

An Intersectional Approach to Youth Participation and the Gender Gap

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Abstract

Great attention has been paid to voting behavior in the United States, including analysis of the effects of demographic characteristics including race, gender, and age have on turnout. Very little work on voting, however, has approached these demographic characteristics as complex and multiple social identities, understood as fundamentally interdependent and intersectional. Based on new data from the Black Youth Project Survey, this paper takes such an approach, exploring race, gender, and age simultaneously. We focus on the substantial gap in voters' turnout between young black men and women, theorizing how a better understanding of their voting behavior depends on the multiplicity of their identities. We find that traditional predictors of voter turnout cannot adequately explain this persistent gap.

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Introduction

In the 2004 presidential election, young African Americans showed up to the polls at the highest level in three decades. Forty-seven percent of young African Americans reported voting, an increase of more than 11 percentage points over the 2000 election (Lopez and Kirby, 2005). Despite a push among political scientists toward moving beyond voting in studies of political participation (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, Verba, et al. 1995), it remains the most popular political activity among Americans. It is furthermore the most commonly reported activity among the young respondents of the Black Youth Project Survey, in which we found that respondents were far more likely to report having voted than having engaged in any other form of political participation.² Voting is particularly important in black politics, which in the post-civil rights era has shifted its focus from protest tactics to electoral participation (Tate 1993, Dawson 1994). Americans' continuing tendency to politically express themselves by casting ballots, coupled with the electoral orientation of black politics, merits continued attention to the unsolved puzzles of African-American voting behavior.

One of these puzzles is the gender gap among men and women.³ Voting is the single political activity in which women consistently out-participate men; they have led the way in voting since the early 1980s (Burns, et al. 2001, Inglehart and Norris 2003). Black women consistently vote more than black men, and research suggests that black women participate

² Cathy Cohen is the principal investigator of the Black Youth Project and the Black Youth Project Survey, also known as the Youth Culture Survey, through NORC. The survey was in the field between July and November of 2005 collecting a total of 1,590 responses. The 45-minute telephone survey was based primarily on a national random digit dial with a secondary oversample of blacks and Hispanics to supplement low N from those groups in the primary sample. Participants in the oversample came from areas of the U.S. with at least 15% black or Hispanic populations (in which 92% of blacks and Hispanics in the U.S. live). There was also an oversample of respondents in the Chicago area. Researchers at the University of Chicago are conducting in-depth face-to-face interviews with respondents who participated in the telephone survey. The Chicago oversample provides a larger N of local respondents with which to conduct interviews. The overall response rate for the telephone surveys was 62%.

³ As Welch and Sigelman note, the phrase "gender gap" is most often used to reference gender differences in party identification, vote choice, and political opinions. Women are consistently to the left of men on all of these axes. It can also be used how we employ it here, to indicate a difference in the level of political activity.

overall at higher levels (Baxter and Lansing 1983, Shingles 1981, Verba and Nie 1972). The recent Black Youth Project Survey confirms this gap, finding a difference of more than 15 percentage points between black women and men. What accounts for this difference? In this paper, we hypothesize several factors that might account for this disparity, and employ an intersectional framework to test them. This framework takes race, sex, and age seriously, contributing to an understanding of the political behavior of young black people, a sorely under-researched and thus poorly understood group of political actors. Work on black political behavior tends to focus on adults at-large, work on young voters in general is scarce, and research that focuses specifically on the political behavior of young African Americans is virtually non-existent.⁴

Our analysis draws upon survey data collected as part of the Black Youth Project (BYP). This survey, unique in its focus on young people combined with an extensive breadth of political, social, sexual, and religious items, provides an excellent opportunity to explore new areas of research, but also provides the ability to focus in on traditional questions in political participation with attention to under-studied groups of young people.

Prior Research

Using data from the era of the Civil Rights movement, Welch and Secret (1981) found that black men participated more, including as voters.⁵ Since then, however, black women have closed the gap and outpaced black men, starting with substantial gains in 1972 (Lansing 1977). Baxter and Lansing (1983) find that despite reporting the lowest levels of government trust and political efficacy and the highest perceived discrimination in comparison to black men and white

⁴ While political behavior researchers have paid little attention to black youth as political actors, other political scientists have made important contributions in this regard. See, for example, Simpson 1998. Also, The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) does a great deal of research on electoral and civic engagement of young people, with attention to race and gender.

⁵ Welch and Secret employ data from 1960, 1968 and 1976.

men and women, black women voted at rates at least as high as black men's. Our finding that young black women strongly outranked young black men in turnout during the past year is consistent with this trend. And there is evidence, in fact, that this gender gap in voting is particularly pronounced for young people and African Americans – suggesting that the gender gap we have observed in the Black Youth Project data may be larger than those we see among older cohorts and other races (Sapiro and Conover 1992). There is little work on young black voters, and even less on this gender gap we have observed. In this section we attend to previous findings regarding predictors of voting and (when available) how age, race, and gender interact with these to impact turnout. Most of this work, however, focuses on adults and thus may not necessarily translate to our population. Further there is little research on participation at the intersection of age and race in which we are interested here.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status (SES) is the most standard explanation for disparities in participation rates. Education is chief among these attributes in its predictive power, but income and occupation also play a role (Verba and Nie 1972, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Including socioeconomic variables in analyses of participation is standard practice, as Schlozman (2002) observes: “even critics of the SES model never fail to include socioeconomic variables in their analyses.” (442) Education, financial well-being, and high-status employment bring political resources such as time, money, political engagement, and civic skills that encourage and enable one to participate in politics (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, Tate 1993). Those with greater resources face fewer costs of participation, thus increasing the chance that they will engage in political activity (Downs 1957, Riker and Ordeshook 1968). In this project, we include measures of education and household income.

