

## Doubly Bound: The Impact of Gender and Race on the Politics of Black Women

**Claudine Gay**

*Strategic Decisions Group  
Boston, MA*

**Katherine Tate**

*University of California, Irvine*

---

*Gender has been thought to be less salient than race among black women. Data from two national surveys of black Americans, conducted in 1984 and 1996, show that black women identify as strongly on the basis of their gender as their race, and that these gender and racial identities are mutually reinforcing. Nevertheless, among black women, their identification with their race more powerfully affected their political attitudes than did their identification on the basis of gender, except in instances where the interests of blacks directly conflict with the interests of women. These empirically based findings speak to the issue of why the attitudes of black women toward contemporary gender issues can sharply diverge from those of white women.*

---

**KEY WORDS:** race; gender; identification; black politics; feminists

*I think Black women were affected by the women's movement, but I think that for most Black women despite Clarence Thomas, Anita Hill, our first allegiance is to race. We feel that we are oppressed more by our color than our gender, and we want Black men to prosper and move ahead.*

Author and social critic Bebe Moore Campbell<sup>1</sup>

*Until black people redefine in a nonsexist revolutionary way the terms of our liberation, black women and men will always be confronted with the*

<sup>1</sup> V. Chambers, "Which Counts More, Gender or Race?" *New York Times*, 25 December 1994, Section 6, p. 16.

*issue of whether supporting feminist efforts to end sexism is inimical to our interests as a people.*

bell hooks, in *Talking Back* (1989), p. 178

Anita Hill's allegation in 1991 that conservative black U.S. Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas sexually harassed her when he headed the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission put black women in a position of having to choose between supporting the interests of blacks or those of women. Black women were put in a similar bind in the 1996 Simpson case, in which a black media personality, O. J. Simpson, was accused of murdering his white wife. In both cases, the racial divide in public attitudes on these events was greater and far more significant than gender as black women sided with black men (Mansbridge & Tate, 1992; Taylor, 1995). Black women's support for Thomas and Simpson has been interpreted to mean that gender is less salient than race among black women.

Here, we argue that black women are "doubly bound," that gender matters as much as race in forming their political identities. Using data from two national surveys of voting-eligible black Americans in 1984 and 1996, we establish that black women identify as strongly on the basis of their gender as their race, and that these gender and racial identities are mutually reinforcing. We nevertheless find that a racially constructed identity more strongly affects the political attitudes of black women than one based on gender. But in the instances where race directly clashes with gender, as in the Thomas-Hill case, black women's identification with women can mute their support for causes presented as favoring blacks.

### **Gender and Race Identification Among Black Women**

The matter of whether race and gender identities negate each other among black women has not garnered much research in the social sciences. To some degree, this issue has primarily been addressed outside of academia, in the realm of practical politics. Black civil rights organizations and their predominantly male leadership have historically been less than responsive to gender issues of concern to black women. Underlying this reluctance has been an assumption that gender identification among black women is at best irrelevant (because the self-reliance and economic independence realized by black women through their long history of participation in the labor force has supposedly promoted egalitarian relations with black men and an active influence within the black family and community) and at worst subversive (because an alliance along gender lines is considered dilutive to the strength of the black struggle for equality, whose primary resource for affecting change is black group consciousness; Giddings, 1982). Hostility toward feminism has been further encouraged by the myth of the emasculating "black matriarch" hampering the progress of black men, as well as by the reduc-

tionist tendencies of civil rights organizations that insist that racism is the one evil that precipitates all other forms of oppression.

A parallel debate has taken place within the women's movement, as some white feminists have viewed black women's concern with racism as essentially divisive and counter-revolutionary. In an effort to explain the absence of black women in the feminist movement, Jane Torrey (1979) suggested that a "high level of black consciousness may block the rise of feminist consciousness and result in a tendency [among black women] to focus on the differences between black and white women." As a consequence, black women have been put into a position of having to choose with whom to ally and whose interests to advance. Just as the concept of "double jeopardy" has been used to describe the situation of black women confronting both sexism and racism, "double bind" might accurately reflect the position of minority women who are told that they must decide between their dual identities (Reid, 1984, p. 247).

Social scientists who have addressed the issue of multiple group identity have made arguments that support the views of male race advocates and white feminists. According to the pluralist framework, multiple group identities that develop as a consequence of greater social and economic integration have the effect of weakening an individual's group orientation toward politics (Dahl, 1961; Truman, 1971). Just as the American political landscape is described by pluralists as having free, complete, and effective competition among groups—all with access to different resources and none dominant—each individual bears multiple, often competing, allegiances. No one is wholly constituted as a factory worker; she is also female, a Jew, a parent. Only a fraction of her political identity and attitudes could be expressed through union affiliation, for example. The priorities of any one group are not expected to figure prominently in her interpretation of politics. Furthermore, the argument goes, the absence of internal cohesion (a consequence of overlapping memberships) limits the effectiveness with which any group can assert its claims—countering the threat posed by the proliferation of interest group activity. Analytical pluralists like David Truman (1971) take great comfort in the existence of these overlapping memberships, crediting them with the moderation of political demands and the attenuation of societal cleavages.

