinkney, 1968). That is, they participated in the movement not as liberal, or fair-weather supporters, but as demonstrators and marchers, as decision-makers in interracial organizations, and as supporters of radical Black individuals and groups.

The assumption is frequently made, but without documentation, that white activists withdrew from the civil rights movement when Blacks assumed fuller leadership. Experiences in the movement and personal acquaintance with women civil rights radicals led the author to question this assumption and to study the issue more systematically. My hypothesis was that such an assumption is over-generalized and inaccurate.

The research that was done had several aims: to trace the connections between awareness of racial injustice and the perception of structures conducive to action; to delineate the kinds of roles played by white women as the civil rights movement passed through various phases, considering factors responsible for a possible decline in commitment; to examine the linkages between participation in civil rights and in other movements; to find out what women civil rights activists are doing in the latest phase of their life course; and to develop theory about the relationship of white women's

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active participation in a minority group movement to their roles as women. The present paper touches on most of these areas of interest but some only briefly.

Methods

A reputational sample of forty New Jersey white women known for their civil rights activism was developed, starting with the author's own contacts. These contacts had been acquired over the years through activities in three central New Jersey municipalities, membership in a civil rights coordinating council, and participation in equal opportunities and Black Studies committees at Rutgers, the State University. Fifteen members of the sample were known to me personally or by reputation when the study began. Each was asked to suggest names of other women who had been active and who had a strong commitment to civil rights. The rest of the sample was selected from the suggestions of as many different respondents as possible. However, wherever feasible, at least two were chosen from each community represented. The list continued to grow. In interviews ranging from one and one-half to three hours in length, I sought to unveil the dynamics of each woman's activism, as related to stages in the civil rights movement and in her own life course. Because background information was desired, the interviews frequently developed as autobiographical narrations. Many of the women were highly verbal and required little questioning. The open-ended nature of the interviews was favorable to the exposure of serendipitous data.

The aim of the research was not to compare members of this sample with other categories of activists or non-activists. Obviously, it is not a randomly selected sample, for the universe itself would be hard to derive. The respondents are not

necessarily well-known outside of their own communities, although some of them did become involved in news-making national events and acquainted with prominent national figures. There is no question that most of those interviewed were key civil rights activists in their communities, although a few were active for shorter periods of time. The subjects were able to provide insights into the varied origins of commitment to racial justice, the forms it took, the processes and structures by which white women became involved, and how activism tied in with the rest of their lives. Thus, the study is, in part, an examination of the meshing of private lives with public issues, of the relationship of the individual to the history of her times. The version is, of course, the one seen by the participant -- except that many individuals discussed the roles played by other members of the sample.

In attempting to understand social movement participants who are "outsiders", that is, not members of the disadvantaged group seeking change, one may assume that social movement theory is generally relevant. Like those who are directly suffering some deprivation, the outsider must have a sense of dissatisfaction, a malaise, and a predisposition to act. Another necessary element, if the movement is to get underway, is the availability of structures through which action can be taken. But additional questions must be raised when dealing with outsiders. A very important one being: how do they come to identify with the oppressed group rather than the oppressing group or situation?

Of work done on the participation of whites in the civil rights movement, Pinkney's book, The Committed (Pinkney, 1968) has been most suggestive. Marx and Useem have compared the experiences of white civil rights activists with two other situations of majority

involvement in minority movements (Marx and Useem, 1971). Neither of the works cited pay very much attention to the possible differences between male and female participants. Similarly, Keniston's intensive study of fourteen young radicals (three of whom were women) who took part in "Vietnam Summer" does not deal with possible sex-related differences (Keniston, 1968). While I did not study males, my findings can be compared to most other studies of activists -- in which females are generally overlooked.

Within the framework suggested by Marx and Useem, that of majority participation in a minority movement, one must also view white women as a minority group within a majority. Most discussion about women civil rights workers has centered attention on the problems of younger white women in direct action organizations. Many became targets of racist-sexist allegations by opponents and objects of controversy within the movement because of their sex. The present study deals with another age group: members of the sample range in age from 29 to 76, and most were married during their period of intensive activism. Whether conscious of their minority status as women or not, they were affected by cultural definitions of their roles. Many of them said, for example, that educational or vocational plans had been disrupted, that they had helped husbands through school and through work- and health-related crises. As women they were expected to, and wanted to remain in the home while their children were young. They welcomed motherhood and did paid work only on a part-time basis or when financially necessary, for the most part. Yet the fact is, that while they considered the role of mother extremely important, the home was not enough; all had some need and found some degree of personal fulfillment in becoming involved in the social movements of their times.

Types of activists are frequently analyzed in terms of their personal and social backgrounds. In a brief article, August Meier classified white civil rights activists as white moderates, radical Marxists, and middle-class liberals. He typed (stereotyped?) early participants as "beatnik sorts. . . and the radical intelligentsia, ranging from Quaker-type pacifists to Trotskyites and Maoists. This group formed a large proportion of the participations (sic) from 1960-63, along with a sprinkling of upper-middle class idealistic Jews and other liberals". (Meier in Gusfield, 1970.)