Education

Education is easily the most consistent predictor of political participation (Verba and Nie 1972, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996, Jarvis, et al. 2005). While Verba, et al. (1995) argue that education doesn't matter for voting directly, they see it at the root of voting's determinants, and as particularly important for building political engagement and being recruited to participate. Researchers have theorized that education provides a long list of political, psychological, and social resources that predispose one to voting, including interest, efficacy, knowledge, income, and language skills (Verba, et al. 1993, 1995; Jarvis, et al. 2005; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Educated people are also more likely to be mobilized into politics because their social networks are filled with other educated people who, by virtue of their status, are more likely to be politically engaged (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). The most powerful aspect of this resource is that it is permanent: education lowers participation costs for the rest of one's life (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). While education is a powerful predictor, Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) note that its magnitude depends on how much a potential participant has of other resources. It is relative in another sense as well: what matters is how educated an individual is relative to others, rather than her absolute number of years of schooling. This explanation helps to account for the puzzle that increased education and declining turnout has presented over the past couple decades (Niemi and Weisberg 2001). Education is furthermore central to accounting for individual black voting behavior. Both Tate and Dawson find that education increases linked fate, which is a positive predictor of voting (Tate 1993, Dawson 1994).

Income

As Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) observe, income defines our needs and is itself a resource (290). Those who are less well-off are less likely to begin participating at all (though engagement can work against this) and are less likely to be recruited. For the poor, politics is a luxury – taking care of one’s life responsibilities demands too much attention to allow for political participation. While the rich can hire babysitters and take taxis to reduce the non-financial costs of participation, the poor cannot regularly rely on these sorts of short-cuts (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Those with higher income furthermore have stronger efficacy, information and interest on average – all resources that predict political participation (Verba, et al. 1995). In addition to these benefits, Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) hypothesize that income might matter for turnout because it determines one’s neighborhood, which impacts adult socialization. It furthermore translates into a bigger stake in the system. Furthermore, high-paying jobs are ripe for developing political resources, and it’s possible that people who make a lot of money may be fundamentally different from those who don’t in a way that would encourage participation. Income has shown to be most important to activities that directly require money, such as campaign contributions. It is also, however, a significant predictor of turnout.

This project uses a measure of the respondent’s childhood household income. Parent income is a useful measure for youth participation because it is also an indicator of political socialization (Alozie, et al., 1993). Parents with higher income are likely to have more political resources, to which they will expose their children. Income most likely cannot explain the gender gap: there is no reason to believe that the childhood household income of young men would substantially differ from that of young women (Hooghe and Stolle, 1994). Our respondents,

however, might be in the beginning stages of establishing their own socioeconomic status, which may very well vary by gender.⁶

Moving Beyond SES: Other Types of Resources

Most current research now understands SES as necessary but not sufficient to explain both participation and the varying levels at which groups engage in it. Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) offer the Civic Voluntarism Model, which holds that resources, engagement, and recruitment work together to determine both level and kind of political participation. Resources include time, money, and civic skills, all of which are informed by education. Engagement is made up of political interest, efficacy, gratification from participation, linked fate, and specific policy commitments, as well as knowledge and strength of partisanship. We include in this paper measures of identities (race, gender, and age), engagement (interest and efficacy), religious activity, socialization, and a new measure of experience with the criminal justice system. Previous findings on each of these follows, with special attention to how these impact black turnout in particular.

Collective Identity

In an inquiry into black political participation such as this one, race consciousness is an especially important predictor. Starting with Verba and Nie (1972), participation scholars have theorized race beyond its role as simply a demographic characteristic. They find that race consciousness is central to explaining the work that race does in generating participation. Verba and Nie (1972) posited that groups with a collective identity and awareness of oppression based on membership will be more political active than those who don't have politicized group identities (such as low-income individuals). Central to the work that race consciousness does for African Americans is its ability to balance out a lack of individual resources (Tate 1993,

⁶ This, however, is not captured in our analysis.

McAdam 1982). It furthermore serves as the missing link between the paradoxical concurrence of low political trust and internal efficacy and high traditional participation; Shingles argues that race consciousness produces both of these outcomes (Shingles 1981). Researchers since Verba and Nie have confirmed that race consciousness plays an important role in participation (Ardey 1994, Shingles 1981, Dawson 1994), though others argue that researchers have overstated its impact (Bobo and Gilliam 1990, Ellison and Gay 1989).⁷

Bobo and Gilliam suggest that since a lot of the data on race consciousness and participation is from the Civil Rights Movement era, it might not speak well to the relationship outside that political context in which race was more strongly politicized than usual. Dawson's finding that race identification will have an especially strong effect if information is easiest to access – which it often is – lends credence to understanding race consciousness as conditional on the political context of the individual and society (1994). Tate concurs that the impact of group consciousness is contextual: it depends on who is running, whether and to what extent race is cued, and who is currently in office. Basically, it depends what is racially at stake.⁸ Overall, she finds limited support for racial group consciousness as a predictor of turnout – it is a soft resource, and doesn't carry as much weight for black political participation as church membership does (1993). This may be because of the activity on which we are focusing, as Tate notes that “group consciousness can be undermined by the individualistic (that is, one person, one vote) symbolism attached to voting” (1993, 16).