Studies have found that black women are more likely than white women to identify as feminists (Baxter & Lansing, 1983; Klein, 1984; Mansbridge & Tate, 1992). Moreover, contrary to those who maintain that multiple loyalties make focused politics less likely, several researchers have found that black consciousness is associated with feminist consciousness (Robinson, 1987; Wilcox, 1990). Clyde Wilcox's (1990) research suggested that the development of black consciousness can potentially facilitate the development of feminist consciousness. Black women who strongly identified with their race were more likely to support a black feminist strategy because they more readily recognize and identify with the disadvantaged and discriminated against in society. Deborah Robinson's (1987) study demonstrated that gender identification among black women had either no effect or a

positive effect on their race consciousness. Surveys have found that even during the early years of the women's liberation movement, black women were far more likely to express support for the cause of gender equality than white women. Black women, wrote Sandra Baxter and Marjorie Lansing (1983), drawing on a 1971 Louis Harris survey, were the most supportive of the women's liberation movement of the four race-gender groups. Thus, these studies found that black women are not choosing sides.

Baxter and Lansing contended that black women have come to see themselves as "a special interest group fighting to overcome the twin barriers of racial and gender discrimination" (1983, p. 108). Battling both racism and sexism, they experience the world differently from those who are not black and female. Patricia Hill Collins (1991) argues that black women viewing the world through such a lens consider the various forms of oppression as "one overarching structure of domination." This unique perspective and their resistance to racial and gender oppression, according to Baxter and Lansing, accounts for their higher rate of political participation.

Being female and black does not automatically lead to gender or race consciousness. But once consciousness has been reached, such individuals are more politically liberal than those who lack group consciousness. Race consciousness for blacks is not only positively related to their rates of political participation, but also reinforces their identification with the Democratic Party and promotes a liberal political outlook as well (Dawson, 1994; Gurin, Hatchett, & Jackson, 1989; Tate, 1994). Similarly, Pamela Johnston Conover (1994) has established that a feminist outlook among women explains the gender gap in politics. Feminists are considerably more liberal than nonfeminists. Conover maintained that women's concern for the disadvantaged in society is not simply a function of being female, and that the commitment to the cause of gender equality among feminists leads them to express more concern for the plight of the poor and the elderly.

The theoretical impact of a dual identity for black women seems straightforward enough: Both identities should promote a liberal policy perspective. Black women who identify with their gender in addition to their race should continue to support civil rights causes. Gender identification, in fact, should enhance the liberal effect of race on black policy attitudes. Their experiences of sexism and racism should promote gender and race consciousness, which, in turn, should lead to support for civil rights and feminist causes. In reality the process is more complicated, as public opinion is also influenced by elite debate. Public opinion is formed from the interaction between loosely integrated ideological predispositions and elite discourse (Zaller, 1992). Not only have the civil rights objectives of blacks been framed as incompatible with the political goals of feminists, they can also be framed as antithetical to each other. The civil rights struggle has been largely defined as having been won once black men attain their share of patriarchal power, whereas white feminists not only have ignored the issue of racism against black women, but their pioneering leaders were as racist as the rest of white society. Thus,

while in theory the dual identity of black women should reinforce their support for the political objectives of both groups, we may find that the pluralists are right—that depending on how the issue is framed, black women are choosing sides.

### The Impact of Group Identities on Policy Attitudes

In the first half of this paper, we examine two principal questions. The first is whether, among black women who identify with women, gender identification increases the probability of supporting liberal public policies. The second question is whether, among black women who identify with women, gender identification enhances the effect of race identification on support for liberal public policies.

The data we analyzed are from the 1984 and 1996 National Black Election Studies (NBES). The 1984 study consisted of 1,150 interviews with voting-age blacks before the November election, followed by 872 postelection re-interviews, all of which were conducted by phone. The 1996 study was also a telephone survey of 1,126 voting-eligible blacks, of whom 854 were re-interviewed after the November election. Both were full-coverage, disproportionate-probability random-digit-dial telephone surveys.<sup>2</sup> Women represented 62% of the black respondents in 1984 and 63% in 1996. Only female respondents in the 1984 survey were analyzed.

