The Social Context of Women's Sustained Participation in Activism

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THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF WOMEN’S SUSTAINED PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVISM

By

Susan Paterson

A DISSERTATION

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THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF WOMEN’S SUSTAINED PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVISM

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Recently, the resurgence of interest in feminist activism has been discussed by media and news outlets. It is still relatively unknown what contextual factors affect sustained participation, as well as how women from different backgrounds sustain activism in the face of compounding oppressions. This grounded theory explores the contexts of sustained participation through two research questions: (1) what are the contextual factors that influence women’s sustained participation in activism?, and (2) how is the dynamic between identity and context reflected in sustained participation in activism? Nine women activists in Miami-Dade County were interviewed about their experiences in feminist movements, specifically what has helped to facilitate or hinder their sustained participation. This grounded theory shows that the dynamic between managing multidimensional relationships and defining identity is influential to women’s sustained activism at different levels of analysis. Some of the specific contexts including relationships, supportive workplace structures, the reproduction of oppression in movement spaces, and operating within the non-profit industrial complex all within Miami-Dade County, which brings its own unique set of challenges. Implications for future research and action for activists and community practitioners are discussed.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Lastly I must thank my wonderful participants, the activists who are working every day to make this world a better place, even if it feels like things will never change. This work is all for you.
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Ch. 1 Introduction

On January 20, 2017, the 45th president of the United States, Donald J. Trump, was sworn into office. The following day millions of women and allies marched worldwide to advocate for rights that they perceived to be under attack with the incoming administration. Inspired by the rhetoric of the 2016 election cycle, the Women’s March sought to “send a bold message to our new government on their first day in office, and to the world that women’s rights are human rights.” (Women’s March on Washington, 2017). For many women and allies involved in the march, it marked the first time they were ever involved in any form of collective participatory action (Przybyla, 2017). For organizers who have been involved in activism for years, the question, as asked by one interviewed organizer, became, “how do we harness the momentum?” (Przybyla, 2017).

The current study explored the contextual factors that lead to sustained participation in activism on feminist issues among women activists in the United States. Researchers have begun to discuss some of these contextual factors that influence participation (Angelique & Culley, 2014; Christens & Speer, 2011; Kieffer, 1984; Perkins, Florin, Rich, Wandersman, & Chavis, 1990, Pancer, 2015), but a more comprehensive understanding of factors both inside and outside of the movement, as well as the ways in which people’s multiple identities interact with these factors, remains to be understood. Participation in activism can influence public policy, create shared meanings, and change societal beliefs about social issues at the local and national levels (Angelique & Culley, 2014; Florin & Wandersman, 1990). Both historical (e.g., the women’s movement, civil rights movement, disability rights movement) and current (e.g., Black Lives Matter, Women’s March on Washington) movements have unquestionably shaped
the cultural landscape by influencing the national conversation about how we view
diversity and a just world. The question of how to keep people engaged in participatory
practices has long been asked by activists and researchers alike across social science
people in activism at the local and societal level is hard enough, but sustaining that
participation over time calls for analysis of factors beyond the motivation needed for
initial participation. Community psychologists have found that context is important for
sustaining community organizing and have even implored that there should be more
research on the relationship between context and participation (Christens & Speer, 2011).

Community psychologists still have much work to do in addressing sustained
participation in activism. Within community psychology and across the social sciences,
there is a lack of understanding of the contextual factors that influence long-term
involvement. Research on factors sustaining people in this work has focused mostly on
internal and psychosocial factors such as identity, perceived self-efficacy, and socio-
political development (Klandersman, 1997; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008,
Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999). This line of research has not explored the contexts
in which people live, work, and play, their relationships, and the opportunities and
barriers that help to facilitate and hinder continued participation. Sustained participation
is a process in which multiple factors lead to continued work. Kieffer (1984) studied
empowerment within the context of participation as a long-term developmental process
for community leaders in grassroots organizations. Like his conception of empowerment
as a process rather than a commodity, participation can be thought of in much the same
way. Kieffer found that empowerment is both a psychosocial and political concept, and that it must be nurtured long-term, not just attained momentarily. (Kieffer, 1984).

