



## ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN FEMININITY AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL BEHAVIOR DURING MIDLIFE

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The contention that femininity makes women unsuited for political participation has roots in feminist theory and political science. This study investigated whether the desirable and undesirable dimensions of femininity, corresponding to Feminine Interpersonal Relations (FIR: warmth, nurturance, and interpersonal appeal) and Feminine Self-Doubt (FSD: submissiveness, self-doubt, anxiety, and passivity), have independent and interactive effects on Black and White women's political efficacy and participation. Using questionnaires administered to alumnae of the college classes of 1967–73 in 1992 and 2008, coders assessed femininity variables at Time 1 when participants were in their 40s using items from the California Q-Set. Political variables were assessed at Time 1 and when the participants were in their early 60s. In general, FIR was associated with greater participation and efficacy, both directly and in interaction with low FSD, and FSD was associated with lower efficacy scores. Specifically, at Time 1, women rated high on FIR and low in FSD were highest on political efficacy; those high in both types of femininity scored lowest. At Time 2, among women high in FIR, low FSD was associated with enhanced levels of participation; however, among those low in FIR, FSD was unrelated to participation. Results are discussed in light of women's midlife development and Black women's gender socialization. Recognition of the role of feminine qualities such as warmth, social skill, and compassion in political work could encourage women endorsing feminist beliefs to act politically.

The contention that femininity makes women unprepared or unsuited for participation in the political realm has roots in both feminist theory and in the field of political science. Many second-wave feminists writing in the 1970s conceptualized femininity in terms of passivity, submissiveness, and dependence, and viewed the socialization of young women into these traits as a form of internalized oppression that facilitated women's acceptance of patriarchy (Hollows, 2000; see also Jackman, 1994). In an early and influential paper, Bourque and Grossholtz (1974) suggested that political science had reached a similar conclusion about the incompatibility of femininity and politics. They argued the field had long overlooked the political involvement of women by uncritically assuming that two commonly held traditional beliefs about women—(a) that women shared the political attitudes of their husbands and (b) that women failed

to vote due to the demands associated with their family roles—were accurate. Concisely put, political scientists assumed that women's deference and nurturance precluded their political participation (see also Sigel, 1996).

In this article we take up this assumption, investigating whether there is in fact any association between whether and how women enact normative femininity (Cole & Zucker, 2007) and their political behavior. We present research testing whether two dimensions of femininity were associated with women's political behavior, measured when these women were in their mid 40s and 16 years later, when they were in their early 60s. These data were collected from Black and White women who graduated from college during the late 1960s and early 1970s as members of a cohort who were among the first to have access to the new educational and occupational opportunities won by the civil rights and women's movements.

### *Femininity and Political Behavior*

Despite the fact that American women's political participation, particularly in electoral politics, dramatically increased subsequent to the peak of the second wave women's movement, many women still view political participation as either unfeminine or incompatible with women's roles. For example, Romer (1990) asked high school activists to write about their future lives. She found that although more than 80%

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of both boys and girls anticipated continuing their activism in adulthood, girls, but not boys, expressed concerns about combining political work with family life. In fact, few boys wrote about family life at all. Several studies have found that women tend to view women who claim a political identity as feminists as unfeminine (Henderson-King & Stewart, 1994; Rudman & Fairchild, 2007). Although this attitude may in part be due to stereotypes about feminists (Bullock & Fernald, 2003), it may also follow from the belief that feminists typically display traits associated with masculinity such as aggressiveness (Rich, 2005).

Other studies suggest, just as the second wave feminists warned, that women's concern with femininity might pose a limitation for their political behavior defined broadly. In a diary study, Hyers (2007) asked women to record their encounters with prejudice, how they responded, and why. Those women who described the motivation for their response as typical gender role concerns (e.g., conflict avoidance) were more likely to do nothing or to respond nonassertively. Indeed, Bullock and Fernald (2003) found that even self-identified feminists rated a profeminist speech as more persuasive when the speaker wore feminine clothing, styled her hair, and used cosmetics than when the same speech was delivered by the same speaker without feminine attire and grooming. They speculated that respondents' ratings reflected their desire to distance themselves from the stereotype of feminists as unfeminine. The authors observed that although feminine self-presentation may increase the persuasiveness of feminist messages, this outcome comes at a cost for the speaker herself because feminine traits are generally devalued (Carli, 2001; Ridgeway & Bourg, 2004).

Role congruity theory provides another line of research suggesting that laypeople view femininity and political participation as being at odds. Eagly and Karau (2002) theorized that due to gender segregation in social roles, people expect women to display communal traits of concern for others that are associated with their traditional nurturing, caregiving roles. However, people expect leaders to display agentic traits more commonly associated with men, such as dominance, control, and ambition. Because of the incongruity between the communal traits desirable for women and the agentic traits desirable for leaders, women are often judged as unsuited for leadership. This theory has found empirical support using multiple methods (e.g., Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, & Reichard, 2008; Ritter & Yoder, 2004).

### *Dimensions of Femininity*

Gender attributes are multidimensional, including grooming and appearance, leisure activities, traits, and beliefs about work/family roles (Mahalik et al., 2005; Twenge, 1999). Psychological theories of gender have largely focused on personality traits. In the 1970s, feminist psychologists argued that masculinity and femininity corre-

sponded to two separate and independent constructs rather than to opposite ends of one continuum (Constantinople, 1973). These constructs have been variously termed masculinity and femininity (operationalized by the Bem Sex Role Inventory [BSRI]; Bem, 1974), agency and communion (Bakan, 1966), or instrumental/assertiveness and emotional/expressiveness (operationalized as the Personal Attributes Questionnaire [PAQ]; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Generally, these conceptualizations of femininity include traits related to the care and comfort of others, such as warm, sympathetic, giving, cheerful, and socially skilled. Widely used measures of these constructs (e.g., Bem, 1974; Spence & Helmreich, 1978) were derived from the responses of predominantly White samples; however, more recent studies have shown that Black and White women rate themselves similarly on the femininity subscale of the BSRI (Cole & Zucker, 2007; De Leon, 1993; Harris, 1996).