⁷ On this same note, Verba, et al. (1995) find no statistically significant relationship between group consciousness and political participation.

⁸ Unfortunately, we do not have information as to *in which* election our voting respondents participated. Furthermore, survey analysis does not lend itself to incorporating context. The in-depth interviews that researchers from the Black Youth Project are currently conducting will aid in fleshing out some of our respondents' political stories by giving them context.

Researchers have theorized gender consciousness to have a similar effect on women, though this predictor has fared less well when subjected to testing. Burns, et al. (2001) find that gender consciousness channels participation into gender-related causes, but has no significant impact on the level of participation. Inglehart and Norris (2003) find some evidence that subscription to traditional gender roles stymies civic activism, but do not see this relationship for voting and other traditional measures of participation. For black women, the traditional question has been whether race or gender is more salient to their political beliefs (Gay and Tate 1998). They find, as one might expect, that both are important – black women identify as strongly with one identity as with the other. Race, however, impacts political beliefs more unless racial interests directly conflict with gender ones. This either/or approach flies in the face of an intersectional approach that resists disaggregating complex identities.

Age

Young people have consistently trailed behind their elders in voting. Researchers who have investigated how age impacts participation posit that life experience serves as a resource (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). This is especially important for adults with little education: the school of life can play a similar role to education. This age effect, however, isn't independent of sex, marital status, education and income (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Early research suggested that the age effect concerned adopting “adult roles” such as marriage, parenting, and full-time employment. Wolfinger and Rosenstone categorically reject this hypothesis in their 1980 study, but Highton and Wolfinger (2001) give adult roles another chance, despite decades of research that show little support for the theory. They defend revisiting it because it has only been tested on adults or, at best, small groups of young people. There is the first analysis of the impact of adult roles on the participation of young people ages

18-24 with a large sample. They ultimately reject the adult roles hypothesis as inadequate for explaining generational difference. We include age, though it is unclear how it might work within the small age range of this cohort.

Engagement

Being interested, informed, and self-efficacious – in short, politically engaged – are other consistent predictors of participation (Campbell, et al. 1960, Verba, et al. 1995) Verba, et al. (1995) suggest that turnout is driven more by interest than by education, and that education effects might in fact be proxies for interest. They find engagement measures to be key predictors of voter turnout. Similarly, Tate (1993) finds that political interest and system responsiveness (a measure of efficacy) impact black political participation (1993). Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) point to the importance of efficacy – feeling capable makes one more likely to be active. Engagement, when coupled with SES, closes the gender gap in participation (Schlozman, et al. 1994, Burns, et al. 2001). This finding, however, concerns gaps in which women lag behind men. We must do further research to understand how engagement works in the voting gender gap, where men trail women, which is especially true among African Americans. Political efficacy has shown to help explain the high participation of blacks. Despite relatively low individual resources, they consistently show high levels of political efficacy (Tate 1993). In their study of political interest and activity of kids in grade levels 4-12, Alozie, et al. (1993) find girls across age to be higher on both of these measures.⁹ In looking at gender differences within race, however, they found black boys and girls had substantively equal levels of activity and interest.¹⁰

⁹ The differences between the two groups are subtle, and this is the first study to have found girls to be more politically interested and active than boys. More research must be done on how race and gender intersect with age to influence political participation.

¹⁰ It is questionable how representative these findings are of the general population of American children. The researchers obtained their respondents from enrollees in a program called “Kids Voting USA,” which aims to develop political interest early in life. The data was collected when children had already been exposed to this program, which we would expect to influence their responses. Furthermore, the activity measures differ from

Similarly, Hooghe and Stolle (2004) find that girls express report intending to participate in more activities than boys do, suggesting higher political engagement.

Religion

Religion is another consistent predictor of political participation, especially for African Americans. Like racial consciousness, it is a collective resource that counterbalances a lack of individual resources (Tate 1993, Verba, et al. 1995). Verba, et al. (1995) note that African American churches both provide resources for and recruit into political activity. They argue that the positive effect we see of being black on political participation is rooted in stronger religious participation, which makes up for lack of individual resources. In addition, they find that church attendance has a positive effect on voting among the general population. Tate finds that of the four collective resources she tests, church membership had the strongest effect on political participation (1993). She stresses that it is *membership* rather than religiosity that is politically useful. Churches furthermore encourage political activity by reinforcing the primacy of racial identity (Dawson 1994). Last, they offer an arena to build skills to groups that have fewer opportunities to gain them elsewhere. This is especially important for black men and women, as well as women in general (Verba, et al. 1995).

Socialization

While the study of political socialization has diminished, researchers still understand political socialization, both childhood and adult, to impact political behavior. The relationship one's parents have to politics is likely to inform one's own. Verba, et al. (1995) find that parent education and political involvement are significant predictors of participation. Parent education impacts participation in that it makes the parents more likely to be politically active. Plutzer

standard measures of participation, in part because the respondents are not of voting age. Alosie, et al. asked, for example, if the kids "voted" in a mock election held through the program, how important they thought voting was, if they asked their parents questions about politics, and if they used the media to learn about politics.