The primary independent variables in our study are measures of group identity—one for gender and another for race. Our conceptualization of group identity is based largely on the pioneering empirical work of Gurin (1985) and Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson (1989), as well as the work of Tate (1994) and Dawson (1994).<sup>3</sup> Individuals who identify with their group may develop a sense of interde-

<sup>2</sup> The principal investigators for the 1984 NBES are James S. Jackson, Patricia Gurin, and Shirley J. Hatchett. The 1984 data are part of the NBES, 1984 and 1988, and are available through the Inter-Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR 9954). Katherine Tate is the principal investigator of the 1996 NBES. The 1996 NBES will be available through ICPSR as well by January 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Although early empirical work on groups tended to conflate identification and consciousness (Campbell et al., 1960; Verba & Nie, 1972), the consensus emerging is that there are four distinct components to group consciousness: (1) group identification—perceived self-location within a particular social stratum, along with a psychological feeling of belonging to that stratum; (2) power discontent—the recognition of a collective deprivation of power and resources; (3) system blame—the attribution of blame for the group's position on illegitimate structural determinants, rather than on the inadequacies of individual members; and (4) collectivist orientation—a commitment to collective action aimed at realizing the group's interests (see Gurin, 1985; Klein, 1984; Miller, Gurin, Gurin, & Malanchuk, 1981). Scholars have tended to justify the focus on group consciousness by a concern for political participation, arguing that the cognizance of shared interests alone is insufficient for the mobilization of group members. Although it may be true that group identification is a necessary but insufficient prerequisite to group mobilization, group identification operates as more than just an intermediate step. Identification, itself, has measurable cognitive effects that can distinguish the group identifier from the objective nonidentifying group member (Conover, 1984; Dawson, 1994; Gurin, Hatchett, & Jackson, 1989; Tate, 1994).

pendence or common fate with other group members. It can be argued that these perceptions represent a more advanced stage of identification—a shift from merely feeling that one belongs or feels close to other group members, to believing that one's life chances are inextricably bound to the group. Further, it can be reasonably expected that individuals who feel their life chances to be constrained by their objective group membership will be more likely to view politics from the perspective of the group, as compared to individuals who identify on a more affective basis.

Common fate with blacks was measured by two questions. The first question was "Do you think what happens generally to blacks in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?" Respondents who answered yes were asked a second question: "Will it affect you a lot, some, or not very much?" The responses to these two questions were combined. In 1984, about 27% said that what happens to blacks will affect them a lot, while 31% and 10% said that the group's fate affects them some and not very much, respectively. About 26% said that they didn't think what happens to the group will affect their lives. The distribution of the black common fate item is shown in Table I. Older women, highly educated women, and women who headed their own households tended to have the strongest race identities. Among blacks generally, men and those who were college-educated tended to strongly identify with race.

**TABLE I.** Race and Gender Identification Measures in 1984 and 1996  
(Black Women Only)

<i>"Do you think what happens generally to black people in this country will have something to do with what happens to you in your life? [If yes, is that a lot, some, or not very much?]"</i>			
Response	1984 (Unweighted N = 715)	1996 (Unweighted N = 756)	Change
Yes—A lot	26.5%	32.9%	+6.4%
Yes—Some	31.2%	35.8%	+4.6%
Yes—Not very much	9.8%	8.6%	-1.2%
No	26.1%	17.0%	-9.1%
Don't know	6.5%	5.8%	-0.7%

  

<i>"Do you think what happens generally to women in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life? [If yes, is that a lot, some, or not very much?]"</i>			
Response	1984 (Unweighted N = 692)	1996 (Unweighted N = 539)	Change
Yes—A lot	19.3%	26.0%	+6.7%
Yes—Some	32.3%	39.4%	+7.1%
Yes—Not very much	9.0%	8.1%	-0.9%
No	33.4%	22.5%	-10.9%
Don't know	5.9%	3.9%	-2.0%

Parallel questions were used to measure the degree of common fate with women. Black women were less strongly identified with their gender than with their race. One-fifth of the 1984 sample had strong gender identifiers, believing that what happened to women affected their lives a lot, while 32% and 9% said that gender affected their lives some and not very much, respectively. Thirty-three percent felt that what happens to women in the United States won't affect their lives. Black women who identified with their gender had a similar profile to race identifiers, except that in addition to being older, heads of households, and highly educated, they also tended to be more affluent than those women who did not identify with their gender. Racial and gender common fate awareness increased over the 12 years among black women. Roughly 9% fewer women said that their lives were independent of their race and of their gender in 1996 than in 1984. Race also increased in salience over this period.

The political attitudes of black women were measured by six policy attitudes. Three of the policies concern race-specific programs; three are general social welfare programs. Regarding the race-specific policy agenda, respondents were asked whether they strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following policy statements:

1. "The government in Washington should make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks and other minority groups."
2. "Because of past discrimination, minorities should be given special consideration when decisions are made about hiring applicants for jobs."
3. "The racial integration of schools is so important that it justifies busing children to schools outside of their neighborhoods."