Such characterizations tend to ignore the role of movement experience in further sensitizing and politicizing the actors. In interviewing women whose participation had spanned a number of years, I was able to note not only their backgrounds, but their development. I could assess whether participation in the movement was a temporary experience, related to a particular life stage, or whether it became an integral part of their lives. Among the factors that appeared to influence their activities were the following: the learning that took place, as they came to know the extent of racism in their own communities; the availability of effective leaders; the fellowship and friendships that were formed; the crises met and resolved; and the satisfactions and troubles involved in what they considered, often, "their work". Even though participants had to rely on memory, which undoubtedly involved some errors, they had vivid recollections of many crucial events. Many were able to date various occurrences by the time they moved into a particular community and the births and ages of their children, as well as the timing of dramatic national occurrences.

The author's own biases should be obvious. White civil rights activists have frequently been lumped together under the rhubric

"white liberal", and the claim made that all lost their commitment when the going got rough. The existence of a number of still-committed white women, of whom I had personal knowledge sparked my interest in finding out if there were others. Interviewees tended to be extremely cooperative for three reasons: my general knowledge about the movement and its participants, my community credentials, and the fact that most of them had never been asked to describe their lives before.

The paper will consider the following topics: selected background characteristics of the sample, origins of commitment - starting with a general reaction to injustice and moving to the more focused concern on racial injustice, time of entry into civil rights and duration of active participation, the organizations joined and activities pursued, activities of the women in the 1970's, and their involvement in other social movements.

Background Characteristics of the Sample

The median age of the respondents at the time of the interview was 44, with a range of from 29 to 76. The age distribution of the women is as follows*:

Table 1, Age

age range	no.	per cent
20-29	1	2.5
30-39	10	25.0
40-49	13	32.5
50-59	10	25.0
60-69	4	10.0
70-79	2	5.0
total	40	100.0

*unless otherwise stated, n = 40 in each table, and percentage = approximately 100%.

Their marital status is:

Table 2, Present Marital Status

	no.	per cent
married to first husband	20	50.0
married to second husband	5	12.5
divorced	9	22.5
widowed	4	10.0
single	2	5.0

Three respondents, including the two never-married women, have no children. For those who do have children, the average number is 2.7. The other married woman is in her early thirties, recently married, and desirous of having children. Twenty-six of the mothers have children of both sexes, six have all boys, and five have all girls.

The frequency of spontaneous remarks about religion, such as their childhood questioning of religious doctrine, dissatisfaction with organized religion, and the seeking-out of socially oriented churches as adults, made it apparent that many respondents had given up their original religions or religious denominations. The following table contrasts the respondents' religious identification in childhood with their religious identification as adults.

Table 3: Religious Identification

Religion	I.D. in Childhood		I.D. Now	
	no.	per cent	no.	per cent
Protestant	18	45.0	10	25.0
Protestant and Jewish	1	2.5	0	0.0
Protestant and Quaker	1	2.5	0	0.0
Jewish	15	37.5	8	20.0
Catholic	3	7.5	1	2.5
Unitarian	0	0.0	7	17.5
Quaker	1	2.5	3	7.5
No religious I.D.	1	2.5	11	27.5

Twenty-four or 60% of the sample switched religious affiliations, frequently having gone from one Protestant denomination to another, but also increasing the number of Unitarians, Quakers, and persons with no religious affiliation--resulting in the above figures. While eight women said they left a church over racial issues, another group very early questioned the religious doctrines to which they were exposed, as typified by the following:

> I started attending (Quaker) meetings when I was around 23 or 24, when we first came to Central City. That could be just a reaction to my very strict Lutheran upbringing -- in the sense that it's very puritanical, very frightening, hell-fire or damnation and this kind of thing. I could never, I could never ---well, when I was 15 years old I went into church for the last time, into a Lutheran church; because it made me physically ill. I said, "I've had it, I can't stand having anybody tell me I'm bad anymore". And I never went back. Which of course made me again an isolate in a sense because then my parents began telling me how bad I was to do this. I really felt that there was no way that I could please anybody, so I might as well do what I damned please. (interview 104)

While New Jersey is reputed to have a large percentage of its population born elsewhere, this is even more true of my sample. Looking at 1970 Census figures for New Jersey, over 50% of all native-born white women, in every age category, were born in New Jersey. However, only one-third of these respondents were born or brought up in New Jersey. The table below shows where members of the sample were born or spent their early childhood years:

Table 4
Where Respondents Spent Early Childhood Years*

Place	no.	per cent of all respondents	per cent of native-born respondents
New Jersey	12	30.0	33.3
New York	15	37.5	41.7
Other N.E. States	4	10.0	11.1
Midwest	2	5.0	5.5
South or Border State	2	5.0	5.5
California	1	2.5	2.8
Abroad	4	11.0	-

*In most cases, this is same state as where born. All who were born in New Jersey are reflected in the above figures.