Tensions within the women’s movement have been discussed as factoring into the belief that some people matter more than others within and outside the movement. White, middle-class, cis-gendered, able-bodied women’s concerns have been critiqued as being pushed to the forefront of the movement, while concerns from women of color, poor women, transgender women, and women with disabilities have been relegated to second-class (hooks, 1984; Kelly, 2001). The current mainstream iteration of feminist activism, the Women’s March, has also faced similar critiques (Brewer & Dundes, 2018). The interplay between identity, power, and context must be considered for a fuller picture of the ecological factors that sustain activism. But while social movement theorists have begun to address collective identity as an important factor in social movements, there is yet to be an understanding of the limits of this theory as it relates to women’s multiple intersecting social identities, as well as their multiple oppressions. Therefore, this study addressed the contexts that facilitate or hinder women’s sustained participation using intersectionality as a framework to understand the opportunities, barriers, celebrations, and frustrations that go along with continued collective action work.

Both context and participation are wide-ranging terms with multiple meanings and usages. Other terms are many times used interchangeably to stand it for “participation.” Before continuing to describe phenomena, I will define these terms to orient the reader to the meanings used by the current study.
Terminology

There are various terms to refer to the type of work performed by activists. Common terms in the literature across various fields include collective action, civic engagement, and citizen participation. Each of these concepts is connected along multiple threads, and many times can be used interchangeably when describing social phenomena. For example, citizen participation is generally linked with elements of civic engagement in that those who participate are generally engaged and knowledgeable about political processes to the extent that they are trying to make changes in these public arenas. The table below defines common terms associated with activism work in the academic literature.

Table 1. Definitions of Participation-Related Constructs

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Construct</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Common Associated Literature</th>
<th>Key Features</th>
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<tr>
<td>Citizen Participation</td>
<td>“a process in which individuals take part in decision making in the institutions, programs and environments that affects them” (Heller, Price, Reinharz, Riger, &amp; Wandersman, 1984, p. 339)</td>
<td>Community Psychology, Political Science</td>
<td>-individuals within context -conceptualized as a process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Action</td>
<td>“an umbrella term that refers to any behavior that individuals enact on behalf of [a] group with the goal of improving their group’s condition or overcoming the group’s disadvantage.” (Morgan &amp; Chan, 2016, p. 565-566)</td>
<td>Social Psychology</td>
<td>-goal to improve condition of a group -focus is on group level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organizing</td>
<td>“an umbrella term for a field of practice in which residents collaboratively investigate and take collective action regarding social issues of mutual concern.” (Christens &amp; Speer, 2015, p. 193)</td>
<td>Community Psychology</td>
<td>-change seeking at the local level -engagement around any issue of community concern</td>
</tr>
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<td>Civic Engagement</td>
<td>“working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference.” (Ehrlich, 2000, p. vi)</td>
<td>Community Psychology, Social Psychology, Political Science, Developmental Psychology, Sociology</td>
<td>-used many times with respect to youth -ranges from informal to formal participation -associated with community service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Action</td>
<td>the behavior-specific aspect of civic engagement. Actions that people undertake to better their communities (Metzger, Syvertsen, Oosterhoff, Babskie, &amp; Wray-Lake, 2016)</td>
<td>Political Science, Sociology</td>
<td>-refers to specific actions of civic engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Development</td>
<td>“(1) A process: developing the ability to act collectively, and (2) an outcome: (1) taking collective action and (2) the result of that action for improvement in a community in any or all realms: physical, environmental, cultural, social, political, economic, etc. (Phillips &amp; Pittman, 2014)</td>
<td>Community Development, Sociology</td>
<td>-emphasis on change at the community level, equity -holistic approach, can tackle more than one problem at a time in development</td>
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Activism