(2002) finds a similar relationship between parent resources and youth political involvement, arguing that parents' socioeconomic status and political resources matter especially when voters first enter the system.

Theory

What is clearly lacking in the analysis of voting behavior is attention to race and gender as more than control variables with independent and direct effects. Such a separation does not mirror lived experience, in which race and gender work simultaneously, producing different attitudes and experiences. Non-intersectional approaches to studying political behavior that do take into account identities often privilege one at the expense of others. This is especially concerning because such an approach often results in the eclipsing of black women: to speak of either *women* or *people of color* is to make women of color invisible (Crenshaw 1995). We contend that by taking account of both axes simultaneously and paying attention to their intersection, we can better attend to the currently under-researched voting behavior of black women and men, as well as better understand how race and gender inform one another. This is a far more challenging way to approach the question of voting behavior, but it rests upon solid theoretical research. Our study takes intersectionality seriously, attempts to put into practice our understanding that the whole of one's identity is always more than the sum of its parts, and insists that it is troubling to assume that the effects of race and gender are ever properly understood as independent.

Intersectionality comes out of and has been articulated most clearly in black feminist scholarship. Stemming out of a concern with taking social and cultural difference seriously, the intersectional approach emerges as an attempt to think about difference beyond binaries. It is dedicated to recasting differences as important things to be understood and celebrated, rather

than stigmatized as deviations from the norm. “Certainly there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex,” writes Audre Lorde, “But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions that result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior” (Lorde 1993, 285).

Beyond the call to recognize differences as real, complex and occurring along multiple axes, there are three other key tenets from which any intersectional analysis must proceed. First, such research must look at multiple identities such as race, class, gender, sexuality and nationality (King 1993, Crenshaw 1995, Brewer 1993, Combahee River Collective 1993). We constrain our particular study to the relatively traditional identities of sex and race, paying specific attention to black women and men. Second, the approach must take these categories to work simultaneously and to mutually construct one another (King 1993, Brewer 1993, Glenn 1998, Collins 1999). The heart of an intersectional approach is to think about how multiple identities interact, making the relationship multiplicative rather than additive. As King (1993) notes, the relative impact of a single attribute is always contextual. Brewer (1993) emphasizes this point by insisting that we think about binary distinctions in terms of both/and rather than either/or. Third, the approach understands identity categories to be non-hierarchical: one identity should never be presumed to be more important than another. Rather, it is necessary to always pay attention to how categories intersect and which intersections are privileged (Crenshaw 1995).

That single categories of difference, such as race or gender, often fail to account for meaningful differences within those communities is of paramount importance to intersectional accounts. The study of gender has, all too often, been driven by the concerns of white women,

failing to note the ways in which race might complicate the category of female. The same holds true of the study of African Americans, where the attitudes, behaviors, and positions of black men come to be representative of the racial category as a whole (King 1993). Crenshaw (1995) captures the problem well, writing, “Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices” (1242). Historically, feminist movements have been permeated with racism and anti-racist movements with sexism. Likewise, academic inquiries into political behavior that attend to race and sex tend to pay less attention to within-group differences, such as the effect of gender within black politics. It is simply the case, Crenshaw argues, that, “women of color are differently situated in the economic, social, and political worlds” (1250). Our research confirms this fact, and compels us to take it seriously.

Data and Methods

Sample Characteristics

Our analysis uses the intersectional approach as its model, taking seriously the intersection of age, race, and gender. While we are certain to fall short in some ways, we hope that our approach lays the groundwork for continuing empirical analysis that can be called intersectional. Our new data allows us to look at young people 18-25, a group that receives a great deal of attention and concern from popular media but is vastly under-studied in terms of understanding their attitudes and behaviors. In this article, we restrict our analysis to African American respondents in order to pay special attention to gender differences. As such, we have excluded respondents from analysis who did not self identify as African American. Secondly, because our dependent variable is whether or not a respondent reports voting in an election during the past 12 months, any respondents aged 17 and younger at the time of the survey were removed from the analysis. The final number of unique cases used in analysis was 413 African

Americans between the ages of 18 and 25 with 170 male respondents and 243 female respondents. Tables 1-3 below break down this sample by standard demographic measures of gender, household income, and educational level. Each of these variables was subsequently used in the analysis as independent variables. See Appendix 1 for question wording and coding details.

Table 1: Age of Respondents by Sex

	Black Male	Black Female	Total	N
Ages 18-21	58.2	60.9	59.8	247
Ages 22-25	41.8	39.1	40.2	166
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	413

Table 2: Highest Degree Received by Sex

	Black Male	Black Female	Total	N
No Degree	32.0	31.8	31.9	131
High School/GED	56.8	50.4	53.0	218
Vocational/Associates	7.1	10.3	9.0	37
Bachelor Degree	4.1	7.4	6.1	25
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	411

Table 3: Household Income by Sex

	Black Male	Black Female	Total	n
\$0 - \$9,999	23.4	19.8	21.2	60
\$10,000 - \$19,999	17.1	16.9	17.0	48
\$20,000 - \$29,999	8.1	13.4	11.3	32
\$30,000 - \$49,999	14.4	20.3	18.0	51
\$50,000 - \$74,999	18.0	15.7	16.6	47
\$75,000 - \$99,999	9.9	7.6	8.5	24
\$100,000 and up	9.0	6.4	7.4	21
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	283

Because of the relatively young age of our sample, in order for the household income measure to be a reliable indicator of socio-economic-status, respondents over the age of 18 were asked to report their household income while they were “growing up.” As such, this measure is in

indicator of their economic background more than an indicator of their current economic standing. As noted above, it also works as a proxy for parent political socialization.