There is evidence that trait masculinity and femininity are in fact multidimensional. Commonly used versions of both the BSRI and PAQ are composed of items developed by asking respondents to rate traits in terms of their social desirability for men and for women. Although less often employed (McCreary & Korabik, 1994), Spence, Helmreich, and Holahan (1979) also developed an expanded version of the PAQ that included subscales measuring positively valued masculinity (M+) and femininity (F+) as well as negatively valued versions of these constructs (M- and F-). They conceptualized F+ as including traits relevant to interpersonal connection and emotional expressiveness, such as kindness, helpfulness, and warmth.

In contrast, they conceptualized F- as including both unmitigated communion (e.g., spineless, subordinates self to others) and passive aggressiveness (e.g., whiny, complaining). Among women, F+ was uncorrelated with both dimensions of F-; however, both F- dimensions were associated with negative self-esteem, and passive aggressiveness was also correlated with high neuroticism. Similarly, Ricciardelli and Williams (1995) characterized negative femininity in terms of doubts about personal competence, describing the construct with traits such as weak, dependent, worrying, timid, and self-critical. Their factor analysis of a scale including 50 trait adjectives designed to reflect both negative and positive aspects of masculinity and femininity revealed the four theorized factors (Antill, Cunningham, Russell, & Thompson, 1981). Among women, the undesirable femininity factor included items such as needs approval, anxious, and worrying, and scores on this scale were correlated negatively with self-efficacy. Interestingly, these two positive and negative dimensions of femininity map onto Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu's (2002) characterization of stereotypes of women as including high warmth and low competence. Additionally, they argue that this type of mixed stereotype supports paternalistic forms of prejudice.

### *Femininity and Race*

Although Black American women value and perform many of the behaviors and traits associated with conventional femininity (e.g., Haynes, 2000; Smith, Thompson, Raczynski, & Hilner, 1999), there simultaneously exists within Black communities a specific raced gender identity that values characteristics discrepant with normative femininity, including assertiveness, participation in the paid labor force, community leadership (Gilkes, 2001), and personal resilience (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007; Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, & Buchanan, 2008). Wyatt (2008) traced the genealogy of this ideal as a survival mechanism that has endured and adapted over time to resist the different forms racial oppression has taken. The justification for this ideal relies on the importance of Black women's roles to community service and racial advancement; for example, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth are cited as exemplars (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007). Note that although the traits of the "strong Black woman"—perseverance, stoicism, confidence (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007)—are at odds with the characteristics of negative femininity, they cannot be equated with masculinity because they are valued specifically when deployed in the communal service of families and communities. Taking an intersectional approach that considers how the experience of gender is shaped by race (Cole, 2009; Greenwood, 2008), we expect that for Black women, rejection of the traits associated with the negative aspects of femininity may be particularly important for political participation.

### *The Current Research*

Our research is based on lengthy surveys, including many open-ended items, that were administered to a sample of Black and White alumae of a large Midwestern university in 1992, when they were in their mid to late 40s, and again in 2008, when most members of the sample were in their early 60s. Raters used the California Q-Set (CAQ; Block, 2008) to describe participants' 1992 responses, and these CAQ profiles were used to create scores for desirable femininity, which we term Feminine Interpersonal Relations (FIR—including warmth, nurturance, and interpersonal appeal), and undesirable femininity, which we term Feminine Self-Doubt (FSD—including submissiveness, self-doubt, anxiety, and passivity). We present analyses investigating the association between these two aspects of femininity with political participation and political efficacy, measured in both 1992 and 2008. The unique features of this data set allow us to explore (a) whether these associations vary by race and (b) whether desirable and undesirable aspects of femininity assessed at midlife are associated with political behavior over time.

Although these data do not allow us to look at change in femininity over time, they do provide an opportunity to explore developmental aspects of femininity by looking at whether the correlates of the two dimensions of femininity

vary from early to late in midlife. We know that women's feelings about their bodies, weight and appearance—concepts often linked to femininity—may change with age (Hurd, 2000; Tunaley, Walsh, & Nicolson, 1999). Women's scores on feminine traits may change as well. Feldman, Biringer, and Nash (1981) found that tenderness and compassion, factors extracted from the femininity subscale of the BSRI and that are related to our construct of FIR, were higher among grandparents than among men and women at earlier stages in the parenting life cycle. Conversely, Roberts, Helson, and Klohnen (2002) found that women's femininity (defined in terms of dependency and insecurity) decreased between young adulthood and midlife. Similarly, longitudinal research following college-educated women (Stewart, Ostrove, & Helson, 2001; Zucker, Ostrove, & Stewart, 2002) demonstrated that between their 30s and 60s, women increased their sense of confidence, power, and authority; these traits appear to correspond to low scores on FSD. If midlife is a developmental moment at which women's relationship to dimensions of femininity including appearance, nurturance, and power are in fluctuation, it is of interest to explore whether feminine traits at midlife predict behavior later in life. Moreover, this unique data set gives us an opportunity to explore these associations within a racially diverse cohort that came of age during the social movements of the late 1960s and early '70s, social movements that advanced the interests of women and Black Americans. This cohort might be especially likely to express their sense of power and authority in the political realm (Muhlbauer, 2007).