“the behavior of advocating some political cause via any large array of possible means…focusing on the basic goal of improving society through political means” (Klar & Kasser, 2009)

Social Movements

“…informal networks, based on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilise about conflictual issues, through the frequent use of various forms of protest” (Della Porta & Diani, 1999, p. 16)

There is noticeable overlap between definitions of these terms, and any could ostensibly guide the current research. For the purposes of this study I will primarily use **citizen participation** for several reasons. First, within community psychology, this is the construct most referred to in the literature and is theoretically related to the constructs of empowerment, ecology, and settings, all concepts important in understanding sustained activism. Second, while a large literature exists on the topic, and it relates closely to participation, collective action focuses largely on group dynamics with less focus on ecological factors, and understanding people in context. Collective action is a term born out of social psychology, with the phenomena of interest being the group, and the individual’s interactions within the group. Focusing on group dynamics is important for understanding why people remain involved in activism, but it fails to also take larger levels of analysis into consideration. While collective action will be referred to
throughout the paper, a focus on the more contextually-focused citizen participation will remain at the forefront.

Other constructs, specifically civic engagement, are closely related to participation and have been theorized within community psychology. Mark Pancer (2015) has written extensively about civic engagement and created an integrative model spanning the fields of community psychology, social psychology, and political psychology. Pancer’s model includes the understanding that systems level factors such as family, neighborhood, and society are imperative to sustained civic engagement. Civic engagement includes a wide-range of civic actions that include voting, cleaning up neighborhood parks, boycotts, etc. The construct has a more direct focus on electoral activities (e.g. voting, running for office) than any of the terms discussed. In addition, civic engagement is often considered in terms of “service,” implying a sense of duty to community and society. While actions are stressed in the above definition, civic engagement has also been referred to as a multidimensional construct that includes beliefs, actions, values, and attitudes (Metzger, Syvertsen, Oosterhoff, Babskie, & Wray-Lake, 2016; Pancer, 2015) and considers benefits of engagement to both the community and the individual. Theoretically, civic engagement did not arise from an understanding of multiple contexts, though Pancer (2015) has moved the dial of engagement work closer to a community psychology way of thinking. Engagement literature will be referenced throughout this dissertation as, like others of these terms, it is very closely related to aspects of participation. After considering civic engagement, one reason for choosing participation, is its focus on process and action, whereas engagement implies a mindset change, though literature does refer to actions as well. Political scientists in
particular use engagement to refer to cognitive elements, whereas participation reflects behavior (Klofstad, 2007). It will still serve as an important construct in understanding a holistic picture of participation.

Community organizing and community development are other concepts used within community psychology to describe participation within communities (Christens & Speer, 2011; Speer & Christens, 2015; Speer & Hughey, 1995). Community organizing specifically has also been theoretically linked to empowerment (Speer & Hughey, 1995). While community organizing is closely linked to citizen participation, it is largely concerned with groups who form in response to specific community issues. Citizen participation on the other hand can refer to both groups and individuals who respond to both specific and general issues related to social justice. Community development is also a localized perspective on making change within communities, particularly with respect to physical space (Hanitio & Perkins, 2017). It is often linked to economic development as well, and is used to talk about improving the community rather than working on social justice issues (Phillips & Pittman, 2014). Community development has developed as its own field, and while it is a field that considers social factors, is not as political as citizen participation or community organizing.

Understanding citizen participation also requires breaking down the first part of the term, “citizen.” “Citizen” is politically-charged and loaded word, especially in these current times when people who are escaping violence and civil unrest are being separated from their children at the U.S. border and denied their humanity through the proposal of an executive order that would end birthright citizenship. In line with community psychology values to consider people as equals, not just clients in need of our help,
“citizen” in the context of this study implies an agency and an equal role in decision making. Citizen in this sense is not just a person who is able to legally reside in a country, but anyone who resides in a place where they can participate in community life. From a community psychology perspective, citizen implies that people are also embedded within political, as well as social contexts (Kieffer, 1984). Citizens could refer to any individuals or to different kinds of interest groups. In addition, because this study is based in and on United States political life, citizen also refers to members of a democratic society, whether or not they are documented or undocumented.