Dependent Variable

This paper focuses exclusively on a single dependent variable, self report of whether or not the respondent voted in a national or local election in the past year. Table 4 below indicates the proportion of black male and female respondents who reported voting in a local or national election during the past 12 months.

Table 4: Percent of Respondents who report voting during the past year, by sex

	Black Male	Black Female	Total	N
No	59.4	44.9	50.8	210
Yes	40.6	55.1	49.2	203
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	413

The data reflects nearly a 15-percentage point gap between black men and women on the decision to take part in an election.¹¹ The presence of such a gap is largely to be expected, as noted above, in that black women are more likely than their male counterparts to take part in political activity. What is of particular interest for us, beyond identifying the source of this difference, is to think about how this difference can be understood in light of intersectional theories of race and gender.

Importantly, respondents were not asked if they were *eligible* to vote, only if they had voted in a national or local election during the past year. That is, we do not have a means by which to exclude individuals who either were not registered to vote or not eligible to do so.

¹¹ Note that the data presented here is unweighted in order to keep its presentation consistent with the regression model that follows below. Upon weighting the data to bring the sample into line with census figures, the size of the gap persists, at approximately 15 percentage points, but adjusts 5 points down for both men and women.

Eligibility matters on two fronts: for those who are not US citizens and for those who have had their voting eligibility restricted as a collateral consequence of criminal conviction.

Independent Variables

Income, age, and education have all previously shown to promote the likelihood of political participation in general, and we expect that increases in each of these variables will result in an increase in the likelihood of casting a vote for reasons noted above. In addition to these demographic measures we also include religious activity, racial and gender consciousness, political socialization, and political efficacy. Each of these variables has persistently shown in previous research to have a positive effect on political participation.

We include a measure of religious activity that scores respondents on their level of church attendance, religious activity that occurs outside of a place of worship, and non-religious activity that occurs at a place of worship. As such we expect that higher levels of religious activity and activity at places of worship will promote the likelihood of voting. We include a measure of racial linked-fate to get at race consciousness among our sample. Previous research has shown that high degrees of black linked fate in particular help explain the relative homogeneity of political attitudes amongst African Americans. The effect that linked fate has on the decision to participate, however, is not as well understood. We theorize a higher sense of linked fate will increase the likelihood to vote. To control for the importance of political socialization in regards to voting behavior, we include a measure of how often respondents remember their parents voting in elections. Having parents who voted regularly (or are at least *remembered* to have done so) is expected to increase the likelihood of voting. A high sense of political efficacy is likewise expected to increase the likelihood of voting, since it indicates that an individual understands him or herself to be capable of having an impact on politics. Our

measure asks respondents about the degree to which they feel like they can personally make a difference politically. We expect individuals who feel this way to be more likely to bear the costs of participation because they see themselves as in a position to effect political change. Even if they do not think that their vote will necessarily be decisive in a particular election, we expect them to be more inclined to vote because of the degree to which they feel empowered politically. Each of these variables is, as noted, expected to increase the likelihood of voting for both men and women. What remains to be seen is the differential impact between the two groups. To help focus directly on gender consciousness, we include an item asking respondents how much they think women are discriminated against because of their gender.

We include an additional measure that is not normally included in voting models, which asks respondents to report if they have ever been convicted of a crime. African Americans in general and African American males in particular, are disproportionately involved in the criminal justice system. In all but two states, the ability to even take part in an election is potentially limited by a criminal conviction. We do not have data, however, on either the type of crime a respondent was convicted of, their status within the criminal justice system (incarcerated, parole, or probation), or if their conviction was expunged from their record (e.g. the respondent had a conviction as a juvenile). As such, we cannot determine if individuals who report having been convicted of a crime have necessarily been disenfranchised. Nevertheless, given the high likelihood that this is the case, we expect the effect of a criminal conviction to be powerfully negative on the decision to vote, at least in part because of technical disqualification. It is also possible that regardless of disqualification, the experience of conviction and subsequent punitive measures have their own effect on the likelihood to vote, but we remains agnostic as to whether

this is a positive or negative socializing effect. More importantly, we do not have the available data to make any determination on this question.

Analysis and Findings

Because the decision to vote is a dichotomous variable, we use logistic regression for our analysis. Results must therefore be interpreted differently than in the case of a more traditional linear regression model such as OLS. First of all, the dependent variable expresses the likelihood of voting as a probability. Second, because the logit model is non-linear, the substantive effect of a variable is not directly available from the coefficient, but must be deduced through hypothetical cases, fixing values at a measure of central tendency and allowing a single variable to vary.