Of the native born, it is obvious that a disproportionate percentage of the sample come from New York. Again examining 1970 Census figures for New Jersey, less than 30% of all white New Jersey women, in various age categories, were born in other

Northeast states. Further, data still to be summarized indicates that of those sample members not born in New York, many attended college, worked, or lived in New York City at some point in their lives. Mobility was frequently associated with job changes of fathers or husbands. In addition, almost half of the sample spent some time in the South, either in childhood or adulthood, with several referring to the first-hand experience of southern segregation as crucial in developing their concern for racial injustice.

A number of women volunteered information about how the Depression of the 1930's had affected their families, with fathers being unable to find work and the family becoming downwardly mobile. Further analysis needs to be done on this data, to record the incidences of status incongruity in childhood that show up in many personal narratives. Some report unrelieved poverty, being on welfare and in foster homes, or living in one room with their entire families. Thirteen, or 32.5% considered themselves poor or very poor, 22 or 55% as average or middle class, and 5 or 12.5% as being quite comfortable during childhood.

The highest level of education completed by the respondents is as follows:

Table 5: Highest Level of Education Completed

	no.	per cent
High School	13	32.5
B.A. degree	11	27.5
M.A. degree	11	27.5
Ph.D. degree	3	7.5
Law degree	2	5.0

The degree of education completed compares closely with Pinkney's 1963-64 national sample of civil rights activists (Pinkney: 1968, p. 37). Fifteen, or 37.5% of the women in my sample indicated that they had been disappointed in being unable to fulfill their educational aspirations. Eight of these had taken college preparatory courses and had either expected, or been expected by parents, to attend college after graduating high school. However, 18 women, or 45% of the respondents did return to school after some interruption -- only 4 of whom attributed the interruption directly to marriage. Three respondents are now in graduate school. One of the Ph.D's, who is a full time college professor, is also studying for her law degree, and another woman who has an administrative job is acquiring her B.A. Others talk of returning to school, so it is likely that the ultimate educational status of the sample will be even higher.

Concern with Injustice

"The basic humanitarian feeling is likely to have existed long before the individual is impelled to develop a specific interest in civil rights or to participate actively in the civil rights movement." (Pinkney: 1968, p. 85)

A precondition to taking part in a social movement is the feeling of malaise, dissatisfaction, unhappiness or anxiety about a given state of affairs. In the case of members of the sample, it is, by and large, an emotional reaction to injustice that sets the stage.

Many respondents spontaneously offered the information that they had had an early reaction against injustice, not necessarily focused on race. Twenty-four, or 60%, mentioned having this feeling during childhood, often telling stories about situations

in which this emotion was evoked. Other respondents did not recall a particular incident but said that humanitarian concerns had been instilled in them as a normal part of life, through parental training. Although I asked no questions about attitudes toward Jews, many non-Jewish respondents volunteered that they had had early associations and friendships with Jews, or strong feelings about the persecution of Jews in Europe. The following quotations provide some of the flavor of their remarks:

> Well, it just seems that always as a child I was affected by all injustice. You know, as a small kid, it would bother me if someone was kicking a dog or a cat or whatever. Anything that couldn't handle its own problems -- that bothered me as a child. As I got older, it became translated into injustice toward human beings. I didn't understand it as a child, but I did later on.
>
> (interview 102)

> My feeling of commitment (to racial justice) goes back to the earliest time that you can think of. I've always felt like this. I was a very poor little girl, who had stigma placed upon her because of poverty... it is related to problems based upon racial or religious or ethnic discrimination and deprivation.
>
> (interview 125)

> When I was in private conversation with people who were bigoted and prejudiced, I was too unsure of myself to speak up. I would just sort of get sick inside. Whether they were talking about Jews, and my maiden name was Reilly, and I didn't look Jewish, so nobody knew I was half Jewish...and when they'd talk about the "niggers" and the Jews, I'd get sick inside but I wouldn't say anything. It wasn't until I was married and had children that I finally got to the point where I could talk up.
>
> (interview 006)

> My older sister was ill a lot, and when my two sisters used to fight, my mother used to try to stop my middle sister even though she may have been right...I used to see the three of them sometimes -- my mother and my sisters -- in a tangle over something, and I was always distressed by trouble and injustice, or things going wrong.
>
> (interview 002)

> As I tried to make clear, it was always in the context of being a democratic socialist (that she acted) -- but had I not been, I still would have cared very much. I know that. It was still very important... (Racial injustice) is such a gross and immediate injustice. The more involved you are, the more friends you have, the closer they are to you, the more important it gets, so that every injustice becomes kind of personal. I don't know when it has ever been anything but personal to me...I was 9 when I heard about the concentration camps, and I don't think a day of my life has passed, in some way, without an awareness of that, an awareness of the horror of it.
>
> (interview 128)

The sense of injustice was sometimes tied in with the individual's own feeling of being in a minority, as can be seen from some of the above quotations. Fifteen, or 37.5% of the respondents report having had a sense of being different as a child -- either as a member of a religious or ethnic group that was in a minority in their neighborhood (and sometimes WASPs were), or of living in a family situation that was somehow unusual and unfavorable in comparison to that of their peers. Seven women report that they had a sense of being rebels during their childhood. Of the 13 who remembered being poor during their childhood, most said they felt deprived and different relative to their peers.