Responses to these statements were coded as dichotomous variables. Disagreement was registered as 0, reflecting a more conservative racial preference, and agreement was coded as 1.

The three questions on general social policies revolved around the respondent's preferences on spending levels. Specifically, respondents were asked if spending by the federal government on food stamps, public schools, and Medicare should be increased, decreased, or kept the same. Responses to the three items were dichotomized so that those who favored cutting or keeping spending at the same level were coded 0 and those who wanted spending increased were coded 1.

In addition to the gender, race, and gender-race identification measures, four demographic variables (age, education, income, and party identification) were included in the analysis as control measures. Because the dependent policy measures are dichotomies, generalized least squares (GLS) were used. Table II shows the impact of gender and race identification on policy attitudes among black women, and Table III shows the interaction effect of gender and race identification on these same policy attitudes.

The initial results of the analysis shown in Table II do not support very well the hypothesis that a gender identification among black women promotes liberal policy views. Although the gender identification coefficient is positive in four of

**TABLE II.** Impact of Race and Gender Identifications on Policy Attitudes

	<u>Race-Specific Programs</u>			<u>General Social Programs</u>		
	Govt. Aid to Minorities	Busing for Integration	Affirmative Action	Food Stamps Spending	Spending on Schools	Medicare Spending
	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>B</i> (SE)
Intercept	.869 (.164)	.912 (.277)	.621 (.278)	1.02 (.27)	.474 (.196)	.469 (.21)
Race Id.	.058 (.017)	.058 (.034)	.066 (.035)	.072 (.034)	.022 (.018)	.040 (.028)
Gender Id.	.001 (.015)	-.037 (.034)	.033 (.035)	-.004 (.034)	.046 (.019)	.013 (.026)
Age	-.004 (.001)	-.009 (.002)	.004 (.002)	-.004 (.003)	-.002 (.001)	.005 (.002)
Education	-.006 (.008)	-.013 (.015)	-.002 (.015)	-.032 (.015)	.014 (.008)	-.001 (.01)
Income	-.015 (.017)	.014 (.036)	-.038 (.036)	-.038 (.036)	-.017 (.015)	.02 (.029)
Party Id.	.114 (.128)	-.028 (.157)	-.026 (.159)	-.055 (.154)	.165 (.156)	-.07 (.077)
Total Cases	196	192	192	192	195	194
SSR	21.7	45.0	44.4	44.7	20.9	33.1
SER	.34	.49	.49	.49	.33	.42

Source: 1984 NBES. *B*, coefficient for each independent variable; SSR, sum of squared residuals; SER, standard error of the regression.

**TABLE III.** Impact of Race and Gender Identifications and Interaction Term on Policy Attitudes

	<u>Race-Specific Programs</u>			<u>General Social Programs</u>		
	Govt. Aid to Minorities	Busing for Integration	Affirmative Action	Food Stamps Spending	Spending on Schools	Medicare Spending
	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>B</i> (SE)
Intercept	.75 (.20)	1.05 (.31)	.76 (.31)	1.14 (.30)	.55 (.22)	.53 (.24)
Race Id.	.102 (.04)	.007 (.072)	.005 (.072)	-.001 (.072)	.016 (.057)	.016 (.058)
Gender Id.	.052 (.056)	-.095 (.08)	-.041 (.085)	-.081 (.077)	.003 (.058)	-.017 (.073)
Interaction Id.	-.017 (.016)	.021 (.027)	.027 (.028)	.03 (.026)	.01 (.018)	.011 (.022)
Age	-.004 (.002)	-.009 (.003)	-.004 (.003)	-.003 (.003)	-.002 (.001)	.005 (.002)
Education	-.006 (.008)	-.012 (.015)	-.002 (.015)	-.031 (.014)	.012 (.008)	-.008 (.01)
Income	.011 (.019)	.006 (.036)	-.037 (.036)	-.039 (.036)	-.015 (.017)	.02 (.029)
Party Id.	.094 (.126)	-.039 (.159)	-.013 (.16)	-.043 (.157)	.167 (.154)	-.065 (.09)
Total Cases	196	192	192	192	195	194
SSR	21.5	44.8	44.2	44.4	21.0	33.0
SER	.34	.49	.49	.49	.34	.42

Source: 1984 NBES. *B*, coefficient for each independent variable; SSR, sum of squared residuals; SER, standard error of the regression.

the six policy regressions, in only one is that coefficient statistically significant. In the case of spending on public schools, black women who strongly identify with their gender are more likely than weak identifiers to advocate increased funding. A 1-point increase in the women's common fate item increases the probability of adopting the liberal policy stance on public schools by about 5%. Admittedly, this is a small effect. In the remaining two policy areas, the gender identification coefficients are negative, suggesting that gender-identified black women were less likely to express liberal support for busing and for increased spending for food stamps. The standard errors attached to these negative coefficients are so large that it is not certain that gender identification carries a consistent negative effect on black women's attitudes toward busing and food stamp expenditures. In contrast, in five of the six models, race identification has a significant and liberal impact on the policy views of black women. Its effect, while not large (2 to 7%), was broadly consistent, affecting the attitudes of black women on race-specific as well as general social spending programs.