Citizen participation is the process and provides the theoretical underpinnings necessary for understanding involvement in the women’s movement. Because involvement in the women’s movement is a political activity advocating for social change, activism will also be used as a term when I speak about the activities in which activists are engaged. As stated earlier, many of these terms intertwine to create a holistic understanding of participation within social movements, activism, and communities more broadly. While this section provides an understanding of participation largely speaking, the next section will address what is meant specifically by women’s participation, the citizens who are the focus of this study.

**Bounded Definition of Women’s Participation**

Women’s participation is the phenomena of interest for the current study. Because of the broad nature of this term, I present a bounded definition of participation that will guide further research. Participation in the context of this study is an intentional process, meaning that it is done with the intention to further social justice. I bring with me a definition of citizen participation, but the scope of this concept may change depending on
how participants see themselves fitting within this definition. Therefore, while I provide
criteria up front, I approach this definition with the understanding that the women in this
study may add or detract as they see it embedded in their own lives.

First, participation is a continual process. To be a participant, a person must not
just attend one event or meeting, but be continually engaged with the activities, beliefs,
and values that manifest into participation. Sustained participation would indicate that a
person has dedicated a significant portion of her time to fight for decision-making power
and rights.

Second, participation in this study is intentional. While participants may be
employed at nonprofit social change organizations, their extra-employment activities and
identity as people who do activism are the focus of this study. This is not to say that
employed work does not count as participation, but that activism extends past the “9-5”
parameters and involves intentional commitment beyond just doing one’s job. Those who
are interviewed in this study may be employed at nonprofit organizations that do social
justice work.

Third, participation must be undertaken with the intent to further social justice.
Participation broadly speaking could refer to any type of action taken with the intent to
increase decision-making and improving conditions for certain groups. Because of this,
any activist group, including hate groups such as white nationalists, could be said to be
striving towards these goals. For the purposes of this study, women’s participation
includes only those actions that work towards greater equality and justice, with the view
that everyone deserves opportunities and goods in society.
Fourth, participation in this study is considered activities where participants must show up for support. This could include a myriad of activities such as participating in marches, attending local or national activism meetings, planning social justice-related activities, holding community teaching forums on issues of social justice, and speaking on behalf of just policy proposals. This definition is meant to exclude social media activism like sharing Facebook posts or retweeting articles related to justice issues as a sole participatory activity.

Participation has been shown to lead to both individual (Florin & Wandersman, 1990) and social goods (Putnam, 1995). Research in community psychology has focused on participation in several social arenas, particularly in community organizing (Christens & Speer, 2011; Speer & Hughey, 1995). Community organizing and participation for social change at the local, community level has gained a lot of attention from community psychologists, but less focus has been placed on creating change at the national level. Perkins and Shensul (2017) have recently called on community psychologists to think aspirationally beyond the community level to explore institutions and the city, state, and nation levels as well. This kind of participation aims to create change in social structures where there is clear support and opposition to certain issues.

In community psychology, citizen participation has largely been studied in the context of organizations (Wandersman & Florin, 2000). Because of this, the contextual factors that have been explored have related most closely to organizational characteristics such as leadership structure and organizational climate. Neighborhood characteristics have also been explored in the context of safety and education, as well as community norms that lead to greater levels of participation (Foster-Fishman, Pierce, & van Egeren,
Fewer studies have considered the larger political and social contexts which govern people’s lives, including institutional sexism, racism, and classism and their effect on participation work. This study is an attempt to understand how these larger contexts also play a role, specifically in the context of political participation.