Feeling different and discriminated against seemed to sensitize these women to the situation of others who were in a similar position. Further, they apparently identified with people who were oppressed; and the oppression of Blacks in the United States was glaring. In addition, the experience of "being different" had given some of the women a sense of isolation or lack of attachment to a particular membership group. The experience of being alone was not new to them when they took radical postures in civil rights or against those in authority. Many sought churches or other groups in their communities which might have like-minded people who shared their social concerns. They began to find friends within the movement. Fellow black and white activists became the reference group that had meaning for them. Asked if they experienced criticism for their civil rights activity, most replied that the type of person who would criticize them for that reason would not be important to them.

Thus, most respondents did not experience the conflicting loyalties said to characterize white liberals. (Pinkney contrasted the civil rights radical, whose reference group consists of blacks and others in the struggle, with the civil rights liberal by quoting Kenneth Clark's observations: liberals are ambivalent because of their "conflicting loyalties -- their desire to maintain their identity in their 'in group', their friends, their family, their social cliques, who do not necessarily share their own attitudes".) (Pinkney: 1968, p. 23).

In some other cases, the individual did have to make choices between friends who would support her efforts and those who would criticize her. One woman described her painful journey from conservatism to her present self-designation as political radical. Her first efforts in civil rights were tentative and faulty.

In an interracial human relations council she made mistakes and was roundly criticized. She had the choice of leaving or continuing; she decided to continue. Her former friends started sifting themselves out. She recalled the tense scene when she called upon one of her friends with an open-housing petition -- knowing that if the friend did not sign she would have to end the friendship. By the time this activist was ready to move to a new town she was not only fully accepted by members of the council as "sincere", but also had decided she wasn't about working to "prove" herself. She chose her friends in the new community based upon their attitudes about race.

In addition to the group of respondents who could pinpoint incidents of felt injustice, there were others who recalled humanitarian concerns as something with which they had been brought up. Fully 70% characterized their parents as having a humanistic, religious, or political ethic stressing justice and equality. One respondent's father, a Baptist minister in a border state, had a continuing exchange of visits with a Black Baptist minister, and encouraged her when she visited the Jewish synagogue with Jewish friends. In response to my question about whether she remembered any incidents involving race or social consciousness, she replied:

> I constantly had a social consciousness because it was just part of my life... It was never separate from living. That's the reason that to talk of beginning to be involved in the civil rights movement is just foreign to me...Just automatically, the injustice to any people is something that everybody should concern themselves with, whether it's Black, women, Puerto Ricans or Jews.
>
> (interview 109)

Concern with Racial Justice and Entry into the Movement

For some women the generalized concern with injustice became focused on racial justice quite early in their lives. But the first remembered concern did not eventuate in action taken in 25 or 62.5% of the cases. The remainder, 37.5%, did recall taking some action in conjunction with their earliest remembered concern. By action, I refer to what the individual perceives as the first time she took a stand for racial justice.

A reaction considered significant by one individual may not have been considered worthy of mention by another. For example, a number of respondents described taking verbal positions against fellow students. Although verbal, the behavior was unpopular and exposed the person to the threat of ostracism. Participation in organizations may not have occurred until much later, but the situation of taking a public position was felt to be significant. In contrast, in families where racial justice was an important issue and an on-going part of their lives, verbal stands may well have been taken for granted. One respondent with that type of background described her first activity as looking around for the nearest CORE group to join.

Although there was some difficulty in pinpointing the exact year in which some women became active, it was generally possible to classify entrance and participation into four time periods: before the 1950's, between 1950-59, from 1960-64, from 1965-69, and from 1970 to the time of the interview. The decade of the 60's is broken up because it encompassed the peak and decline of the civil rights movement. The following table classifies respondents by period in which they took their first remembered action for racial justice.

Table 6: Beginning of Civil Rights Activism

	no.	per cent
Before 1950	7	17.5
Between 1950-59	10	25.0
Between 1960-64	16	40.0
Between 1965-69	6	15.0
From 1970 on	1	2.5

The period of the early sixties was, obviously, the peak period for the beginning of activism, with 40% of the respondents entering the movement at that time. However, Table 6 indicates that 42.5% of the respondents had taken some action prior to that. Regarding duration of involvement, 3 women were active only in the third period, between 1960-64, 4 more were active only in the fourth period, and 7 more participated directly in civil rights only during the decade of the 1960's. The remaining 26, or 65%, participated before and after the main thrust of the movement. Comparison between the two groups -- those who were active before and after the decade of the 60's, and those who were active only during the decade of the 60's, will have to be saved for a later time. However, it should be mentioned again, that the age range of those studied is from 29 to 76 years of age. Thus, the youngest persons were less likely to have been old enough to take action during the earliest time period.