As Spence et al. (1979) found, we expected that the socially desirable and undesirable dimensions of femininity would be uncorrelated. Based on the extant literature, we hypothesized there would be no difference between Black and White women on FIR. However, due to the emphasis on strength, coping, and competency in Black women's gender socialization, we expected they would score lower than White women on FSD. Cole and Stewart (1996) found that Black women in this sample scored higher than White women on political participation and political efficacy at midlife; thus we expected to find similar differences on these variables measured in 2008.

Because undesirable femininity, particularly the aspects related to confidence, has been found to be associated with low efficacy generally (Ricciardelli & Williams, 1995), we expected that FSD would be associated with lower political efficacy. Because self-efficacy in a particular domain has been shown to predict behavior in that domain generally (e.g., Holden, 1991; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998) and in particular for political efficacy (Zimmerman, 1989), we similarly expected that FSD would be related to lower political participation. Additionally, individuals who are anxious, fearful, and concerned with their own adequacy might be too focused on their inner lives to expend their resources on political goals. Because of the link between the strong Black woman ideal and community service and social change work

(Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007; Gilkes, 2001), we expected that for Black women, low scores on FSD would be particularly important for political participation.

We could find no extant literature to directly support a hypothesis about the association between FIR and political efficacy. Hyers's (2007) findings suggest that women who conform to feminine norms of conflict avoidance and social poise might steer clear of some forms of political participation (e.g., protest). On the other hand, recruitment into political organizations could be facilitated by membership in social networks (Baumeister, Dale, & Muraven, 2000; Cable, Walsh, & Warland, 1998; Schussman & Soule, 2005), and the traits associated with FIR may foster the development of such networks. Consequently, these analyses were exploratory. However, we hypothesized that there would be an interaction between FIR and FSD such that women whom observers rated high on both dimensions would be least politically engaged, both in terms of efficacy and participation. We speculated that women whom others perceive as both deeply responsive to the needs of others and doubting their own competence—that is, those who most conform to paternalistic stereotypes of women (Fiske et al., 2002)—would be least likely to try to have a political impact.

## METHOD

### Participants

Analyses presented here are based on questionnaires administered through the mail to two samples of University of Michigan alumnae in 1992 and 2008. In 1992, the participants were in their mid to late 40s; in 2008, they were in their early 60s ( $M_{\text{age}} = 61.44$ ). One sample comprised participants in the Women's Life Paths Study ( $N = 107$ ), a longitudinal study initiated in 1967 by Sandra Tangri (Tangri, 1972). Because the longitudinal sample did not include any Black women, in 1992 we recruited 64 Black alumnae from the same era. Because substantial numbers of Black women did not matriculate to the University until the early 1970s, women who graduated between 1967 and 1973 were included in this sample. In both waves of data collection, participants completed lengthy questionnaires including items pertaining to occupational and family history, health and life satisfaction, and political attitudes and behavior. Thus, the questionnaire was not obviously focused on political attitudes and behavior (see Cole & Stewart, 1996, for a more detailed description of this study and the sample). As in any longitudinal sample, it is important to note any patterns of systematic sample attrition. Of the White participants, 79% ( $n = 85$ ) participated in both the 1992 and the 2008 data collections. For the Black participants, 61% ( $n = 42$ ) responded to the survey in both waves of data collection. Participants who did not complete the survey in 2008 were compared to those who did on demographic variables measured in 1992, separately by race.

There were no significant differences on the key variables in this article, including measures of femininity (FSD and FIR), internal political efficacy, and political participation.

Cole and Stewart (1996) reported that in 1992, Black and White women were comparable on mean levels of education, income, and number of children. White women were more likely to be married or living with a partner and were significantly older, although these differences were not large and were not related to participant's scores on political variables. In 2008, Black and White women did not differ in terms of level of education, marital/partner status, or yearly income.

On average, the women in both samples reported high levels of education (78% reported having earned a postgraduate degree) and income (28% reported a yearly household income of between 50,000 and 100,000 dollars, and 54% reported yearly income of greater than 100,000 dollars). Additionally, 65% reported currently living with a partner or spouse. As was the case in 1992, White participants in the 2008 sample were significantly older ( $M = 62.18$ ,  $SD = 3.50$ ) than Black participants ( $M = 59.99$ ,  $SD = 3.70$ ),  $t(239) = -4.51$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This difference was a function of recruitment strategy, because White women were drawn from the class of 1967 and Black women from the classes of 1967–73.

### Measures

*Femininity: FSD and FIR.* Two dimensions of femininity, FSD and FIR, were assessed using observers' ratings of participants on the CAQ (Block, 2008). Typically, femininity is assessed through self-report (e.g., Mahalik et al., 2005; Parent & Moradi, 2010). Block (2008) argued that observer ratings, or O data, are particularly valuable for assessing characteristics that are influenced by social desirability, and the CAQ provides a way to systematize these observations. Given the highly prescriptive nature of gender roles (Mahalik et al., 2005), particularly femininity (Prentice & Carranza, 2002), the use of O data allowed us to assess femininity without the demand characteristics of self-report and to include both aspects of femininity, and their interaction, in multiple regression models to predict political variables assessed in 1992 and 2008.