**Sustained Participation**

Community psychologists have begun to address the factors that sustain individual participation in activism work (Angelique & Culley, 2014, Christens & Speer, 2011). However, there is still a lack of research on the factors that lead to sustained participation. While some studies have alluded to the idea that there is a distinction between initial participation and sustained action (Morgan & Chan, 2016; Thomas, McGarty, Mavor, 2009), few researchers have answered the call. Current research on sustained participation in collective action, much like the research on predictors of initial participation, focus on internal factors such as identity, motivation, and burnout. One particular study focused on how mindfulness techniques and meditation help to prevent burnout in long-term activists (Gorski, 2015). In community psychology, the literature on volunteerism parallels that of citizen participation. Factors involved in sustained volunteering at organizations include organizational commitment and motivation (Schusterschitz, Flatsher-Thoni, Leiter-Scheiring, & Geser, 2014).

While internal motivation and perceived self-efficacy are important in understanding sustained engagement, for community psychologists, it is also important to understand the contextual factors that contribute to sustained engagement in collective action. Harnessing momentum includes more than just finding internally motivated individuals. It must also include a close examination of the ecological factors such as
people’s social networks, access to resources, the interaction between communities and the people who live in them, and the larger social and political environments in which people live.

Activism is one example of “the pursuit of thriving” (Prilleltensky, 2014, p. 152). On both a national and local scale, the women’s movement has been dedicated to making women visible and matter within traditionally male contexts, their healthcare matter with the fight for affordable health services, and their safety matter with the fight for legislation against intimate partner violence, domestic abuse, and campus rape. People must feel that they matter and that they are adding value to these causes to sustain participation within social movements. Because mattering is a political phenomenon as well as a psychological one, “mattering structures” such as networks and visible representation in the community that contribute to sustained participation will be considered.

**Context**

The current study focuses on women activists in context, as well as explores those contexts themselves. As we all are, women activists are embedded within multiple larger social systems including family, community, organizations, and the larger political structures and society in which they live. Still, context remains a ubiquitous, but muddied, term within community psychology and the social sciences more broadly. Within this study, context is treated as the spaces in which women live and act, and an exploration of how women interact with these different spaces is used to illuminate the inhibiting and facilitating contextual and environmental factors that affect women.
Social context is the bedrock upon which community psychology is built. In contrast to traditional psychology, the focus of CP is not on the individual, but on the embeddedness of people within communities and the study of communities themselves as more than just a mere collection of individuals (Trickett, 1984). Instead of asking, how do people act within their specific contexts, we ask, how do these contexts affect people? But context is a nebulous construct, one used in many different arenas to understand the many factors that affect individuals and groups at varying levels.

In terms of participation, contextual factors such as social support and norms within family, friends, and community (Foster-Fishman, Pierce, & Van Egeren, 2009), social networks (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993), access to resources (Palmer, Perkins, & Xu, 2011), formalized organizational structure (Prestby & Wandersman, 1985; Rappaport & Seidman, 2000), the larger political climate (Pancer, 2015) and, potentially, celebration and fun (Berkowitz, 1996) have all been linked to sustained citizen participation. These factors affect activists both in and outside of the movements in which they are a part. They also affect differently at different time points, with some contexts being more salient before participation and some more influential after participating for longer periods.

Within community psychology, context has mainly been represented by the concentric, nested circles that make up the ecological model. Often associated with developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), the ecological model assumes that people are embedded within multiple levels of analysis and takes into account environments that affect individuals outside of those in which people immediately interact, i.e. the larger political climate (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Community
psychologists also use four ecological principles that help to explain social, contextual phenomena. These principles, like the model, draw upon field biology as a metaphor and help to anchor questions related to context. They include adaptation, cycling of resources, interdependence, and succession (Kelly, 1966; Trickett, 1984).