The GLS coefficients reported for both the gender and race identification measures, as shown in Table II, have large standard errors. This is probably because gender and race identities among blacks are highly correlated; the Pearson's *R* for gender and race common fate is .39. Strong race identifiers, in other words, tend to be strong gender identifiers as well. Further analysis that addressed directly the potential multicollinearity problem between race and gender identification determined that while gender identification promotes a liberal policy perspective among black women, the magnitude of this effect appears to be much smaller than that of being strongly race-identified. Because the two measures are so highly correlated, it is difficult to speak with any certainty about the magnitude of their effects found in this sample. Still, although we cannot be certain that a perception of gender interdependence significantly increases support for liberal social policies, it does not detract from such support. This is especially important with regard to the more race-specific policy of government aid to blacks and minorities. Contrary to the concerns voiced by black male civil rights activists, identifying with women is not at odds with a black public policy perspective.

Table III shows the results of the analysis of whether being gender-identified in the black community enhances the liberal effect of race identification. Given the amount of multicollinearity present in the models, it is not surprising that the standard errors are consistently large relative to their respective coefficients for all three identification models. However, to the extent that any of the reported relationships can be reliably interpreted, gender identification does seem to enhance the impact of race identification in five of the six policy areas. On all but the issue of government aid to minorities, the interaction of black common fate and women's common fate is positive.

In the model predicting support for government aid to minorities, race identification had a strong liberal effect that was statistically significant ( $p < .02$ ), but its interaction with gender identification worked to dilute black women's commitment

to race-specific programs. When gender and race identification are assumed to be independent of one another, strong race identifiers were 10% more likely to support government assistance to minorities. Taking into account the interaction between gender and race identities cuts the effect of race identification on the probability of being liberal by 1.5 to 8.5%. This dilutive effect, however, may not be reliable. Constructing a 95% confidence interval reveals that the true impact of the interaction between gender and race identities could dilute support for minority aid by as much as 5% or increase it by 1%. Generating 95% confidence intervals for the interaction terms for the remaining five models yields the same conclusion: that it is unclear whether having a strong gender identity along with a strong race identity reinforces or detracts from one's liberal policy positions. The results indicate more conclusively that liberalism on the six policy issues we examined is best explained by the intensity of black women's race identification alone.

### **A Second Look: Race and Gender in 1996**

Thus far, we have found that gender identification figures less prominently in the formation of black women's policy attitudes than does identification with their race, although this does not mean that gender identification is never politically relevant for black women. The insignificance of women's common fate may also be an artifact of the 1984 survey. In many other policy areas, especially those of particular concern to women (such as the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion rights, and child care), gender identification may play an important role in the evaluation of politics. Such questions were not included in the 1984 NBES. Moreover, given the historic nature of Jesse Jackson's presidential bid in 1984, it seems reasonable to suspect that race figured especially prominently for blacks. The particular salience of race in the campaign may have made blacks all the more aware of their interdependence. Conover (1984) argued that different group identities (what she terms "self-schemas") are activated in different political contexts. In 1984, race, possibly, was the primary lens through which blacks interpreted politics.

Black politics may have become more "gendered" since 1984. Notable recent events with the potential to divide blacks on the basis of gender included Anita Hill's 1991 charge that President Bush's nominee to the Supreme Court, black conservative Clarence Thomas, sexually harassed her when he headed the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Hill's allegation was ignored by the all-male Senate Judiciary Committee until leaked to the media. Although her charge became a cause célèbre among feminists, prompting several women to make bids themselves for the U.S. Senate, it also caused black public opinion to swing decisively in favor of Thomas's confirmation to the Supreme Court. He was confirmed by a vote of 52 to 48, the narrowest margin ever for a Supreme Court nominee. The 1995–1996 O. J. Simpson trial set off another storm of racial and gendered public controversy. Accused of a double homicide involving his ex-wife,

Simpson was found not guilty by the mostly black and Hispanic jury. Race strongly influenced opinions on this matter, and women's attitudes toward Simpson's guilt and the verdict were not significantly different from those of men. For example, in a *Los Angeles Times* survey, about half of whites surveyed said that they were angered by the jury's acquittal of Simpson, compared with only 4% of blacks.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Louis Farrakhan's Million Man March on Washington, D.C. in October 1995, which excluded black women, raised questions about the role of women in the struggle for racial equality and social dignity.