Each respondent's 1992 questionnaire was redacted so that the scales assessing this study's dependent measures were removed. Many of the remaining items were open-ended, including questions about mentoring, career difficulties, views on combining work with family, experiences in past and present relationships, feelings about motherhood, spirituality, reflection about their life course, and activities each year since 1981. Three to four trained coders read each redacted file and rated the participants using the CAQ (Block, 2008). The CAQ is designed to capture a broad description of personality by using 100 traits, which coders place on a continuum ranging from 1 (*extremely characteristic*) to 9 (*extremely uncharacteristic*) in a forced normal

distribution: 5 items can be placed at the most extreme ratings and 18 are placed in the center (*relatively unimportant*) rating. For each participant, the coders' scores on each CAQ item were averaged to compute the participant's score on that CAQ item. Average interrater agreement was .78 ( $SD = .09$ ).

The Femininity/Masculinity (F/M) scale from the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) was selected as a criterion in the development of our CAQ measure of FSD. The F/M subscale was designed to place individuals on a continuum between femininity and masculinity reflecting folk notions of these constructs (Gough & Bradley, 1996). A series of validation studies reported by Gough and Bradley (1996) suggested that the aspect of femininity tapped by the F/M subscale corresponds to our conceptualization of FSD. Observers rated people scoring high on F/M as dependent, submissive, and high strung; spouses of high F/M scorers described their partners as avoiding self-assertion, self-promotion, and attention from others. Gough and Bradley (1996) provided correlations between the full set of CAQ items and the CPI F/M subscale. Based on the CAQ correlates, Gough and Bradley (1996) observed that, "women with high scores on F/M seem to somaticize their worries and tensions, accept dominance from others, seek reassurance from others and worry about their own adequacy" (p. 156), further supporting the use of this subscale to operationalize FSD. We measured FSD as the average of the 12 CAQ items with the highest correlation with F/M. These items tap submissiveness, self-doubt, anxiety, and passivity (see the Appendix for items). For each participant, raters' scores on these items were averaged to create a scale score. The coefficient alpha for the Black sample was .63; for the White sample, .75.

Because there is no precedent for the construct of FIR in the CPI, this measure was developed by asking 12 women psychologists (Ph.D.s and doctoral students, six Black and six White) whose research concerns gender to complete an online CAQ sort. These judges were asked to complete a sort of "a woman you would describe as very feminine. Imagine that this woman is of the same race as you. Rather than thinking about a specific woman you know, try to imagine the ideal or prototype of a feminine woman." Following Peterson and Klohnen (1995) we then examined the 13 most highly rated items averaged across the 12 raters (corresponding to those rated in the two "most characteristic" categories). Although the judges were not asked to select items reflecting only positive aspects of femininity, all 13 of these items tapped socially valued characteristics related to warmth, nurturance, and interpersonal appeal (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989). Comparison of the femininity sorts made by Black and White judges revealed a great degree of similarity, thus we decided to make a single profile. These items reflected (a) interpersonal warmth and concern for others and (b) social skills. Two items were removed due to low item-total correlations. For each participant, raters' scores on these 11 items were averaged to create a scale score. The

alpha for the Black sample was .76; for the White sample, .86.

In order to maintain the discriminant validity of the two femininity measures, CAQ item 93, "If female: Behaves in a feminine style or manner," was omitted from both scales. The correlations between this item and both FSD and FIR were significant and positive,  $r = .52, p < .001$ ;  $r = .48, p < .001$ , respectively. The two femininity measures were not significantly correlated for either racial group—for White women,  $r(N = 105) = -.13, p = .21$ ; for Black women,  $r(N = 66) = -.05, p = .69$ —supporting the contention that these are two separate dimensions of femininity.

*Political orientation.* In 1992, respondents rated political orientation on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very conservative*) to 5 (*radical*). The mean was 3.36 ( $SD = .89$ ). In 2008, a different response scale was used, ranging from 1 (*very conservative*) to 7 (*very liberal*) ( $M = 4.99, SD = 1.53$ ). Political orientation was assessed in 1992 and 2008, and these ratings were highly correlated,  $r(N = 119) = .71, p < .001$ . In each multiple regression, we controlled for political orientation as measured concurrently with the dependent variable.

*Political efficacy.* Political efficacy, the sense that one can successfully affect the political system relative to the ability of other individuals to do so, was measured using a 5-item scale developed by Craig and Maggiotto (1982). Participants were asked to rate their agreement with statements, such as "I feel like I could do as good a job in public office as most of the politicians we elect," from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The internal consistency reliability of the measure in 1992 was .76 (Cole & Stewart, 1996). In 2008, the same measure had an alpha of .67.

*Political participation.* Political participation was measured as a continuous variable based on self-reports of the frequency with which respondents engaged in any of 17 different political behaviors in both 1992 and 2008 (Fendrich & Lovoy, 1988). These items tapped protest, community activism, party and campaign work, and political communication. At both times, respondents were asked to indicate how often they had engaged in each behavior during the past 2 years. Responses were summed and divided by the number of items. The alpha for political participation in 1992 was .87 (Cole & Stewart, 1996); .88 in 2008. Women's participation in their 40s was correlated with participation in their 60s,  $r(N = 119) = .64, p < .001$ . Additionally, participation in both their 40s,  $r(N = 162) = .40, p < .001$ , and 60s,  $r(N = 117) = .38, p < .001$ , was significantly positively correlated with a retrospective measure of college activism administered in 1992, indicating political behavior was fairly consistent in this sample over time.