Since growing as a field, other conceptions of the ecological model have been developed, expanding on the initial understanding of embeddedness. Notably, Neal and Neal (2013) developed a model pointing to the networked nature of people’s experiences. Instead of people existing within nested circles, people’s experiences are really viewed more accurately through relationships between the different settings. They point specifically to an example of a child’s siblings within a school system whereby the sibling is not part of the mesosystemic interaction between school system and family.

Our understanding of context is constantly growing and shifting as a field. Considering the various models of Bronfenbrenner (1979), Kelly (1966), Trickett, Kelly, and Vincent (1985), and Neal and Neal (2013), this study expands on our understanding of context by including a typology of what context looks like in terms of women’s sustained participation. A participation context model illuminates which factors, both precipitating and sustaining, encourage and inhibit involvement within activist movements with the understanding that multiple intersectional identities provide a larger context in which women live, operate, and make decisions about their own lives. To understand sustained participation, it is imperative to understand the factors that encourage involvement in activism in the first place.
Philosophical Stance

I am guided in this study by an explicitly intersectional feminist standpoint. Critiques of collective and feminist research have both stated the nature of “acceptable activism” and feminism to be white and upper-middle class (hooks, 1984; Kelly, 2001). An understanding of citizen participation, as well as the continued participation by seasoned activists, must address these critiques head on. This study is guided by the understanding of the complex ways that multiple intersecting identities interact with the environment to influence women’s sustained participation in social movement work. Intersectionality refers not only to the multiple intersecting identities that define a person and influence the way people interact in the world, but the way multiple forms of oppression interact to maintain the status quo and create power hierarchies (Crenshaw, 1991). It highlights, for example, that women of color have multiple intersecting marginalized identities that shape their lived experiences different from that of White women and men of color. Psychology has been critiqued as focusing mostly on the identity part of intersectionality, without addressing structural inequalities and connection to activism inherent in the concept (Alexander-Floyd, 2012). The field has ignored, for example, that the interaction of racial and gender dynamics doubly oppress women of color. White women feminists have been explicit about certain issues such as the wage gap, while failing to realize that this gap is much more insignificant for white women as it is for women of color (Kelly, 2001). An intersectional perspective considers the differences within feminism, but also expands on what constitutes a feminist issue outside of the concerns of upper middle-class, heterosexual, cis-gendered, White women. For example, prison reform and police brutality affect working-class women and women
of color much more sharply, depriving women of safe environments in which to raise children and live without fear of violence (Crenshaw, 1991; Fine, 1992).

Within community psychology, we claim to already focus on the need for structural-level social change that gives attention to the contexts of people’s lives. Intersectionality is a useful and pertinent framework for exploring the inter-locking oppressions that govern people’s lives (Rosenthal, 2016). Gender, race, class, sexuality, and gender orientation, for example, cannot be thought of separately as to piece them apart negates the meaning of each of those categories separately. Community psychologists have not yet made good use of the intersectional framework when exploring participation and activism. This is ironic considering the framework’s insistence on broader level social change, the remedying of social inequalities, and the promotion of well-being for all people. Intersectionality is a complement to much of the work we are already doing within community psychology and can help further our goal of attention to and celebration of diversity.

The concept of participation in this study must be viewed in the context of the current social and political climate in the United States. It must be stated that women have made monumental gains in rights since the 1970s. While those rights may be threatened, they nevertheless exist. But, we must ask, who has access to these rights? While abortion is legal, it remains under attack at the state level where in some places, women must travel hundreds of miles to receive a safe abortion. Recently, the Supreme Court nomination of Brett Kavanaugh has stoked new fears about Roe v. Wade because of his dissent from a ruling about an undocumented immigrant teen seeking an abortion (Foran & Biskupic, 2018). It seems that while on legislative paper those rights are
upheld, in actuality a confluence of intersectional factors may preclude certain people from accessing such rights. Because participating in accessing basic rights such as healthcare and community safety are intersectional issues, it can be imagined that participation in collective social action is as well.