Two models are reported in Table 5 below. The first model (referred to as the “simple” model) takes account of the aforementioned independent variables. Because our primary interest in this paper is to think about gender-based effects within race, we estimate a second model (referred to as the “interaction model”) in which we include a series of interaction terms to identify the specific gender-based effects of each of our independent variables. But, as table 5 shows, the addition of the interaction terms does not greatly improve the fit of our model. The simple model correctly predicts 67% of our cases, but the interaction model only increases correct prediction by 1 percentage point. Additionally, the small difference between likelihood χ^2 ratios reported, 7.19 distributed over 9 degrees of freedom, indicates that we cannot conclude that the additional explanatory power of the interaction model is significant. As such, our analysis is based on the results given in the simple model. The interaction model is reported for completeness, but should not be taken as authoritative. This, it turns out, is a serious blow to our analysis. The intersectional approach insists that we consider race and gender

simultaneously, but without the interaction terms, we risk collapsing back into standard additive analysis. We thus include in Appendix 2 results from the interaction model. We remain extremely cautious in interpreting these results, as we cannot be confident that the interaction model is significantly different than the simple model.

In the simple model, five variables have an effect on the probability that an individual voted in an election. Gender, age, parents vote, political efficacy, and conviction all have statistically significant effects at the .05 level. Only criminal conviction has a negative relationship with voting (i.e. being convicted diminishes the likelihood of voting).

Table 5: Logit Analysis of Decision to Vote

	(1) Simple Model Vote	(2) Interaction Model Vote
Independent Variables		
Female	0.667** (0.30)	6.495* (3.90)
Household Income	-0.0920 (0.080)	0.0405 (0.13)
Education	0.285 (0.22)	-0.223 (0.45)
Age	0.256*** (0.071)	0.410*** (0.13)
Religious Activity	-0.0333 (0.12)	-0.0771 (0.20)
Parent's Vote	0.332*** (0.12)	0.312 (0.22)
Make Difference Politically	0.610*** (0.20)	0.834** (0.37)
Linked Fate	0.175 (0.14)	0.560* (0.30)
Discrimination Against Women	-0.0364 (0.17)	-0.234 (0.27)
Convicted	-1.064** (0.48)	-1.669** (0.70)
Female*Income		-0.240 (0.17)
Female*Educ		0.697 (0.53)
Female*Age		-0.219 (0.16)
Female*Relact		0.0313 (0.26)
Female*ParentsVote		0.0792 (0.26)
Female*MakeDiff		-0.352 (0.45)
Female*LinkedFate		-0.531 (0.34)
Female*Discrim		0.319 (0.35)
Female*Convicted		0.983 (1.05)
Constant	-8.099*** (1.74)	-12.16*** (3.21)
Observations	265	265
Likelihood Ratio Chi2	60.7 (df=10)	67.89 (df=19)
Correctly Predicted	67.2%	68.3%

In order to say something about the relative size of each of these variables effect on the likelihood to vote, it is necessary to construct several hypothetical respondents, and vary a single value across its possible range. Table 6 below demonstrates the differences between black men and women for the statistically significant variables.

Table 6: Probability of Voting

	Likelihood of Voting		
	Black Female	Black Male	Difference (F-M)
Age			
18	50.8%	35.1%	15.7
21	68.7%	53.2%	15.5
25	85.6%	75.5%	10.0
I Can Make A Difference Politically			
Strongly Disagree	40.2%	26.3%	13.9
Agree (Modal Response)	68.7%	53.2%	15.5
Strongly Agree	79.8%	67.2%	12.6
Parents Vote			
Not at all	37.4%	24.0%	13.4
Only Important Elections	53.2%	37.2%	16.0
All the time	68.7%	53.2%	15.5
Convicted			
No	68.7%	53.2%	15.5
Yes	43.3%	28.8%	14.5

All other values held at a measure of central tendency. For continuous variables (age, income, and religious activity index), the arithmetic mean is used. For the remaining categorical variables, the modal value is used.

Sex

From this table, we can note that the independent effect of being female as opposed to male, holding all other values at an average value, is 15.5 percentage points. That is, a typical female respondent is 15.5 percentage points more likely than an identical (in terms of our measures) male respondent to vote in an election. In our analysis, we expect the typical female respondent to have a 69% likelihood of voting compared to 53% for male respondents. There is, according to our model specification, a substantial positive effect on voting behavior resulting

from simply “being” a woman rather than a man. We can get a better sense of how gender interacts with other variables by comparing hypothetical male and female respondents in terms of the other statistically significant findings.

Age

Even our youngest women respondents are expected to vote, with a typical 18-year-old respondent predicted to have approximately 51% likelihood of voting. As age increases to 25, the likelihood that women will vote rises over 30 points to 86%. Age has a substantial effect for men, but our youngest voters are far less likely to vote, with a typical 18-year-old male respondent only having a 35% likelihood of voting. By the time they reach the age of 21, however, we expect men to vote more often than not. Yet even at age 25, males are still less likely vote than their female counterparts. The effect of age is stronger for men, with a roughly 40-point increase in the likelihood of voting over the 18 to 25 year old time span.

Political Efficacy

This gender-based trend continues with our measure of political efficacy as well. At the low end of the scale (individuals who strongly disagree that they can make a difference politically), women are still far more likely than men to vote (40% to 26%, respectively). Yet the size of the effect on each group is roughly of the same magnitude, each seeing about a 40-point increase in likelihood by moving from strongly disagree to strongly agree on the 5 point scale. Compared to other significant indicators besides age, however, high levels of political efficacy produce the greatest likelihood of voting for typical women respondents, leading us to believe that it is a distinctly important resource for increasing voter turnout.

