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# Getting to the Grassroots: Feminist Standpoints Within the Welfare Rights Movement

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*This article presents historical evidence of how standpoints were used in women's participation in the welfare rights movement from 1964-1972. Results of a qualitative study using archival sources and oral history interviews are presented. An intersectional analysis of race, class, and gender, informed by feminist standpoint theory, provides lessons for current social movement work. Findings reveal that class-based standpoints were strong motivators for the recipients of welfare in their movement participation. Gender-based standpoints were important in non-recipients' participation in the movement; however, race formed a strong standpoint for the African American non-recipients in this study. Participants in social movements may exhibit unique standpoints, and understanding how these emerge and vary is important for mobilization.*

*Key words: welfare rights, social movements, Feminist Standpoint Theory, intersectionality*

Representing a major shift in welfare policy, the 1996 passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) eliminated the program known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), replacing it with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Although after the implementation of TANF many

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researchers have emphasized its success by indicating the decreased numbers of those receiving assistance (Cancian, et al., 2002; Greenburg, 2001), recent increases in the poverty rate illustrate the need for more complex solutions. Female-headed households with children had a poverty rate of 28.7 percent in 2005, compared with 13.0 percent for male-headed households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Poverty is still a concern, and it is still very much a women's issue. Therefore, it is important that we understand the historical context of women's poverty as well as thoroughly examine the strategies for change that women employed in the past. The welfare rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s was a movement that emphasized the rights of poor women. Although the movement was focused on women on welfare, it also involved the participation of middle class Black and White women working together for change. It provides valuable information about how linkages across race and class were formed and how mobilization within the similarity of gender occurred. This information is helpful to developing new approaches to cross-race, cross-class social change work.

This study focuses on exploring concepts and questions that, while historical, aim to offer usable information for current efforts at social change for poor women. This paper presents the results of a case study of the welfare rights movement in Detroit and Southeast Michigan in order to illustrate the ways in which standpoints around race, class, and gender were involved in women's participation in the movement. Understanding how those from different backgrounds and with differing social experiences and "everyday lives" (Smith, 1987) worked together in this social movement is important to our knowledge of how coalition building occurred. By understanding more about how women from differing social locations came together in the past to work for change, social workers can learn valuable lessons for conducting social change work with women in the present.

The welfare rights movement offers a unique opportunity to explore a movement where poor African American and poor White women who were recipients of welfare worked alongside middle-class White and African American women. Much of the past analysis of radical movements and social protest

has focused on men, leaving women primarily invisible (Blee, 1998). This lack of visibility provides another justification for examining women's participation in the welfare rights movement. Researchers have noted that much of the scholarship on past social movements has either ignored women's participation or falsely represented it (West & Blumberg, 1990). Research has also indicated that this has led to the false assumption that most protest participation and key roles in social movement work have been undertaken by men, with women playing only minor parts (Blee, 1998; Evans, 1979; Robnett, 1997). Although much of the early welfare rights movement leadership at the national level was male, women, particularly African American women, led at the grassroots level. Recently scholars have examined women's overall contribution to the welfare rights movement and stressed the importance of their participation (Kornbluh, 2007; Nadasen, 2005). When we examine this movement at the grassroots level we can see clearly that women—both poor and middle class, White and Black—engaged in important social change work together, although their motivations and the unique knowledge that they contributed were very different.

The National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) was the official umbrella organization for the welfare rights movement. It was most active from 1964-1972, and was established by George Wiley, who was a tenured professor of chemistry at Syracuse University and an active member of the civil rights group the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) [Kotz & Kotz, 1977]. In May of 1966 Wiley, having left his faculty position founded the Poverty/Rights Action (P/RAC) center in Washington, D.C., the organization that would later develop into the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) [West, 1981].

In June of 1966 Wiley worked with Ohio welfare rights groups to implement a 155 mile "Walk for Adequate Welfare." The media attention that this march garnered helped support the growth of the National Welfare Rights movement, with more local and state level groups across the country affiliating with NWRO afterward (Gilbert, 2001). Early on, various local affiliates focused on the grievances of individual welfare recipients, such as the need for funding to buy basic

necessities, claims of unfair treatment by caseworkers, and unfair termination of benefits (Nadasen, 2002). This early emphasis on individual grievances helped drive the specific tactics that became the trademark of welfare rights groups all over the country. They engaged in activist tactics such as sit-ins at welfare offices, and marches in various state capitols as well as in Washington, D.C. These tactics were controversial outside NWRO, but were important to members, eventually being referred to as the "street strategy" (West, 1981).