## RESULTS

The analysis strategy was as follows. First, we used *t* tests to compare Black and White women's means scores on key variables, including FSD and FIR, as well as political variables. Next, we ran hierarchical multiple regression analyses with political efficacy and political participation measured in 1992 and 2008 as the dependent variables. The control variables, race and political orientation, were entered at the first step. At the second step, we entered the two femininity variables, FSD and FIR. At the third step the interaction between the two centered femininity variables was entered (FSD × FIR), as well as the interactions between each centered femininity variable and race coded as a binary variable (White = 0, Black = 1). For each dependent variable, we also ran a model with a fourth step, including the three-way interaction of the two centered femininity variables with race; because this interaction did not significantly increase the  $R^2$  for any of the dependent variables, these models are not presented. In all regressions, Cooks *d*, a statistic measuring each individual's influence on the model, was calculated. Any participant whose Cooks *d* was over .5 (indicating disproportionate influence over the model) was dropped from the analysis (no more than one participant was dropped from any analysis). Additionally, a measure of effect size for multiple regression, Cohen's  $f^2$ , was calculated. Statistical standards indicate that an effect size of .02 is considered small, .15 is considered medium, and .35 is considered large (Cohen, 1988). Finally, significant interactions that emerged in the regressions were graphed and simple slopes were calculated.

### Racial Comparisons

The analyses comparing Black and White women's mean scores on measures of femininity and political variables revealed that, as hypothesized, White women were significantly higher than Black women in their level of FSD, and the racial groups did not differ on their average level of FIR (see Table 1). On average, Black women were more liberal

than White women in their political orientation in 1992. Although this pattern was reversed in 2008, the mean difference did not reach significance. There were significant racial differences on all of the political variables, showing that the Black women in the sample were more politically engaged. As reported in Cole and Stewart (1996), compared to White women, Black women reported higher levels of political efficacy and political behavior in their 40s. This pattern persisted in 2008: on average, Black women reported high levels of political efficacy and behavior.

Our central research questions focused on the relationship between the two dimensions of femininity and political efficacy and participation. We hypothesized that FSD would be related to lower political efficacy and political participation. Additionally, we hypothesized that, consistent with paternalistic stereotypes of women, there would be an interaction between FIR and FSD such that women who were high on both would show the lowest levels of political participation and efficacy.

### Associations Between Femininity and 1992 Political Variables

Table 2 presents the results of the political variables measured in 1992. In 1992, when participants were in their 40s, the interaction between FIR and FSD was significantly associated with political efficacy. Simple slopes analyses were conducted to probe the significant interaction using values one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean for FIR (Holmbeck, 2002). As seen in Figure 1, women rated low in FIR were moderate in terms of political efficacy, regardless of FSD,  $B = -.54$ ,  $\beta = -.08$ ,  $SE = 0.59$ ,  $p = .36$ . However, for those high on FIR, political efficacy varied as a function of level of FSD; those high on FSD were lowest on political efficacy, and those low on FSD were highest on political efficacy,  $B = -2.72$ ,  $\beta = -.41$ ,  $SE = 0.81$ ,  $p < .01$ . In other words, when the women were in their 40s, those who were interpersonally warm and compassionate felt politically efficacious if they

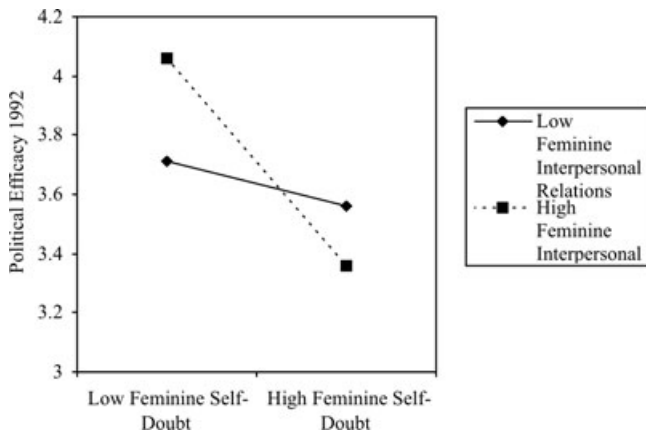
**Table 1**  
Comparisons Between Black and White Women on Femininity and Political Variables

	<i>Black</i>		<i>White</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>eta</i> <sup>2</sup>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
1992 Femininity Variables								
Feminine Self-Doubt	3.37	.51	3.91	.82	4.78	169	<.001	.12
Feminine Interpersonal Relations	6.51	.63	6.55	.86	.33	169	.75	.00
1992 Dependent Variables								
Political Orientation	3.56	.73	3.23	.95	2.42	164	.02	.03
Political Efficacy	3.90	.78	3.61	.90	-2.21	168	.03	.03
Political Participation	1.11	.49	.92	.49	-2.39	166	.02	.03
2008 Dependent Variables								
Political Orientation	4.68	1.59	5.04	1.61	-1.15	122	.25	.01
Political Efficacy	4.94	.76	4.63	.84	-1.94	121	.06	.03
Political Participation	1.18	.48	.95	.43	-2.61	122	.01	.05

**Table 2**  
Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting 1992 Political Variables From Femininity, Race, and Their Interactions