Looking at the origin of participation in terms of each woman's life stage, twenty-two or over half of the respondents were concerned with racial justice before graduating from high school, but only 6 (15%) had engaged in some action by the time of graduation.

Table 7: Beginning of Civil Rights Activism by Life Stage

First Participation	no.	per cent
While in high school	6	15.0
Before marriage*	9	22.5
After marriage, before motherhood	2	5.0
After birth of 1st child	9	22.5
After first child attained school age	14	35.0

*Two of those in the sample have never been married and are included among those who became active before marriage.

A total of 15 or 37.5% of the women had engaged in some action in the period between high school graduation and marriage, and only two more did so following marriage and before the birth of the first child.

Examining the figures another way, 65% of those in the sample had begun their civil rights activity before their first child attended school. This data must be interpreted cautiously: it could be hypothesized that the child's entrance into school provides impetus for becoming involved in community life. However, the height of the civil rights movement occurred when many of these women had young children, so the two periods coincided. The question still remains of why these individuals did not confine their voluntarism to such groups as PTA's and Cub Scouts, in which many of their neighbors were carving out unpaid careers.

Early entrance into the movement frequently came in the form of individual actions. Two women remember going to highly segregated elementary schools in which there were only one or two Black

children. Each of these respondents recalled that, at the time, they were concerned that the Black children might feel isolated. Each made a special effort to be friendly. For example, in the "partner" games of early elementary grades one always took the hand of the only Black child in class. Other instances of early individual action occurred when, as children, respondents took verbal issue with their peers or parents. In one situation, the subject, as a teen-ager, "broke-up" with her boyfriend because he had criticized her friendship with a Black girl.

Not only did a white individual have to be concerned about racial injustice, but that person needed to perceive herself as being able to do something about it. Although there were some CORE groups operating from 1942 on, the proliferation of direct action organizations did not occur until after the dramatic stand of Mrs. Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott, in 1955.

Those who were active before the 1960's worked through traditional community groups, such as churches, Y's, and PTA's and through radical political groups. A few of the women in the sample became affiliated with socialist groups shortly after graduation from high school. Such groups were involved in obtaining justice and raising defense funds in a number of well-known cases of accused Blacks, such as the Scottsboro Boys and the Trenton Five, and in anti-lynching protests. Other early activists participated in northern or southern desegregation efforts with small groups of friends or in incipient organizations. They challenged the restrictions of public facilities such as swimming pools, hotels and restaurants. Some joined NAACP chapters in colleges and communities--that organization frequently being the one on the scene that was specifically directed against racial discrimination. In one community a YWCA and even a PTA were moved to take positions on

segregation. One respondent recalled an early and successful effort by her Y to have blood donations desegregated.

Opportunities for group action increased toward the late 1950's and were especially available in the early 1960's. At that time, the media were publicizing desegregation efforts and the brutal reactions to them. A number of civil rights organizations became prominent on the national scene. In some communities, white churches and human relations groups began dealing with local racial issues. Not only were there organizations to join in many places, but they also provided models for those who wished to start similar groups in other communities, as witnessed by the number of fair housing groups that sprang up in New Jersey. There was a cross-fertilization of ideas between many of these groups, and some demonstrations that brought them together. Almost all of the respondents were active mainly in their own New Jersey areas, although a few did make trips to the South to join in civil rights demonstrations. They did, of course, attend rallies and meetings in the state and national capitols, and many participated in the 1963 March on Washington.

Most persons in the sample eventually joined more than one organization -- the initial one frequently serving as the bridge toward a more social-change-oriented group. For example, while twelve respondents were active in church-sponsored civil rights programs, all but one also joined another civil rights group. Of th 17 who joined the NAACP, all eventually participated in some other organization. Of the 18 who belonged to local human relations councils, only two confined their work to that particular group. Twelve of the thirteen women who became involved in job-affiliated civil rights activities also participated elsewhere. Twenty per cent of those interviewed stayed with only one organization.

The table below lists the various groups mentioned as contexts of participation by respondents, and number of respondents mentioning each.

Table 8: Group Contexts of Respondents' Civil Rights Activities

	no. of respondents	per cent of total organizational participations
Human Relations Councils	18	16.7
N.A.A.C.P.	17	15.7
Fair Housing Groups	13	12.0
Job-affiliated	13	12.0
Church-affiliated	12	11.1
Defense committees and prisoners' rights	9	8.3
C.O.R.E.	8	7.4
Poverty Agencies	6	5.6
School or college affiliated	5	4.6
Other miscellaneous	7	6.5
Total	108	99.8

The following excerpts give some indication of how transitions were made from conservative to change-oriented organizations:

> When my oldest was in kindergarten I did all the proper things. I became a room mother and joined the PTA. It gave me something to do. And the PTA drove me up the wall, absolutely up the wall. And I tried to do something to stir up the women there. And then I started discovering things in the school district. The only Black kids came from Robbsville, and they all went to that one little elementary school. The kids there were in real poverty...