While George Wiley's establishment of P/RAC marks the official start of the welfare rights movement on a national level, it is important to note that many welfare recipients had already been informally gathering and organizing in various cities across the United States (Abramovitz, 1996). Some of the grass-roots groups that were initiated by the women recipients themselves seemed to occur almost simultaneously in various parts of the country (Pope, 1990). In 1963, Johnnie Tilmon, who eventually took over for George Wiley, organized one of the first local welfare rights group in her California community in Watts (West, 1981). Important to an examination of how women organized in this movement at the grass-roots level is the fact that in store-front organizations in communities across the United States women had been gathering informally to fight the welfare system, even prior to the development of the national level organization (Abramovitz, 1996; Pope, 1990; West, 1981).

The welfare rights movement, although considered primarily a movement of poor African American women, was also made up of White middle class female supporters. In the 1960s and 1970s Friends of Welfare Rights groups emerged that were comprised of non-recipient, White, middle class women, who became active in the larger welfare rights movement. They were involved in fundraising efforts, negotiation of recipient demands from welfare officials, and some direct action. However, members of the many Friends of Welfare Rights groups were not allowed to vote on official NWRO issues or attend recipient-only meetings (West, 1981). Since the welfare rights movement included both the recipient and the non-recipient Friends of Welfare Rights groups, it offers a unique opportunity to examine the mobilization of participants across

divisions of race, class, and within gender.

During the 1960s Detroit and its surrounding suburbs experienced profound racial transformation. White flight from the areas surrounding the inner city took hold concurrent to Blacks' integration of these neighborhoods. Economic transformation occurred as the auto industry's decline accelerated, resulting in increased lay-offs (Sugrue, 1996). As Detroit became more racially segregated, it also became more economically segregated. As Black middle class families moved out of the city's center, facing down violent encounters in attempts to integrate the surrounding White communities, the poorest citizens were left behind (Sugrue, 1996). Poor African American mothers who were receiving welfare became the key establishers of the welfare rights movement in Detroit, although they were supported by the many area Friends groups comprised of White middle class women.

### Theoretical Underpinnings: Women's Standpoints

Since this study examines questions of how women crossed racial and class boundaries in order to work together in the welfare rights movement, women's lives and experiences are central to the analysis. Swigonski (1996) has noted that when social workers engage in work with poor women it is particularly important to start from women's lives and to understand their standpoint. Assessing women's standpoints allows for their voices to remain central to the analysis (Sosulski, Cunningham, & Sellers, 2006). A standpoint is a critical perspective that marginalized or oppressed individuals may have about the ways in which unequal power relations operate within society. Women have less power than men within our society, and their standpoint can offer important insight. When we examine women's standpoints, we are able to see the ways in which hierarchical power relations work, rather than viewing these relations through the obscured and privileged lens of men, or those in power (Martin, 2001).

Examining the standpoint of women as Smith (1987) articulates, means obtaining understanding through the analysis of women's everyday lives as they existed in a particular historical moment, and as they were shaped or influenced by

the "ruling apparatus" of a male dominant society (p. 108). However, the standpoint approach I use in this study, while acknowledging an emphasis on gender, is different from Smith's (1987) concept of a standpoint of women. The use of standpoint in this study also includes the understanding that race was a differentiating factor, and that although gender was a similarity for all of the women in this study, race shaped the standpoints of women in different ways. Patricia Hill Collins first articulated the basic tenets of a Black feminist epistemology in her groundbreaking book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1991). Collins (1991) posits that there is a unique Black feminist standpoint that is grounded in the historical group-based experiences and the knowledge uncovered by Black women's position within unequal power relations. This concept is further developed in her book *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (1998), where she argues that critical social theory that is in true opposition to oppression can be produced only when conscious efforts are made to uncover the unique contributions and knowledge of those who have occupied marginalized positions in our society, particularly Black women. Thus, theories such as standpoint theory are uniquely positioned to challenge the basis of unequal power relations and provide critical knowledge of how these relations operate.