Variable	Political Efficacy 1992 (N = 160)					Political Participation 1992 (N = 157)				
	B	SE B	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup> (p)	$\Delta R^2$ (p)	B	SE B	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup> (p)	$\Delta R^2$ (p)
Step 1				.033 (.07)	.033 (.07)				.092 (.00)	.092 (.00)
Political Orientation	.71	.47	.12			2.19	.74	.23**		
Race	1.22	.85	.11			2.78	1.36	.16*		
Step 2				.055 (.07)	.022 (.17)				.122 (.00)	.030 (.08)
Political Orientation	.62	.47	.11			2.28	.74	.24**		
Race	.63	.90	.06			2.19	1.43	.13		
Feminine Interpersonal Relations	-.18	.55	-.02			1.49	.88	.13		
Feminine Self-Doubt	-1.07	.57	-.16			-1.23	.90	-.11		
Step 3				.108 (.01)	.053 (.03)				.132 (.00)	.010 (.62)
Political Orientation	.55	.46	.09			2.37	.75	.25**		
Race	.70	.97	.07			1.76	1.56	.10		
Feminine Interpersonal Relations	-.11	.69	-.02			2.32	1.13	.20*		
Feminine Self-Doubt	-1.78	.66	-.27**			-1.28	1.07	-.12		
Feminine Interpersonal Relations $\times$ Feminine Self-Doubt	-1.32	.52	-.22*			-.76	.84	-.08		
Feminine Interpersonal Relations $\times$ race	1.32	1.23	.10			-1.91	2.00	-.09		
Feminine Self-Doubt $\times$ race	.86	1.44	.06			-1.20	2.33	-.05		

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01.



**Fig. 1.** The interaction of Feminine Self-Doubt and Feminine Interpersonal Relations predicting Black and White women’s Political Efficacy, 1992.

were low on FSD; however, those high on FIR and high on FSD felt least politically efficacious. These results were independent of race.

Contrary to hypotheses, none of the femininity variables, that is, FSD, FIR, and their interaction, accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in political participation measured in 1992. However, there was a significant main

effect of FSD on political efficacy in 2008, such that those who were higher in FSD reported less political efficacy (see Table 3). This latter finding supported our hypothesis that FSD would be related to lower political efficacy.

*Associations Between Femininity and 2008 Political Variables*

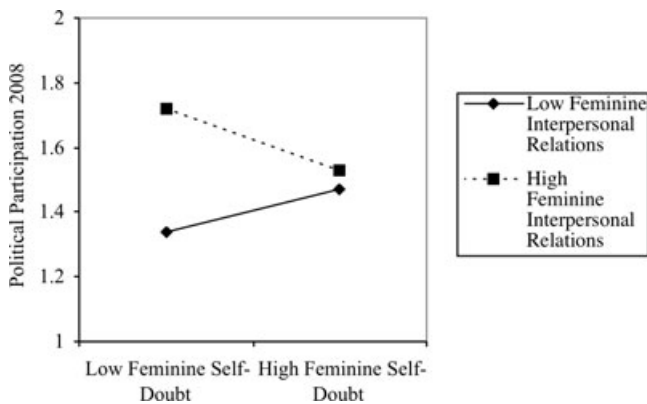
Examining the pattern for 2008 political participation, when the participants were in their 60s, there was a significant main effect for FIR, as well as a significant interaction between FIR and FSD. Simple slopes analyses were conducted to probe the interaction using values one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean for FIR. Figure 2 shows that among women high in FIR, low FSD was associated with enhanced levels of participation,  $B = -.20$ ,  $\beta = -.33$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $p < .05$ . In contrast, among women who were low in FIR, FSD was not significantly related to participation,  $B = .03$ ,  $\beta = .05$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p = .66$ .

Additionally, the interaction between FSD and race had a significant effect on 2008 participation. Figure 3 revealed that White women reported moderate levels of political participation regardless of FSD,  $B = .01$ ,  $\beta = .02$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p = .83$ . However, Black women high in FSD reported the lowest level of participation, and those low in FSD the

**Table 3**  
Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting 2008 Political Variables From Femininity, Race, and Their Interactions

Variable	Political Efficacy 2008 (N = 120)					Political Participation 2008 (N = 119)				
	B	SE B	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup> (p)	$\Delta R^2$ (p)	B	SE B	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup> (p)	$\Delta R^2$ (p)
Step 1				.027 (.20)	.027 (.20)				.094 (.00)	.094 (.00)
Political Orientation	.00	.05	.00			-.04	.03	-.14		
Race	.29	.16	.16			.28	.09	.29**		
Step 2				.106 (.01)	.079 (.01)				.142 (.00)	.048 (.05)
Political Orientation	.00	.05	-.01			-.05	.03	-.17		
Race	.10	.17	.06			.26	.09	.26**		
Feminine Interpersonal Relations	.03	.09	.03			.17	.05	.21*		
Feminine Self-Doubt	-.33	.10	-.30**			-.06	.06	-.10		
Step 3				.137 (.02)	.031 (.26)				.222 (.00)	.080 (.01)
Political Orientation	.00	.05	.00			-.05	.02	-.18*		
Race	.07	.18	.04			.14	.10	.15		
Feminine Interpersonal Relations	.07	.10	.06			.14	.05	.25**		
Feminine Self-Doubt	-.37	.12	-.35**			-.02	.06	-.03		
Feminine Interpersonal Relations × Feminine Self-Doubt	-.25	.13	-.17			-.14	.07	-.17*		
Feminine Interpersonal Relations × race	-.12	.23	-.05			-.11	.12	-.09		
Feminine Self-Doubt × race	.01	.26	.01			-.34	.14	-.27*		

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01.

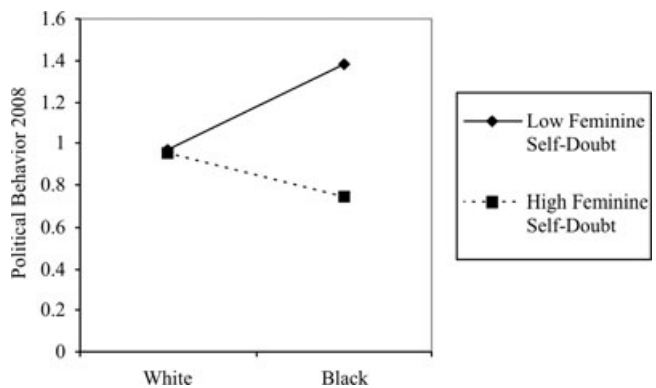


**Fig. 2.** The interaction of Feminine Self-Doubt and Feminine Interpersonal Relations predicting Black and White women’s Political Participation, 2008.

highest,  $B = -.34$ ,  $\beta = -.57$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $p < .01$ . Thus, FSD was associated with lower political participation for Black women but not for White women in our sample.