In the 1996 NBES, respondents were asked to rate Farrakhan, his Million Man March, Thomas, Simpson, and the women's movement on a "feeling thermometer" scale from 0 to 100. Scores below 50 indicate that respondents felt cool toward the individual or event, while those above 50 represent warmth; a score of 50 indicates that respondents neither especially liked nor disliked the individual or event. Respondents did not rate those individuals or events that they did not recognize.

As shown in Table IV, on the whole, blacks were neither strongly positive nor strongly negative toward Farrakhan, Thomas, and Simpson. Their average ratings hovered around the midpoint of the scale, with Thomas earning somewhat cooler ratings on average than Farrakhan or Simpson, whose scores were slightly above 50. In contrast, blacks gave strongly favorable ratings to Farrakhan's Million Man March and to the women's movement. Although men and women gave Farrakhan, the black Muslim leader, and the march comparable evaluations, gender differences emerged in the ratings for Thomas, Simpson, and the women's movement. Black men rated Thomas and Simpson somewhat more positively than black women; there was a 4-point difference between them. Black men also rated the women's movement more negatively (again, by 4 points) than did black women.

Few significant differences emerged, however, on the basis of black women's race and gender identifications. Thomas received somewhat lower scores from strongly race-conscious black women than from those with weak race identities. As might be expected, women who strongly identified with their gender gave the women's movement significantly higher scores than did women who weakly identified with their gender.

Table V presents the results of an ordinary least squares regression analysis of the five feeling thermometer ratings. Age, education, and region (the South) were included in the regression models as control variables.<sup>5</sup> In Table VI we show the effect of an interaction between gender and race common fate identities. In general, few differences emerged among black women that could reliably predict their attitudes toward Farrakhan, the Million Man March, Thomas, Simpson, and the women's movement. Women who strongly identified with their race rated Farrakhan, his march, and Thomas no more or less highly than those who weakly

<sup>4</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 8 October 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Because income was strongly correlated with education in this data set, it was excluded from the regressions.

**TABLE IV.** Mean Ratings of Farrakhan, Million Man March, Thomas, Simpson, and the Women's Movement by Men, Women, and Race and Gender Identifiers Among Women

	Sample	Women Race Identifiers					Women Gender Identifiers			
		Men	Women	Strong	Weak	Non-Identifiers	Strong	Weak	Non-Identifiers	
Louis Farrakhan	56	58	54	59	55	52	55	53	56	
Million Man March	77	76	78	81	79	73	82	75	76	
Clarence Thomas	46	49	44**	40	45	44*	38	43	45	
O. J. Simpson	56	58	54*	53	54	56	54	52	55	
Women's Movement	71	68	72**	75	72	69	76	73	66**	

Source: 1996 NBES, Weighted. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

identified with their race. Race identification, however, did increase the evaluations that black women gave for Simpson and for the women's movement. Gender identification also only affected these latter two ratings. Women who strongly identified with their gender gave Simpson lower evaluations than those who didn't think that their lives were affected by their gender. Those who identified with their gender were also more likely to rate the women's movement more positively than those who didn't.

Black women who identified with their race remained more likely to identify with their gender, and vice versa, although because the race identification measure used in the analysis of the 1996 data also includes a component for race salience, race and gender identification were only weakly correlated at .12 in 1996 in contrast to 1984. Our analysis of black public figures and events shows that the interaction effect of gender and race was generally dilutive. Black women who strongly identified with their race and gender gave the Million Man March, Thomas, and Simpson more negative ratings than those who espoused weak affiliations. But the fact remains that only two of the models were statistically significant and represented improvements in fit over the main-effects model. Attitudes toward the Million Man March and Simpson were best accounted for by the models that included the interaction term. A race identification promoted positive evaluations, whereas the joint effect of being identified by race and gender caused black women to evaluate the march and Simpson more negatively. In contrast, the interaction model caused a reduction in fit for the women's movement. Being both strongly race- and gender-identified did not significantly affect the attitudes that black women have toward the women's movement. Attitudes toward Farrakhan and Thomas cannot be reliably predicted from the models presented in Tables V and IV, as the  $F$  values for the models were not statistically significant at the .05 level or less. Among black women, being strongly race- or gender-identified (or both) did not affect their feelings toward these two political figures.