The standpoint approach used in this study also builds on Harding's (2004) discussion of the emergence of standpoint thinking. She refers to standpoint theory as "...a kind of organic epistemology, methodology, philosophy of science, and social theory that can arise whenever oppressed peoples gain public voice" (p. 3). This also relates to feminist standpoint theory as articulated by Hartsock (1998), who assumes that those who are oppressed live in material worlds created by structures of domination developed by oppressors, and that it is through their struggle to comprehend this world that critical knowledge is created. Standpoints are not automatic, and they must be uncovered through the oppressed group's political struggles. Through these struggles, poor women, particularly women of color, can make visible to the larger society the ways in which systems of domination have structured their lives and can allow the oppressive features of these systems to

be known (Hartsock, 1998).

While many standpoint scholars have built on the work of previous authors, there is no universally accepted definition of standpoint theory. Most feminist scholars will refer to standpoint thinking or standpoint theories, rather than assuming one agreed-upon definition of a standpoint theory. There is indeed some debate about the merits and bases of the various strands of standpoint theory. A comprehensive overview of these debates and of the various approaches to standpoint theory can be found in Harding's (2004) book titled *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*. The contributions of multiple forms of standpoint thinking apply to the use of standpoint theory in this study. Having outlined these contributions by various scholars, the author defines the specific constraints of the use of standpoint as it emerged and was made clear within interviews with participants in the welfare rights movement.

In the use of standpoint theory, the author first assumes that standpoints are not the same as social locations. A social location or status refers to the position an individual occupies within society, particularly in regard to race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. These social locations are privileged and oppressed based on the access to power that one has within a particular category of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. The women who participated in the welfare rights movement occupied varying social locations and were simultaneously privileged and oppressed based on how these locations intersected. Participants in this study developed particular standpoints that emerged through political struggles based on social experiences grounded in lives structured by the power relations inherent in the historical social locations that they each occupied. Standpoints were identified where participants indicated that they possessed critical insight into these unequal systems of social relations. This insight was evidenced in the ways that women in the study emphasized or focused on a unique knowledge that they had achieved based on their social location, their social experience, and their political struggles.



## Methods

Oral history method and archival analysis were used for this case study of women's participation in the welfare rights movement from 1964-1972. The sample was selected from participants in the welfare rights movement in the Detroit, Michigan area. A snowball sampling method was used to locate participants, using information obtained from key informants chosen for their leadership roles in the movement. African American and White women who were poor, working class, middle class, or upper middle class at the time of their participation were included.

Twelve women participated. All of the participants in this study were involved in one of two major welfare rights groups in Detroit that were affiliated with the NWRO during the 1960s and 1970s, or one of two major Friends of Welfare Rights groups in Oakland County that were affiliated with the NWRO. The findings from the interviews are cited in this paper using participants' pseudonyms. Table one briefly describes the sample.

Table 1. Basic description of sample (all female)

Pseudonym	Recipient status	Race	Class
Anita	Friend	White	middle
Delores	Recipient	Black	poverty
Patricia	Friend	White	middle
Anna	Friend	White	middle
Martha	Friend	White	upper middle
Ruth	Friend	White	middle
June	Friend	Black	working
Victoria	Recipient	White	poverty
Evelyn	Friend	Black	middle
Gladys	Recipient	Black	poverty
Vivian	Recipient	Black	poverty
Helen	Recipient	Black	poverty

Documents from various archival collections were also examined. The majority of these came from the Michigan and

Detroit area. Others were produced by the National Welfare Rights Organization and prominent individuals within the movement. These primary sources included manuscript collections from the following archives: The George Wiley Collection at the Wisconsin State Historical Society, The Labor History Archives at the W. P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University, The Radical History Archives at Michigan State University, and The Labadie Collection at The University of Michigan.

### Analysis

The oral history interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed. Interview transcripts were coded and analyzed using a computer program for qualitative data analysis. As common themes developed more fully, and similarities in descriptions emerged, subsets were then coded. The constant comparative method of analysis was used (Silverman, 2000), analyzing and comparing within case data before moving on to examine between case comparisons. The final themes which emerged after re-coding were then organized into "Conceptually Clustered Matrices" (Miles, & Huberman, 1994), in order to see larger patterns and relationships.

The examination of race, class, and gender within this study was assessed using an Intersectional approach to the analysis. Intersectionality refers to the socially constructed categories of race, class, and gender as converging and interlocking dimensions that contain specific power relations which impact and structure all of our lives (Crenshaw, 1995; Weber, 2001). A key feature of intersectionality is that each of these categories converges and impacts the other, and thus, should not be separated and analyzed individually or additively (Anderson & Collins, 2001).

Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill (1996) explain that an intersectional analysis examines the agency of women as it exists within and in response to the converging categories of race, class, and gender, and the dominant power relations therein. Collins (1993) also explores the concept of intersectionality as a category of analysis that moves away from seeing race, class,

and gender as dichotomous either/or categories and moves towards analysis that acknowledges them as ever present, simultaneously shaping and influencing, and acknowledging that one particular category may be emphasized more than others at certain points in time.

Systems of race, class, and gender are interrelated and operating at all times, so even unacknowledged categories were still impacting, shaping, and influencing the study participants' lives. Therefore, examining the impact of race, class, or gender in isolation, even as it was singularly emphasized within participants' standpoints, does not provide sufficient understanding of how women participated in the welfare rights movement. Categories of race, class, and gender converged to produce the specific experiences and interpretations of social movement participation that are examined in this study.

## Findings

### *Indications of a Poverty Class Standpoint*

The welfare recipients in this study indicated their poverty class lives as being the most important motivator for their involvement in the welfare rights movement. Friends seldom talked about class, and when they did it was in a way that illustrated their own class and race privilege as it intersected within their participation. Here, Martha, the only upper middle class friend in the sample told a story about the time that a community activist with whom she was working had taken her to visit some of the poor areas in the community:

And so he took us to this *house*, where the water had been turned off, for like, two weeks, because of inability to pay the bill. There were cockroaches everywhere, and some were dropping down from the ceiling onto our heads ... So I came home to ... (chuckles), first of all I came home and tore off all my clothes and jumped in the shower (chuckles) you know, to make sure I hadn't brought any cockroaches in. And then I got on the phone and started calling the water department, and demanding (chuckles) that their water be turned on. Well, of course they needed money, so I had to come up and give something like 200 dollars to turn their water

back on, and ... so I saw it firsthand. I saw poverty firsthand, and it just ... it just blew me away. (Martha)

In many cases the shock of witnessing or viewing poverty for the first time was a precursor to Friends' involvement in the movement. However, although they indicated outrage at the existence of real poverty, the fact that they were able to remain unaware of these realities for so long speaks to the intersection of their own race, class, and gender.

In contrast, when recipients talked about class as a motivating factor, they referred to their lived experiences as poor women. Recipients spoke about being drawn to the movement based on their need for concrete assistance. Vivian talked about how she first got motivated to become involved with welfare rights:

We didn't have any furniture, we didn't have anything. Just the bag that we brought [when she and her children came up from the South, fleeing an abusive husband]. So I ended up goin' to the Welfare Department. And my first worker, I don't know how to say it (chuckles), but I wasn't gettin' anything done. And so that's how I ended up at the —— group. So, I went to their meeting, and you know, continued, because Mrs. ——, she was real nice to help me get a ... at the time you could get appliances- from the Welfare Department ... like stoves and refrigerators. It took some time for me to get it, but after I got in their group that's what they helped me with. (Vivian)

Another recipient, Delores, spoke about her involvement in terms of what she had to lose or gain, "But it was nothin' for us to go into a welfare office and scare, and take it over. Because we have nothin' to lose, but we got a world to gain" (Delores). Gladys also talked about the daily strife and stigma she experienced by being poor and needing to get on assistance:

They'd [caseworkers] treat, talk to you so bad ... that's what would hurt mostly, is the way they would talk to you, you know, like you're dirty, nasty, lazy, didn't want to work, and all kinda stuff. Where, you take a

woman that has six or seven children, how could she work? ... and back in those days, the jobs wasn't payin' that much. The only thing they could do was day work. 'Cause I did it on many a day. You know? So ... they just ... I just really can't explain how bad it *did* feel." (Gladys)

This last example illustrates what Harding (2004) refers to as the epistemic privilege that comes from standpoints, or the particular insights that oppressed groups may attain about the social systems which structure their lives. Thus, she indicates that standpoints have the potential to transform "...a source of oppression into a source of knowledge..." (p. 10). Recipients in this study possessed unique knowledge for which they struggled and which informed their strong poverty-class standpoint. Their understanding of the fact that they held a clearer view of a life in poverty and of the social systems that structured their lives was based on their shared class status and represented the standpoint they indicated. Although this was the standpoint they emphasized within their participation, it must be noted that their own race and gender also converged with their class status to help shape their experiences and influence their lives.