**DISCUSSION**

In this study, we conceptualized femininity as composed of both desirable and undesirable elements, which correspond to FIR (warmth, nurturance, and interpersonal appeal) and



**Fig. 3.** The interaction of Feminine Self-Doubt and race predicting Black and White women’s Political Behavior, 2008.

FSD (submissiveness, self-doubt, anxiety, and passivity). We hypothesized that these two aspects of femininity would have both independent and interactive effects on women’s political efficacy and behavior.

In 1992, when the women were in their mid 40s, femininity was related to political efficacy for both Black and White women. There was a significant interaction between FSD and FIR such that women low in FIR were moderate in political efficacy regardless of their level of FSD. However, for those high in FIR, high FSD had a depressing



effect on their political efficacy, and low FSD was associated with enhanced efficacy. Put another way, the desirable aspects of femininity—warmth, nurturance and interpersonal appeal—were related to feeling one can make a political impact, but only for women who were unencumbered by femininity's undesirable aspects: self-doubt, anxiety, and passiveness. In fact, women who were rated high in both desirable and undesirable femininity reported the lowest levels of political efficacy. This combination of traits most closely reflects paternalistic stereotypes of women as warm but not competent (Fiske et al., 2002). In contrast, in 1992, when the participants were in their 40s, there was no association between political participation and either aspect of femininity. Contrary to our hypotheses, there were also no race differences in the association of femininity with either of the political variables at this time.

However, in 2008, when the women were in their early 60s, femininity was related to both political participation and efficacy. For Black and White women alike, FSD had a significant negative main effect on political efficacy; that is, high FSD was related to low efficacy regardless of FIR. By the time the women entered their 60s, the social aspects of femininity no longer magnified the effect of self-doubt on efficacy. This pattern suggests that aging may provide women some freedom from the subtly oppressive aspects of femininity that feminist theorists identified and that support paternalistic stereotypes of women.

Moreover, when the women reached their 60s, both aspects of femininity were related to political participation. Women who combined high FIR with low FSD reported the greatest political involvement, suggesting that women must transcend self-doubt in order for their social and nurturing traits to lead to political efficacy and participation. This finding is particularly interesting in light of the fact that feelings of confidence, power, and authority have been found to increase among college-educated women between their 30s and 50s (Stewart et al., 2001; Zucker et al., 2002). Why did the same model account for so little of the variance in political participation when the women were in their 40s? Here the literature from political science may be helpful. At points in the life course when family demands are high, individuals participate in politics less, particularly in non-school-related matters (Jennings, 1979). Perhaps later in the life course, when many women face fewer family constraints on their time (Riley & Bowen, 2005), personality variables may be more relevant to participation.

FSD was directly related to political participation for Black women entering their 60s, but not for White women. For Black women, low FSD was related to greater participation; high FSD was related to depressed participation. Given that Black women in the sample also were rated as having lower levels of FSD than White women, this finding supports the importance of Black women's particular gender socialization to the Black community's political mobilization (Gilkes, 2001). Much of the literature on the "strong Black woman" ideal discusses the costs to Black women's

mental and physical health of maintaining strength, or the appearance of strength, in the face of continuing discrimination and structural disadvantage (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007; Harris-Lacewell, 2001). In contrast, the findings in our paper suggest that to the extent the "strong Black woman" ideal helps Black women resist socialization into the self-doubt, anxiety and passivity that can be associated with femininity, the ideal can be a resource for political action, possibly an important form of resistance, at least later in life. At the same time, fighting for other people through political involvement is consistent with the emphasis of the strong Black woman ideal on self-sacrifice for the benefit of others.

These findings suggest the importance of this gendered racial socialization for collective approaches to resisting racial oppression. However, it should be noted that because we controlled for political orientation, this association holds whether Black women participate on the political right or left. The fact that Black women's participation was associated with FSD in 2008, but not in 1992, is puzzling. Perhaps the unprecedented level of support for the Barack Obama presidential campaign among African Americans (more than 90% rated him favorably [Bostis, 2008]) led Black women in the sample to participate unless personality traits such as those tapped by FSD held them back. Unfortunately, participant age and historical era are confounded in this study, as they are in any longitudinal study of a single cohort.

In contrast, in their 60s, White women's political participation was not related to FSD. For this group, feminine characteristics such as submissiveness, self-doubt, and anxiety did not pose an obstacle to political participation. Recall that White women were higher than Black women on this trait. Perhaps by the time they reach late midlife, many White women have learned how to take action if they chose, regardless of any personal doubt or anxiety. However, because we did not measure femininity in 2008, it is also possible that, rather than compensating for higher FSD in 2008, White women's FSD may have decreased as they aged.

There are several broader implications of these findings. First, the findings support the contention that psychological femininity is multidimensional and includes socially desirable and undesirable elements, which are uncorrelated and have separate and interactive effects on political participation and efficacy. Moreover, high FIR and high FSD, and the CAQ items that assess them, correspond to the mixed stereotypes of women as warm but not competent theorized by Fiske et al. (2002), stereotypes that support benevolent sexism. Future research should further investigate the correlates of these personality traits for women.