Parents Vote

As theorized, respondents whose parents never voted are far less likely to vote than those whose parents always voted. The effect is equally strong between men and women, but, following the trend noted already, a gap persists between them. At the low end, female respondents' likelihood of voting is 37% compared to male respondents at 24%. At the high end, their respective likelihoods are 69% to 53%.

Conviction

The effect of conviction is strongly negative, greatly depressing male likelihood of voting below 30%. But as with other significant variables, the difference between men and women is fairly constant, ranging between 10 and 16 percentage points, centered around the independent gender effect of 15.5%.

Discussion

We find that there is clearly a distinct effect on voting of being a black woman. Put simply, gender matters for African Americans. While we cannot pinpoint precisely the mechanism by which this is the case, we can offer some speculations here that we believe are supported by our analysis. Overall, our analysis shows that the observed gap between black men and women persists across statistically significant independent variables. There are two possible explanations for the persistence of this gap. First, there may be an existential effect of being a black woman or black man that influences one's likelihood of turnout. Perhaps that black women are "doubly oppressed," on the axes of both race and gender contributes to increased participation.¹² In this case, a search for a mediating variable would inevitably turn up empty.

We find it entirely plausible, however, that our model is misspecified. It is likely we did not include all relevant variables. For example, we do not include measures of factors such as

¹² Tate (1993) offers this as a common potential explanation for black women's consistent out-participating black men.

mobilization and political environment (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).¹³ Given the scarcity of previous work on black youth political behavior, we chose to test some of the traditional predictors of voting among adults, with special attention to predictors of black adults' voting behavior. For example, religious activity consistently predicts adult voting behavior, especially among black adults. This simply may not be the case for young people. The same might be said about our measure of race consciousness, linked fate: young African-Americans may not experience it in the same way as adults. It is a feeling that we expect would intensify over time, as one gains racialized lived experience. Additionally, linked fate may be a gendered concept, having different salience for black men and black women. Sadly, our results do not allow us to move beyond speculation on these indicators, as they are not statistically significant. Our measure of gender consciousness leaves us in the same position, unable to speak authoritatively on its effect.

We can say something, however, about age, efficacy and socialization. Increases in each of these generate strong and comparable increases in the likelihood of voting for both black men and black women. Yet, as noted above, the size of the gap remains relatively constant over variation in these variables. This may suggest that the mechanisms of voting work roughly the same for black men and women, but these groups start at fundamentally different levels. It is particularly important to note that increases in these variables are relatively more important for men than for women. At the lowest level of each of these resources, youth, poverty, and low efficacy suppress turnout for black men. Black women in a similar position remain far more likely to vote.

¹³ There is evidence to suggest, however, that such contextual factors are less important for the particular act of voting. Ellison and Gay (1989) find for black voters that individual attributes – both demographic and psychological/attitudinal are more consistent predictors of voting, while contact, recruitment social networks are better predictors of other political activity – specifically campaign work. (see also Shingles 1981)

The inclusion of the conviction measure is perhaps most revealing. The restriction of voting rights through felon disenfranchisement statutes has a seriously predictable effect: persons of color, in particular African American men, bear the weight of these exclusions (Maza and Uggen 2006). In the states with the most restrictive policies, Alabama and Florida, nearly 1 in 3 black men cannot vote. The gendered effect this has is most certainly driving part of the difference between black women and men. As noted previously, it is unknown what, if any, effect that the experience within the criminal justice system might have on would-be voters. It seems plausible that involvement with the criminal justice system, especially at a young age, would have a strong demobilizing effect, operating perhaps by diminishing an individual's sense of political efficacy. While this problem is predominantly faced by young black men, it is a significant concern for women as well. As Richie (2002) notes, while men are more likely to be incarcerated, the imprisonment rate for women has increased at a dramatically higher rate than it has for men.¹⁴ Richie and other scholars argue that any consideration of criminal justice and collateral consequences "is seriously incomplete without understanding the particular ways that women are affected by mass incarceration and the ways we are engaged in the process of change" (149).

Reflecting upon our analysis, we find that we have inadvertently prioritized race over gender by restricting our sample to African American respondents and exploring gender within. Further analysis should include a reversal of this order, analyzing the sample within the subgroups of female respondents and male respondents, exploring the effect of race. We theorize, on the basis of our findings here, that we would find similar results: being black likely impacts turnout within sex groups. Given that the voting gap between white women and black

¹⁴ Specifically, she notes that "While the actual numbers are much smaller than their male counterpart, the rate of increase [for women] was nearly double that for men in the period from 1980-1997, 573% to 294%."

women is relatively non-existent, the presence of within-gender racial differences would be particularly interesting.

Second, it is imperative that this analysis be repeated with attention to other identity categories, in particular taking account of other racial and ethnic groups, such as Latina/os and Asian Americans. The bulk of theoretical discussion of intersectionality has centered on the experiences of black women, but there are compelling reasons to broaden its scope to encompass other groups. The point, as Crenshaw argues, is to pay attention to both intersectional identities and the way in which some intersections are privileged.