Many of the documents produced by the welfare rights movement emphasized class, focusing on how policy changes would harm the poor. However, in many documents phrases such as "working families" or "working poor" were also included. In an informal letter to citizens of the district, a leader of one of the Oakland County Friends groups claimed that proposed federal level cuts would result in only those on welfare being eligible for services such as day-care and family planning, thereby reducing assistance for the "working poor" (Kowaleski, 1972). Another example of a more complex appeal to class is found in the response to Michigan's attempt to pass new residency requirements for welfare recipients. A document from the group Citizens for Welfare Reform describes residency requirements as uprooting poor working families, and asks whether "...poor working people who aren't earning enough—should be pulled from their jobs ..." (Thomas, 1971).

Those working in the broader welfare rights movement

seemed to emphasize that recipients held a strong class-based standpoint informed by the critical knowledge they had gained from a life in poverty. However, leaders at the national level of the movement also reached out across divisions of class. In a press release of a speech given by George Wiley in 1970, he clearly made a strong appeal for the middle classes to join the movement (Wiley, 1970). This somewhat conflicted portrayal of class is understandable, as the welfare rights movement needed to reach out across class lines in order to build support and sustain itself, while it simultaneously needed to maintain a sense of class solidarity or insider status for recipients.

### The Emphasis on a Racialized Standpoint

In the interviews, when race was talked about by White friends who had class privilege it was in a way that emphasized difference. The African American friends specifically talked about race as a form of solidarity with recipients rather than difference. The African American Friends illustrated a strong race based standpoint that emphasized their shared experiences of racial discrimination, allowing them to form linkages with recipients. June, the only working class friend, claimed an insider status when working with the recipients:

Sort of, a insider, Cause most of a lot of peoples I had known down through the years. And ... and ... either known them through the years or either worked in some sorta organization with them. They, some of 'em looked at it as, just one of them ... (chuckles) that had got a job with the County. (June)

However, this race-based standpoint was also informed by their experiences as women, working class and middle class. Although June talked about her shared historical legacy of racial discrimination that seemed to grant her insider status with recipients, she also remembered that when she drove recipients to their meetings they made her stay outside in the car, since she was not poor and on welfare. The non-recipient status she occupied acted as a barrier on one dimension of participation, while a shared racial status simultaneously acted as

a connection on another level.

Evelyn, the only African American middle class Friend in the sample, talked about the importance of the Civil Rights Movement and how that related to her work with welfare rights:

It was just, we had been you know involved ... very, very strongly involved in the Civil Rights Movement... I think it was, was really ... I want to say an, an out-, outreach or an out-branch of ... the Civil Rights thing. (Evelyn)

Throughout her discussions of her past social action work, Evelyn indicated a critical knowledge that she had achieved, based on her experiences and struggles as a Black woman engaged in social movement work. She spoke of her family's experiences of discrimination in her hometown as providing her with a unique perspective and leading to her motivation to work in the welfare rights movement helping other Black women. Although she emphasized a strong race based standpoint, class, as well as gender, also intersected in her participation in interesting ways. She became very distraught when the recipient members planned and carried out a baby shower for her:

When I found it out, and I said, well, you can't do that, you know? You don't have enough money. And one of the mothers, and I don't, I didn't think I'd ever forget which one- but one of the mothers said, 'You don't have a choice. We're doing this.' And I had stuff for this kid, like I was working, and my husband was working, and ... you know, we were not missing a, a minute of anything, not missing a penny. We both had family that was supportive, you know?" (Evelyn)

While it may be assumed that race and gender can converge in a shared standpoint, it may not be enough to connect women from differing class positions. Jordan (2001) wrote about this phenomenon in an essay about her vacation to the Bahamas. She described her feeling of separateness from the everyday life of the Black maid who cleaned her room. While

they shared the sameness of race and gender, their different class status made them seem as if they were each from different worlds (Jordan, 2001). The African American friends in this study did view their race-based standpoint as a source of connection with recipients, but they were unable to cross the social class chasm that made their lived experiences different. Particularly for Evelyn, the unseen ways that class intersected with gender and race in her participation acted as a barrier to connections with recipients.