**TABLE V.** Impact of Race and Gender Identification on Feeling Thermometer Ratings Among Black Women

	Louis Farrakhan <i>B</i> (SE)	Million Man March <i>B</i> (SE)	Clarence Thomas <i>B</i> (SE)	O. J. Simpson <i>B</i> (SE)	Women's Movement <i>B</i> (SE)
Intercept	54.52** (8.02)	46.43** (7.52)	78.13** (6.67)	41.15** (6.72)	57.24** (5.97)
Race Id.	.63 (.72)	.18 (.65)	.95 (.59)	1.17* (.60)	1.18* (.52)
Gender Id.	-.08 (1.40)	-1.76 (1.28)	1.25 (1.17)	-3.28** (1.19)	2.25* (1.05)
Education	.39 (.90)	-1.48 (.84)	-.46 (.76)	-.35 (.75)	-.16 (.68)
Age	-.06 (.11)	.06 (.10)	-.12 (.10)	.34** (.09)	.11 (.08)
South	-1.78 (3.16)	7.01* (3.00)	-1.68 (2.63)	6.03* (2.66)	.15 (2.37)
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.004	.04	.02	.08	.03
Total <i>N</i>	341	318	379	325	376
Signif. <i>F</i>	.8969	.0320	.2339	.0001	.0260

Source: 1996 NBES. \**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01.

**TABLE VI.** Impact of Identification Interaction Term on Feeling Thermometer Ratings Among Black Women

	Louis Farrakhan <i>B</i> (SE)	Million Man March <i>B</i> (SE)	Clarence Thomas <i>B</i> (SE)	O. J. Simpson <i>B</i> (SE)	Women's Movement <i>B</i> (SE)
Intercept	52.02** (12.23)	31.00** (10.68)	63.14** (10.04)	26.23** (10.18)	51.91** (9.00)
Race Id.	1.10 (1.88)	3.21* (1.63)	3.79** (1.54)	2.99* (1.56)	2.18 (1.36)
Gender Id.	.85 (3.72)	4.34 (3.27)	6.87* (3.06)	2.30 (3.09)	4.26 (2.74)
Interaction	-.17 (.63)	-1.16* (.57)	-1.05* (.52)	-1.05* (.54)	-.37 (.47)
Education	.40 (.90)	-1.40 (.84)	.42 (.75)	-.30 (.75)	-.14 (.69)
Age	-.06 (.11)	.05 (.10)	-.13 (.09)	.34** (.09)	.11 (.08)
South	-1.75 (3.17)	6.95* (2.98)	-1.39 (2.62)	6.45* (2.75)	.24 (2.37)
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.005	.05	.03	.09	.04
Total <i>N</i>	326	318	379	325	376
Signif. <i>F</i>	.9446	.0122	.0956	.0000	.0378

Source: 1996 NBES. \**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01.

### Summary and Conclusion

The first part of our analysis reveals that the perception of gender interdependence accounts for little of the policy liberalism observed among black women. Racial identification, in contrast, more consistently shaped the liberal policy attitudes of black women in 1984. A possible reason for the failure to find an effect for gender identification is that the policy measures we examined, as represented in the 1984 telephone survey, did not directly address women's concerns. Contrary to the arguments of pluralists and those in the black community who are suspicious or hostile toward feminist causes, gender identification did not detract from the liberal effect that race consciousness had on the policy views of black women. Nor,

however, did a gender identification enhance its liberal effect. Our analysis suggests that in 1984, black women viewed politics from a racial lens even as the majority felt connected to their gender as well as their race.

In the second part of the analysis, we examined the impact of race and gender identification on the opinions of black women toward controversial black public figures and public events. A small but still statistically significant gender gap was present in the attitudes of black men and women toward Thomas, Simpson, and the women's movement. And in the separate analysis of black women only, it would appear that gender identification is a source of this gender gap. Although neither race nor gender identification contributed much toward the attitudes black women had about Farrakhan and the Million Man March, they had significant effects on attitudes toward Simpson and the women's movement. In the interaction effects model we developed, the impact of being strongly identified with women detracted from the effect of being race-identified. Among black women, strong race identifiers rated the Million Man March, Thomas, and Simpson more highly than did weak race identifiers, while gender identification in some cases served to reduce these ratings. At the same time, being both strongly race- and gender-identified caused black women to more negatively rate the Million Man March, Thomas, and Simpson.

Even if race remains the dominant political screen for black women, our results still soundly repudiate the popular view that gender is irrelevant for black women. The core theoretic essence of our findings is that the patterns that characterize the political attitudes and behavior of black women, and of groups that belong to more than one social category, are extremely complex. On nongendered policy matters and issues, racial solidarity promotes a liberal perspective. Yet, with complicated issues and events that pit race against gender and gender against race, gender remains politically relevant for black women, in this case working against collective pressures to support the interests of blacks over those of women.

Race remains the dominant screen through which black women view politics, not only because most consider racism a greater evil than sexism, but because gender is simply a weak vehicle for political identification. Although most blacks report that they have been personally victimized by racism (Sigelman & Welch, 1991; see also Essed, 1991), comparatively few women feel that they have been discriminated against because of their gender, even if they have. Sexism is a broad societal evil that most women recognize and condemn but few claim to have directly experienced. In contrast to blacks, working women tend to separate themselves from the plight of women for a number of important psychological reasons, including the need to believe in a "just world" (Crosby, 1982). Gender, consequently, is a less salient category in politics among women than is race for blacks.