We are open to the possibility that our approach to implementing intersectionality theory in quantitative analysis has fallen short in other ways. Our analysis necessitates that we impose our understanding of race and gender upon respondents, who likely experience these and other identities in varying and complex ways. People surely have their own understandings of how they are raced and gendered actors. We believe interviews, which allow respondents to use their own words, rather than responding to a closed-choice instrument, should accompany any survey analysis. This is especially imperative when dealing with socially-constructed identities. Interviews would furthermore be helpful in theory-building and model-specification. We look forward to conducting future work on this puzzle, complemented by the interview data that the Black Youth Project is currently compiling.

Conclusion

In this paper we addressed a significant gender gap in voting between young black women and black men. Informed by intersectionality theory, we started from the presumption that the predictors of (or their relative impacts on) voting for black women might be different from those for black men. Using interaction terms, we tested whether sex worked together with

our predictors to produce higher participation rates among women. Our results, unfortunately, do not allow us to comment on what might account for the gender gap among black youth. They do reinforce that this gap is anything but accidental; it has proven itself robust, maintaining across a series of significant predictors – age, efficacy, socialization, and conviction. Furthermore, our findings suggest that there may be other important predictors of voting unique to young black people that we missed here; future research should work to identify these. We have, as political scientists, a great deal to learn about young voters across race and gender, and this is one of many exciting puzzles that deserve continued attention.

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Appendix 1: Question Wordings and Coding Used in Analysis

For all measures, Don't Know and Refused have been dropped from analysis.

Dependent Variable:

Vote:

Please tell me if you voted in a national or local election during the last 12 months.

Only respondents 18 and older were asked this question. Responses were recoded as a dummy variable for analysis, (0=No 1=Yes).

Independent Variables:

Sex (FEMALE):

Respondents self identified as Male or Female. Responses recoded as a dummy variable (0=Male 1=Female) for analysis.

Age (MAIN_AGE):

Respondents gave their age in years. Responses left unaltered for analysis.

Education (EDCU)

What is the highest degree you have received so far?

For analysis, responses were coded as follows:

- 0 = No Degree
- 1 = GED or High School Degree/Diploma
- 2 = Post high school vocational cert. or Associates Degree
- 3 = Bachelors Degree
- 4 = Post-Graduate Degree

Income (HHINCOME)

Which of the following income levels includes your total household income on average while growing up—meaning the combined income of everyone in the household where you were raised?

- 1 = "\$0 - \$9,999"
- 2 = "\$10,000 - \$19,999"
- 3 = "\$20,000 - \$29,999"
- 4 = "\$30,000 - \$49,999"
- 5 = "\$50,000 - \$74,999"
- 6 = "\$75,000 - \$99,999"
- 7 = "\$100,000 and up"

Religious Activity (RELACT)

The religious activity scale is built from three measures of religious activity, church attendance, activity at a place of worship, and religious activity no at a place of worship, measured by the following questions:

E4. How often do you attend religious services?

E5. How often do you engage in activities at your place of worship? I mean how often do you do things like serve on a committee, give time to a special project, or help to organize a meeting?

E6. How often do you engage in religious activities outside a place of worship, like reading religious books at home, praying before meals or listening to religious music?

Responses for each item were the following;

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Rarely
- 3 = Only on religious holidays
- 4 = Once or twice a month
- 5 = Once a week
- 6 = Daily

These items were combined into a single scale from 1 to 6 (with 1 indicating low religious activity and 6 indicating a high level of religious activity) using *Stata Statistical Software*, based on a Cronbach Alpha test. The three items, taken together, had a reliability coefficient of 0.67.

Parents Voted (PARENTSVOTE)

Okay, now think about your parent or the person who raised you who was most interested in politics. How often did that person vote? (That is how often did your parent or person who raised you vote?)

Responses were coded as follows:

- 4 = In every election
- 3 = In most elections
- 2 = Only in important elections
- 1 = Rarely
- 0 = Not at all

Political Efficacy (MAKEDIFFPOL)

C12. Okay, now I want to talk a bit about politics. Again, tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements.

I believe that by participating in politics I can make a difference. Would you say you...

- 3 = Strongly agree
- 2 = Agree
- 1 = Disagree
- 0 = Strongly Disagree

Discrimination towards Women (DISCRIMWOMEN)

In this country, how much discrimination is there against women? Would you say...

- 3 = A lot
- 2 = Some
- 1 = A little
- 0 = None at all

Linked Fate (LINKEDFATE)

I believe that what happens to most black people in this country affects me. Do you...

- 4 = Strongly agree
- 3 = Agree
- 2 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 1 = Disagree
- 0 = Strongly Disagree

Criminal Conviction (CONVICTED)

Respondents were asked if they had ever been arrested. If they answered yes, they were then asked if they had been convicted.

Appendix 2: Interaction Model

Table A1: Probability of Voting, Interaction Model

	Likelihood of Voting		Difference (F-M)
	Female	Male	
Age			
18	54%	28%	26
21	67%	55%	12
25	81%	85%	-4
I Can Make A Difference Politically			
Strongly Disagree	44%	21%	23
Agree (Modal Response)	67%	55%	12
Strongly Agree	77%	72%	5
Linked Fate			
Strongly Disagree	65%	21%	44
Agree	67%	55%	12
Strongly Agree	68%	67%	1
Convicted			
No	55%	55%	0
Yes	67%	21%	46