While Black Friend members perceived race as a dimension of solidarity that provided a degree of insider status with recipients, the White Friends identified division around race. They claimed that the African American women in the movement had a stronger sense of self than the White women. Anna, comparing the Detroit recipients to those from the suburbs, talked about the way Blacks and Whites internalized the shame of welfare. She claimed:

Whereas in Detroit, so many people were poor, and they were healthier in a way. These women were healthier, because they didn't so much think it was their fault. Out here, you were sure if you were poor, it was your fault. (Anna)

This image of the typical African American welfare rights member indicates a specific-raced view of the women's participation in the movement. They had assumptions about recipients that conjured up stereotypical images of a strong Black militant welfare recipient.

Victoria, the only White recipient in this sample, provides a contradiction to the Friends' view of the racial division in self concept and level of militancy. She offers a very class conscious and militant view of her own involvement in the movement. Here she talked about when she first applied for welfare and how she soon became active with welfare rights:

So I went in and applied for ADC. And I ... for a while there, I did not ... you know, I didn't work at all. And I was very politically active (chuckles) during that time. I guess they created a monster. (Victoria)



Victoria spoke about how she immediately felt a right to welfare and actively rebelled against the assumptions and stereotypes of caseworkers. The reality of how participants experienced welfare rights activism was much more complex than the essentialized racial divisions that were sometimes assumed by White Friends.

Race could also be emphasized separately and divisively in movement documents responding to welfare policy changes. When the welfare rights movement fought against Nixon's proposed Family Assistance Plan (FAP), which would have eliminated AFDC and replaced it with a low basic wage (\$1,600 a year or 42.7% of the poverty threshold, which in 2005 dollars would be approximately \$8,486) or when work requirements were fought against, many times the issue was framed in strong race-based language. In a NWRO publication to protest FAP, the plan is called "anti-Black" and a form of "institutional racism" (NWRO, n.d.). In a statement by the Detroit area Citizens for Welfare Reform, forced work requirements are defined as a "...way that the government is advocating slavery and supporting slave wage industries" (Detroit Area Citizens for Welfare Reform Steering Committee, 1971). George Wiley, the African American male leader of NWRO, commonly used a racialized standpoint in documents aimed at a Black audience. In a letter to Congressman Charles Diggs and members of the Congressional Black Caucus, Wiley asked for their help in defeating FAP, calling it racist and claiming that it represented the "brutal repression against five million Black welfare mothers and children" (Wiley, 1971).

### The Gendered Standpoint

Gender was most frequently noted as a critical motivating factor for the Friends' involvement in welfare rights. This was illustrated by Anna:

So it was a, you know ... it was a short move to see that women were being manipulated around their economic security. In other words, women were in bad marriages because they had no economic options. Women were in abusive marriages because they had no

economic options. And then when they moved, to take the only option open to them, which was state support, some kind of state support ... [they were stigmatized]. (Anna)

Many of the Friends talked about the importance of being a woman and a mother and how meeting welfare recipients in person or seeing them come to their churches to speak about their lives made them feel a connection.

Because they had small children at the time, I had small children, and it was just something that I decided would be more of interest to me than to study. Which, the League of Women Voters just studies issues. They don't take action. (Anita)

As Anita expressed, the White Friends felt motivated to get involved in welfare rights in part due to this affiliation with other women and mothers. Ruth also spoke about meeting a woman on welfare for the first time, and how this led to her getting involved in welfare rights work.

And anyways, we talked and talked and talked. Finally I said, You know I'm not a social worker, I don't know the answers to these things. But, you know, if we get together, like you told me how you took care of something, you know very well some other mom's gonna know something else. (Ruth)

Ruth remembered that when she met with this woman for the first time she had to bring her own infant daughter along with her. Ruth stayed so long in the young mother's dilapidated apartment talking with her that the baby wet through the cloth diaper she was wearing. Ruth explained how touching it was that since she had forgotten to bring extra diapers for her daughter, the woman gave her one of her own towels to use.

The White Friends in this study indicated a strong gender-based standpoint that was produced through their own awareness of being a woman and the unequal power relations that this represented. However, their own privileged race and class intersected with their experiences as women, allowing them to

obscure the importance of race and class within their own lives and to instead emphasize a shared sameness of gender in their participation in the movement. They connected race to a difference in approaches and tactics within the movement. They claimed that the African American women in the movement were more militant than the White women. Patricia claimed, "Well ... as I say, the real militants were, the *real* militants were the Black people in Detroit."