Moreover, women are socialized not to think solely in terms of their own interests as females but to identify and empathize with the plight of others, most prominently their husbands and families. During the controversial Thomas hearings,

one black woman told a reporter that even though she could relate to the plight of Anita Hill, she has a husband and two sons, adding, "This society has a history of mistreatment and abuse toward black men. You have to wonder, what if my son is accused of this. Is he going to get a fair shake?" (Williams, 1991). Black women are no different from other women in this regard in wanting, as Bebe Moore Campbell explains, the men in their community to prosper and advance.

Finally, our analysis validates the suspicion among African-American male leaders that feminism might weaken black women's support for black causes. Feminism will indeed reduce support for black causes among strongly race-identified black women when those causes are framed as harmful to the advancement of women. We don't want to exaggerate the detracting effect that gender identification has on race identification over the single effect of race, however, because gender cleavages in the black community are rare and relatively small. For many black women, even when confronted with black interests that conflict with those of women, race solidarity is going to win out over solidarity with women.

That race overshadows gender in the black community and among black women is hardly surprising. This, we feel, has been the case for the white community as well, given that we live in a society where the races are far more divided socially and politically than are the sexes. The gender gap in presidential and congressional elections, for example, at 5 to 10 percentage points, is nothing compared with the 40 to 50 percentage point race gap (which emerged in 1964 and has remained constant since) in voting preference for these elections. Divisions in U.S. politics are more likely centered around race than gender. Black women will support their interests as women, but their support can be muted and even overwhelmed when those interests are framed in such a way that they conflict with the interests of the race.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research reported here was funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation (SBR-9507469) to Katherine Tate. Support for this research was also provided to Claudine Gay from the Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C. An earlier version of this paper was presented by Claudine Gay at the 1994 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, New York, 1-4 September 1994.

### REFERENCES

- Baxter, S., & Lansing, M. (1983). *Women and politics: The visible majority* (Rev. ed.). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Campbell, A., Converse, P.E., Miller, W.E., & Stokes, D. 1960. *The American voter*. New York: John Wiley.

- Collins, P. C. (1991). *Black feminist thought*. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall.
- Conover, P. J. (1984). The influence of group identification on political participation and evaluation. *Journal of Politics*, 46, 760–785.
- Conover, P. J. (1994). Feminists and the gender gap. In M. Githens, P. Norris, & J. Lovenduski (Eds.), *Different roles, different voices: Women and politics in the United States and Europe* (pp. 51–60). New York: HarperCollins College.
- Crosby, F. J. (1982). *Relative deprivation and working women*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dahl, R. (1961). *Who governs?* New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dawson, M. C. (1994). *Behind the mule: Race and class in African-American politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Essed, P. (1991). *Understanding everyday racism*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Giddings, P. (1982). *When and where I enter: The impact of black women on race and sex in America*. New York: Bantam.
- Gurin, P. (1985). Women's gender consciousness. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 49, 143–163.
- Gurin, P., Hatchett, S. J., & Jackson, J. S. (1989). *Hope and independence: Blacks' response to electoral and party politics*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- hooks, b. (1989). *Talking back*. Boston: South End Press.
- Klein, E. (1984). *Gender politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mansbridge, J., & Tate, K. (1992). Race trumps gender: Black opinion on the Thomas nomination. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 25, 488–492.
- Miller, A., Gurin, P., Gurin, G., & Malanchuk, O. (1981). Group consciousness and political participation. *American Journal of Political Science*, 25, 494–511.
- Reid, P. (1984). Feminism versus minority group identity: Not for black women only. *Sex Roles*, 10, 247–255.
- Robinson, D. (1987). *The effect of multiple group identity among black women on race consciousness*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan.
- Sigelman, L., & Welch, S. (1991). *Black Americans' views of racial inequality: The dream deferred*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Tate, K. (1994). *From protest to politics: The new black voters in American elections* (Expanded ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press and Russell Sage Foundation.
- Taylor, H. *Harris Polls*. Gannett News Service, 28 March 1995.
- Torrey, J. (1979). Racism and feminism: Is women's liberation for whites only? *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 4, 281–293.
- Truman, D. B. (1971). *The governmental process* (2nd ed.). New York: Knopf.
- Verba, S., & Nie, N. H. 1972. *Participation in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wilcox, C. (1990). Black women and feminism. *Women and Politics*, 10 (3), 65–84.
- Williams, L. (1991, October 14). The Thomas nomination: Blacks say the blood spilled in the Thomas case stains all. *New York Times*, section A, p. 1.
- Zaller, J. R. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.