Along with this activity, at the same time, I was going to the local Lutheran Church and they invited three people to come and talk about this new group that was forming this Human Relations Council. What they were doing was drumming up interest and hoping that other people would join. Well everyone sat there and smiled and said it was marvelous and they waved good-bye to them, and that was the end of it...

The Church didn't join the Council on Human Relations, but I did!

(interview 101)

The YWCA was my first contact with Central City as a community, and it also opened other doors and let me see things. I started to work for the Y, and this may really be a factor (in how she joined NAACP). I was a volunteer for the Y, and I devised some teen-age girls' clubs at that time, and I think it was almost totally Black. And then I met a woman, a Black, who is still just about one of the closest friends I have. She was director of volunteers, and she was a great influence on me. She wasn't very active in civil rights, but one contact leads to another, in a network. I had a lot of Black friends, and they asked me to come to this meeting or that meeting. There was a study of school segregation at this time, and an outside expert was called in, and I was one of the people who went to see him with this Black friend of mine...

I got involved in open housing through the Quakers. There was a Quaker from another meeting in New Jersey whom I met at one of the meetings here, who was chairman of the New Jersey Committee Against Discrimination in Housing. He got me started on that, but that was sort of peripheral. We did very little except do some testing of some of the apartment buildings to see whether or not they would take Blacks...the limelight was on the school situation at that time.

(interview 104)

This last quotation suggests some of the networks that were developed among civil rights workers. In pursuing my initial contacts, I discovered certain centers of activism. "Central City" developed a strong core of dedicated persons with overlapping memberships in various organizations -- an old, established NAACP, a small CORE group, a Black community center, at least two socially concerned churches, a special committee involved in de facto school segregation issues, a peace group, and possibly others. This city has remained a place where white activists come from surrounding communities to join in work involving racial justice.

"Pleasant County", less urban, had an early and militant class-oriented Black leadership, which not only approved of involving whites but also counselled many of them on how to cope with their new roles. This county had no strong socially oriented churches centrally involved in civil rights work, but it did experience a proliferation of other organizations. It, too, has remained a base for whites who wish to continue in the movement, and the original Black leaders have begun to play national roles. Another urban center, "Old City", had its origin in a college NAACP chapter, drew upon it for a citywide CORE, and was also tied in with a city agency serving the poor -- the latter, incidentally, providing a source of jobs for activists.

In contrast, "Rich County" was described as predominantly rural, wealthy and Republican. The opportunities for local participation were few, and a human relations council developed only in the latter half of the sixties, following the identification of a liberal core of whites who supported Eugene McCarthy's presidential nomination campaign.

Foci of Civil Rights Activities

The following table gives a rough indication of the foci of activities engaged in by the respondents. The list is probably incomplete, for there was a tendency to overlook what were considered less important efforts. Membership in an organization such as CORE probably included a variety of activities, not all of which might have been mentioned. However, the list does represent the major areas in which respondents worked.

Table 9: Focus of Civil Rights Activities

Area of Activity	no. of times mentioned	per cent of total mentions
Housing	27	26.0
Education and Schools	26	25.0
Helping Minority Individuals	14	13.5
Justice, Courts and Prisons	13	12.5
Employment	10	9.6
Voting	4	3.9
Recreation	2	1.9
Other miscellaneous	8	7.7
Totals	104	100.1

The kinds of specific tasks engaged in by these activists can be grasped from this list: organizing meetings and demonstrations; serving on executive boards and negotiating committees; creating new organizations; raising funds; circulating open-housing petitions; testing availability of housing to Blacks; working with government agencies to develop low cost housing; picketing, boycotting and other demonstrating, locally and in state and national capitols; writing publicity, newsletters, position papers and research findings; tutoring and setting up tutorial programs; arranging educational and cultural programs; engaging in public speaking and educational efforts with large and small groups; attending trials, transporting defendants and their families; visiting prisoners, engaging in support activities for families of prisoners; getting citizens to patrol schools or initiate conciliation efforts after urban rebellions; helping to recruit and advise Black students in colleges; promoting change in mainstream institutions (e.g. college admission policies); serving on teams to desegregate various facilities; working for liberal or radical political candidates; setting up youth or community centers; serving on poverty boards, organizing or supporting welfare rights' groups.

Activities in the 1970's

Different kinds of activities predominated as the "Civil Rights movement" became the Black Power movement". Thus, during the late 1960's and early 1970's, the organizational contexts for white participation became less clear. Some of the CORE groups made conscious decisions for whites to leave leadership positions, decisions in which the seasoned whites tended to concur. Attention became focused on the urban rebellions, economic issues, the

indictment of Blacks who were alleged to have taken part in riots or militant activities, and on prison conditions. The Black student movement at colleges and universities was very much in the limelight. Whites who wished to remain in the movement had to seek out new roles, often as individuals, and often in the context of their jobs, or in serving on the boards of various mainstream agencies.