Problem Statement

The problem for participation is twofold and can be thought of (1) theoretically and (2) practically. First, there is a lack of literature on what contextual factors sustain women’s participation in activism. The research that does exist looks largely at individual factors like motivation and efficacy without exploring the larger ecological contexts in which women are embedded. Contextual factors such as social networks, neighborhoods norms and values, as well as access to resources may all play a role in women’s sustained participation in social justice activism. In addition, while activist identity development has been covered in the literature, researchers have yet to understand the interplay between the multiple intersecting identities that women bring with them to activist work and the surrounding contexts. This study will address and expand on the contextual and intersectional factors that facilitate or hinder involvement in sustained participatory practices.

Second, without an understanding of the contexts that influence participation, activists, communities, and movements face challenges in sustaining wide-scale social change. An acontextual approach to activism may serve to reproduce inequality by unknowingly excluding people that movements claim to empower. Incorporating people’s contexts into activism work may allow for greater inclusivity and a way to
understand social justice in an ecological manner that moves beyond the “single issue silos” (Gaventa, 2016, p. 10) in which activists operate.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is twofold (1) to identify, at multiple levels of analysis, contextual factors that affect women’s sustained participation in activism and (2) to understand the dynamic between identity and context that facilitates or inhibits participation in activism on women’s issues. The main objective is to understand what contextual factors sustain women in social action and under which circumstances. Within this study, I ask two questions:

1. What are the contextual factors that influence women’s sustained participation in activism?
2. How is the dynamic between identity and context reflected in sustained participation in activism?

**Significance of the Current Study**

The current study looked beyond internal factors associated with citizen participation and explore the contexts that help to facilitate or hinder sustained participation, and how these contexts are affected by activists’ multiple intersecting identities and oppressions. Explicitly attending to the context surrounding sustained citizen participation helps to create a “socially responsible agenda for the future” (Trickett, 1996). This agenda includes looking at the larger contexts in which we are embedded including every day and institutional discrimination. While this study focused specifically on activism, a close look at the ecological factors in participation informs the way we think about the factors involved in sustained participation in other types of
activities, as well as the levels at which community psychologists and community organizers can intervene to influence sustained citizen participation. Second, this study incorporated a look at positive aspects of community life. Findings of this study can be used to derive recommendations for action for community psychologists, activists, and community organizations. In addition, it provides a new model of context for community participation, with the understanding that different contextual effects manifest based on different life experiences, and also differ based on whether one is considering the internal contexts of participatory movements or the outside context of larger society.
Ch. 2 Literature Review

Summary

This study was conducted within the spirit of the axiom “think globally, act locally.” The women’s movement is a national movement but manifests itself differently in different communities. Communities are differentially affected by issues fought for by groups and individuals in the women’s movement depending on demographics, the physical environment, and the social climate. Miami, the particular setting of this study, has a unique history as all communities do, but even more unique as a decidedly Latino and Caribbean multicultural city.

This literature review consists of three main sections. In the first section, I will discuss the literature surrounding theories of citizen participation and similar constructs, paying attention to the differences and similarities between participation in local contexts and participation as it is described in analogous disciplines to tackle national social issues. I will outline some of the major theories of participation within community psychology that have formed the base for our field’s knowledge. This will then lead to a discussion of Kiefffer’s (1984) model of empowerment development and the precipitating factors that lead to participation. I will then lead up to a discussion of sustained participation. In the second section, I will outline a model of contextual participation, including a temporal dimension (pre-participation and sustained participation) and a space dimension (within or outside of the social movement). Each one of these dynamics will be broken down into factors that either facilitate participation or hinder participation within the context of activism. This section also includes relevant literature on Miami,
with references and statistics that help paint a picture of the specific context of participation in the County.

The last major section in the literature review will begin with a brief history of the women’s movement in the United States and the identity factors that have shaped the issues for which women fight. I will then discuss the concept of intersectionality as it is used in the psychological literature, and the interplay between identity and context that guides women’s activism. Lastly, I will integrate the three major sections of the literature review: participation, context, and intersectionality to show how what we know helps to shape the research questions being used for this study.