Second, the findings that FIR was positively associated with political efficacy and participation at two different ages is at odds with the literatures positing femininity as a deterrent to political involvement. Our results suggest that claims that femininity either relegates women's interests to

the domestic sphere, or facilitates women's acceptance of patriarchy, have perhaps focused on only the undesirable aspects of femininity without defining it as such. These critiques have also overlooked the ways that communal and expressive aspects of femininity may play an important role in political life, which is inherently social. A few studies have investigated social networks as a recruitment mechanism for political mobilization, particularly for women (Cable et al., 1988; Cole, 1994; Crossley, 2008; Irons, 1998). The traits associated with feminine interpersonal relations might be expected to foster such networks.

The positive association between FIR and the political variables suggests that studies of political participation should consider the role that communal traits might play for women. Arguably, this expansion may take different forms for women on the political left and right. It is noteworthy that in all of the models tested, political orientation was controlled. Certainly a given political issue might be understood in terms of communal values on both the left and right (e.g., liberals might oppose a war based on concern for human life, whereas conservatives might support the same war as protecting the homeland). Researchers have found that liberals value and make use of the moral framework of harm/care more than conservatives (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; McAdams et al., 2008). Thus, it is possible that the traits associated with feminine interpersonal relations are consistent with moral values for women on the left, whereas on the political right, women's performance of the normative feminine traits of care and nurturance might be viewed as representing valued traditional gender roles. Whether warmth, compassion, and care for the welfare of others plays the same role in the political participation of women on the political left and right remains a question for future studies. Future research should explore the types of behavior that FIR and FSD might predict beyond the political realm, and whether these differ among diverse groups of women. Considering the results in a lifespan developmental context, it would be useful to know how these aspects of femininity are related to women's social project commitments at midlife and beyond (Newton & Stewart, 2010).

Of course our study has strengths and limitations. Because the femininity variables were assessed using observers' ratings, these analyses minimize the possibility that shared method variance produced spurious relationships. The sample is one of a handful of longitudinal data sets of college-educated women, and to our knowledge the only one that includes an over-sample of Black women. By the same token, our sample is highly educated and affluent, and thus our results cannot be generalized to American women in general. Plentiful research in political science demonstrates that education and income are associated with higher levels of political participation (e.g., Leighley, 1995). The sample is also distinctive by virtue of the cohort it represents. For women who came of age during the social movements of the late 1960s and early '70s, political partic-

ipation may be an important expression of their identities (Stewart & Healy, 1989) and may thus have associations with their gender roles that cannot be generalized to other cohorts. However, Duncan's (2010) finding that feminist self-labeling was a stronger predictor of attitudes towards feminism than was the cohort suggests that this is an open question that is ripe for future research. Finally, the analyses were constrained by the fact that we did not have CAQ ratings for women in 2008, which limited our ability to look at the development of femininity and its association with political variables over time.

Our findings suggest that femininity is not entirely the "velvet glove" that masks the iron fist of patriarchy (Jackman, 1994). Understanding femininity as including both desirable and undesirable elements could help clarify and even reconcile the tension between feminist critiques of the political implications of femininity and the value placed on femininity by women outside the movement. This understanding could be particularly important for the political mobilization of women who endorse feminist beliefs but hesitate to identify as feminists because, for many women, the perception of feminists as "unfeminine" is an important obstacle to feminist identification (Henderson-King & Stewart, 1994; Reid & Purcell, 2004; Rudman & Fairchild, 2007). A feminist campaign emphasizing the important role of feminine qualities such as warmth, social skill, and compassion for others in political work could encourage women who endorse feminist beliefs to put those convictions into action in the political sphere.

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#### APPENDIX: ITEMS FROM THE CALIFORNIA Q-SET USED TO CALCULATE FEMININITY SCORES

##### *Interpersonal Relations*

- 
35. Has warmth; has the capacity for close relationships; compassionate.
92. Has social poise and presence; appears socially at ease.
17. Behaves in a sympathetic or considerate manner.
5. Behaves in a giving way towards others. (N.B. Regardless of the motivation involved.)
11. Is protective of those close to her. (N.B. Placement of this item expresses behavior ranging from overprotection through appropriate nurturance to a laissez-faire, under-protective manner.)
64. Is socially perceptive of a wide range of interpersonal cues.
80. Is interested in members of the opposite sex. (N.B. At opposite end, item implies absence of such interest.)
29. Is turned to for advice and reassurance.
-

84. Is cheerful. (N.B. Extreme placement toward uncharacteristic end of continuum implies unhappiness or depression.)
88. Is personally charming.

*Self-Doubt*

14. Genuinely submissive; accepts domination comfortably.
10. Anxiety and tension find outlet in bodily symptoms. (N.B. If placed high, implies bodily dysfunction; if placed low, implies absence of autonomic arousal.)
19. Seeks reassurance from others.
72. Concerned with own adequacy as a person, either at conscious or unconscious levels. (N.B. A clinical judgment is required here.)

30. Gives up and withdraws where possible in the face of frustration and adversity. (N.B. If placed high, implies generally defeatist; if placed low, implies counteractive.)
59. Is concerned with own body and the adequacy of its physiological functioning.
45. Has a brittle ego-defense system; has a small reserve of integration; would be disorganized and maladaptive when under stress or trauma.
47. Has a readiness to feel guilt. (N.B. Regardless of whether verbalized or not.)
68. Is basically anxious.
40. Is vulnerable to real or fancied threat, generally fearful.
42. Reluctant to commit self to any definite course of action; tends to delay or avoid action.
78. Feels cheated and victimized by life; self-pitying.

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*Note.* Each number refers to item number in the California Q-Set.