This period coincided with changes in the personal lives of many of those in the sample, as their life course continued. Many of the mothers took jobs because their children were nearing college age and an additional income was needed. As pointed out earlier, over 40% of the respondents returned to school after an interruption, and some were in college or graduate school during this period.

At the time of the interview, 30 or 75% of the respondents were working, all but three of them full time. Nineteen, or slightly less than 50% were still engaged in volunteer efforts related to civil rights. Many of those who were working felt that they were able to integrate their concern with racial justice into their jobs. This concern tended to follow the direction of Black leadership in broadening to include economic and class issues, and work frequently involved helping lower income groups of all races.

The table below shows the present occupation of those in the sample:

Table 10: Present Occupation

Occupation	number	per cent
Administration	8	20.0
Teacher or school director	7	17.5
Social worker	4	10.0
Office or white collar worker	4	10.0
Lawyer	2	5.0
Home business	2	5.0
Writer	1	2.5
Waitress, part-time	1	2.5
Photographer, part-time	1	2.5
Graduate student, no working	2	5.0
Not doing paid work	6	15.0
Seeking employment	2	5.0

It is interesting to note how many of the sample members became administrators. Whatever their formal qualifications, they had undoubtedly acquired additional organizing skills during their civil rights work. The opportunity to acquire skills in such other areas as writing and public speaking, as well as the chance to use those they had were acknowledged by respondents as part of their personal gains from activism. Most of the administrators are in education, social work, or community agencies.

During the seventies, some of the women became involved in the trials of indicted Blacks -- attending court sessions, forming defense committees, transporting defendants and their families, and visiting those in prison. One woman mentioned she offered her house for security so that a Black woman charged with murdering a policeman could get out on bail. She did not know the defendant

personally. When I asked her why she did it, she first said, simply, "Because I wanted to." When pressed, she added:

> Well, I was able to do it, and I was very involved emotionally in this whole case. I felt it was a terrible injustice being done to the defendant.... Since then there has been a second trial, and I went every day. It was so oppressive. I'm not sure she can get a fair trial in New Jersey.
>
> (interview 121)

Identification with Black mothers heightened the sense of involvement for the following respondent, who explained her efforts to help the same defendant:

> One of the few things I did while I was back in Graduate School was..... Ruth Taylor was in jail, and I was involved with several other people in getting her kids down to see her... I guess I went off to find the kids ten times and succeeded in collecting them and getting them down to see her about four times.

Asked, "Had you known her?" she replied:

> No, she was a mother in jail, and I had two little children.
>
> (interview 106)

Related to this, some respondents became involved in prison reform and prisoners' rights. In fact the only activist that could not make time for an interview is an old friend, now a lawyer, who is deeply involved in prisoners' defense work.

In this later period, some women served as board members and employees in poverty agencies. Welfare rights was another area in which a few became involved. The following excerpts show the different ways that two women came to enter the welfare rights movement, a movement which has, of course, involved a large number of Black and minority women:

> Someone said, "Oh, you're involved in race -- then you should become involved with Reverend K., who is in welfare." I remember thinking at that time that race and welfare were two different issues... I was sort of pushed into it, and was asked to come down and work... And, as it turned out, I realized that I was working in the racial area on a different economic level. Where previously I was working with middle class Blacks in a housing area, now I had moved to a lower economic and welfare area, and it was still the race issue... I began to suggest that the church become involved in welfare reform... They said, "Well, write an article". So I wrote an article and did a tremendous amount of research in one month. I wrote an article with a recommendation for the church, and it was adopted by the church senate. It was then sent to the New Jersey Council of Churches and was adopted by them as their stand on welfare.
>
> (interview 005)

A younger woman's entrance into Welfare Rights came about in a very different manner. She had worked as a nurse's aide for several years after leaving her husband, trying to support her two young children. Then she enrolled in a community college and went on welfare.

> I went to school full time and stayed on welfare. I was President of Welfare Rights in Pleasant County. It was Ed Thomas' (Black head of poverty agency) idea. I was complaining angrily to him once. He said, "Why don't you organize welfare rights?" I said, "Do I have to?" So I did, I organized a chapter.
>
> (interview 133)

Those who were working in colleges tended to play roles in developing programs to increase minority representation of students, faculty and workers, or to provide the kind of supportive services needed by minority students. Two of the women in the sample are probably the major architects, with one other individual (a white

male) of desegregation efforts at the state university. One woman, after returning to graduate school, became a college librarian and by-passed bureaucratic channels to successfully recruit Black workers and student aides at all levels. Another became a cooperative nursery school director, started an alternate high school directed to potential drop-outs, and continued doing occasional pre-school consulting for a poverty agency. One of the social workers is counselling unwed mothers in New York, many of whom are from poor and minority backgrounds.

A few respondents are now devoting most of their time to another cause. One is state coordinator for a peace organization. Another works with an organization which promotes cultural exchange between the U.S. and China. Another is relatively inactive because of age and illness but spends some time combatting "racism, sexism and age-ism" in the Gray Panthers.