White Friends placed an emphasis on race as the reason why Black recipients used different tactics, while their own higher access to power and resources was obscured. Rather than examining how their own privileged access to resources may have led to their tendency to be more comfortable with policy advocacy as opposed to direct confrontation, they instead talked about the militancy of Black recipients in Detroit.

Recipients, however, experienced their gender status through everyday lives intersected by racial and class-based discrimination. An example of this discrimination can be seen in the story that Vivian told about trying to find housing when she first moved with her children to Detroit, "And the hardest thing was, really, try' in to get a place to stay. I would call ... and I would—[the landlord would ask] 'How many kids?'—'I got five.' That was the end of the conversation."

As Vivian indicated, the issue of housing for welfare recipients, and particularly those with large numbers of children, was a critical one in Detroit at the time. An article in *NOW*, the national welfare leaders' newsletter, discussed a sit-in by a Detroit-based welfare rights group demanding more housing for large families, and criticized the Detroit Housing Commission and the city welfare department for not giving mothers with large families money up front in order to secure housing, claiming that by the time they got the money from the welfare department the place was already rented (*Sit in by Mothers Spurs Search for Housing*, 1967).

In contrast to Friends, recipients emphasized a strong poverty-class standpoint. This was informed by their struggles and experiences of discrimination as poor, and in most cases Black, women on welfare. They illustrated a standpoint that emphasized their class status, but their lives were also structured by the convergence of race and gender.

Gender and gendered images of mothers and their children were often used in movement documents in an attempt to combat the negative changes to welfare policy that occurred during the War on Poverty. Gender was used to portray these policy changes as harmful to poor mothers. Images of a stay-at-home mother needing to care for her children were used in documents to defeat the Family Assistance Plan and the Work Incentive program. The 1969 testimony of Beulah Sanders, George Wiley, and Carl Rachlin before the House Ways and Means Committee made the claim that Nixon's FAP would force mothers out of their homes, leaving their children in "government run centers" (Sanders, Wiley, & Rachlin, 1969). Yet, this same testimony also included a request for adequate jobs for all women who choose to work "...in addition to their primary job as mother and homemaker" (Sanders, Wiley, & Rachlin, 1969). This illustrates slight ambivalence about the use of gender within the broader welfare rights movement. The NWRO called for the elimination of The Work Incentive Program (WIN) because it forced mothers to work when they were needed full time to care for their children, but they also claimed that WIN had helped some women get an education and training to find jobs (Help Fight Workfare, 1969).

Although WIN was overall viewed as a punitive policy change, there was an attempt to find positive aspects of the program for poor women and their children. The gendered responses to social welfare policies attempted to fit cohesively with the idealized image of woman and motherhood, but the realities of the class and race differences of welfare recipients resulted in a more complicated experience of gender. The message illustrated in many of the movement-produced documents was that welfare mothers should be able to stay home and care for their children, just as White middle class women had been encouraged to do for decades, but they should also be able to work outside the home as long as it was voluntary.

## Discussion and Conclusions

These findings indicate that while shared gender served as an important motivation for some women who participated in the welfare rights movement, differences in race and class

also complicated this participation. Although gender acted as an important mobilizing feature for the Friends' participation in the welfare rights movement, gender should be considered cautiously by those currently doing cross-race and cross-class coalition building or social movement work. As this study has shown, constructs of "woman" may differ based on the ways in which race and class intersect within women's lived experiences.

Although three major standpoints were emphasized by women in this study, poverty-class standpoints and gender-based standpoints were most prominent for participants. For the White Friends in this study, gender was a critical standpoint related to their involvement, but the recipients did not experience their gender in the same way, and thus did not emphasize strong gender-based knowledge and experiences. This study shows that poverty-class standpoints were emphasized as critical to recipients' involvement in the welfare rights movement. Race-based standpoints were only emphasized by the African American Friends involved in the movement.

This examination of the ways that race, class, and gender intersected within the standpoints of early welfare rights movement participants offers insight into ways that social mobilization occurs across difference and within similarities. A main implication for social movement work is the knowledge that it is important to attempt to uncover and comprehend participants' standpoints when engaging in movement building with differing populations. It is also important to acknowledge that members' standpoints may be very different. Standpoints, and the ways that race, class, and gender intersect and help to shape them, are important to consider when engaging in large scale work with diverse communities and groups.

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