Four respondents expressed a sense of guilt or emptiness because they feel they are no longer contributing to the movement in any way. A 68 year old woman, one of the most active for many years, resigned from a defense committee after she had received criticism from other white members, and felt herself to be unfairly treated. Prior to leaving the committee she had run its office almost daily, attended trials, and visited a Black male prisoner regularly. She began having nightmares after visiting the jail. Her story sounded somewhat like the portrait of "battle fatigue" experienced by field workers during the height of the Mississippi campaigns. Here she expresses her feelings:

> I decided I couldn't do that any more (serve on the committee). I had friction with the people who were on the committee and criticism.

Question - "So then you left the Defense Committee?"

> Yes, I feel guilt about it... I don't want to give up on the people. After all, they're still in prison. We still have injustice.

Question - "How long have you been out of it?"

> A year.

Question - "Do you still have hopes of doing something more?"

> No, but who knows. If someone came along and asked me, I might.

(interview 115)

Participation in Other Movements

In womens' movement circles it is often suggested that the movement drew heavily from civil rights activists. While 9 women have participated in some way in the women's movement, only 4 considered it an involvement equal to or greater than that in civil rights. A larger number considered the peace movement to be very important, and saw it as an interest related to civil rights. In certain towns, both movements drew from approximately the same groups of people. The following table compares involvement in civil rights with that of other movements for the sample:

Table 11: Comparison of Involvement in Civil Rights and Other Movements

Involvement equal to or greater than that in civil rights	no.	per cent
Peace movement	9	22.5
Both peace and women's movement	1	2.5
Women's movement	3	7.5
Left political movement	6	15.0
No other movement	20	50.0
Not given	1	2.5

While ten women in all had an involvement in the peace movement equal to or greater than that in civil rights, nine others had participated in it in some way. Of the later entrants into civil rights, some were drawn from the peace movement and from the political supporters of peace candidates. Six women have been involved in different left political movements. Seven have not been involved in any other movement as far as could be ascertained. Five women have taken part in prison reform activities and 4 in college reform; both of these were closely related to concerns with racial justice and are not listed in Table 11.

Further analysis of the links between the various movements needs to be made. It should be mentioned that lack of formal participation in a particular movement does not indicate lack of sympathy with it. A number of women felt that they had had early feminist tendencies and had gone beyond women's traditional roles in their own lives. While maintaining that the women's movement was helpful to some women, even these sympathizers sometimes criticized directions taken by it. Members of the sample, over time, came to set their own priorities in terms of what they felt was most needed in the way of social activism and in terms of their own changing lives. Perhaps the clearest articulation of this point was made by one who is highly politicized at this time:

> If one sees herself as a social change agent, which I really do think I see myself as, and am consciously aware of that in everything I do, and in every place I go, then I weigh and measure each situation in those political terms. Everything that I do in the nursery school where I work is to help the people who are the cooperative parent members of that school begin to raise their own consciousness levels around the need for day care, and the social implications of that. And I keep them abreast of political movements and legislation, and aware of the social and economic and racial distribution of the kinds of people that we attract to our school.

> And, of course, in the new movement that I am involved in, (an alternate school) which is at the junior-senior high school level, I see myself in a leadership position. I have taken on a leadership position myself in being the coordinator and the prime mover in getting that particular project off the ground . . .

She describes her rejection of traditional voluntarism and sharp refocusing on those activities which are related to her role as social change agent:

> I began to realize that you just can't spread yourself out so thin, and be a dabbler in everything. And I began to see myself as developing an "umbrella" in terms of what types of political activities I would be involved in, and what types I wouldn't be involved in. And I would not, for example, be involved in PTA at a school, and I recognized very clearly that those kinds of things are just not relevant to the kind of person I am, and I began to think through very carefully, before I got involved in any project, just what they were about, and how they hooked into the political person that I see myself as.
>
> (interview 004)

Conclusion

Using a reputational sample of 40 women known as highly involved activists in the civil rights movement in New Jersey, this study has attempted to learn, through interviews, certain things about the dynamics of their involvement. Most of them can be termed "civil rights radicals" rather than "civil rights liberals", in that they tended to identify strongly with Blacks and others in the movement, and did not "defect". The paper has traced the origin of their concerns in strong feelings about injustice, which became translated into a desire to do something about racial injustice. The decade of the 1960's was the period of most intensive activity in movement organizations, but more than half of the women took actions against racial injustice

before and after that period. Opportunities for participation were undoubtedly influenced by the varying civil rights networks of particular communities. The paper has attempted to summarize the kinds of activities that were pursued and the roles played by these women, and to indicate what they are now doing. It has briefly touched on their participation in other movements, indicating that many were also involved in the peace movement, fewer in the women's movement.

Much of the data acquired in the process of this study is still to be analyzed, and I have suggested some of the questions that need to be pursued. The paper presents an early formulation of findings, occasionally alluding to broader concepts of social movement theory believed to be relevant.

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