**Section I: Citizen Participation**

Citizen participation has been at the forefront of community psychology literature for decades (Wandersman, 1977; Heller, Price, Reinharz, Riger, & Wandersman, 1984; Mannarini, Fedi, & Trippetti, 2010; Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). It is considered one of the foundational processes of the field, reflecting values of empowerment and sense of community, as well as the belief in procedural justice for all members of communities. There are myriad benefits of participation in civic life including feels of control over one’s own life (Sampson & Graif, 2009; Wandersman, 1977), improving the overall quality of communities (Hallman, 1984; Wandersman & Florin, 2000), and a relationship with increased sense of community (Hughey, Speer, & Peterson, 1999; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In addition, there are many different ways to participate, including neighborhood clean ups, voting, being part of a neighborhood coalition, or protesting unjust policy. Lines of research within the topic of participation within CP include who participates, why people participate, the effects of participation on communities and
neighborhoods, and the characteristics of community organizations that are successful versus those that are inactive.

In a search on PsycInfo within the *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *Journal of Community Psychology*, and the *Journal of Applied Social and Community Psychology*, the term “participation” has appeared in 576 articles. Much of the work on participation has focused on community members’ involvement in local organizations and neighborhood initiatives.

Other areas of study in the social sciences have asked similar questions using associated terminology like collective action and community development. Regardless of terminology, community psychology is less concerned with individual and group-level effects and more concerned with understanding the contexts that affect participation and the ways in which people influence their contexts through participation. The ecological model that acts as a guiding force for understanding community psychology is utilized no differently within the area of citizen participation.

**CP Frameworks of Participation**

Community psychologists have long tackled the issue of citizen participation. Within the field, a number of theories related to processes and outcomes of participation have been postulated. In this section, I will focus on four major theories in the field proposed by Wandersman (1977), Kieffer (1984), Perkins, et. al (1990), and Christens & Speer (2011). The range of publication dates of these theories will highlight the ways the field has grown and expanded on the way participation is conceptualized and theoretically utilized.
Abraham Wandersman (1977) was one of the first researchers to address the need for a conceptual framework of participation at the community level within community psychology. His work was instrumental in creating frameworks to address participation in several arenas, ranging from permanent formalized structures like community mental health centers (Wandersman, Kimbrell, Wadsworth, Livingston, Myers, & Braithwaite, 1982) to community organizations formed in response to crisis (Edelstein & Wandersman, 1987). Wandersman’s (1977) model used four different parameters of participation to describe the different opportunities to participate. These parameters are: (a) setting and scale, (b) stage of process, (c) types of participation, and (d) type of participant.

The setting and scale refer to both the physical space in which participation takes place (i.e. workplace, schools, residential areas, etc.) and the dimensions along which this process occurs (i.e. short vs. long-term, sustainability, cost). Stage of process refers to the temporal stage at which the participation occurs from planning to evaluation. Types of participation refers degree of involvement individuals have within community life. Lastly, type of participant refers to the different actors from multiple levels of analysis who play a participatory role. Wandersman’s model of participation determines that individual differences account for who participates in which types of participation. Sense of mastery and control, operating in a congruous environment, and opportunities gained through participation all serve as moderators between the influencers and the effects of participation.

Wandersman’s model laid the groundwork to answer three major questions related to participation: (1) who will participate under which conditions, (2) effects of
participation at the individual, interpersonal, and block levels, and (3) how does participation change over time, and, what are the effects of these changes on the setting and on individuals? This model represented the first time that community psychologists approached participation with a systematic framework.

Kieffer (1984) proposed a model of participation that is rooted in the concept of empowerment. Kieffer postulated that empowerment is a developmental process that leads to gaining participatory skills and a greater understanding of the political world. This model uses a life span analogy comprised of four main “eras” through which people travel to attain political empowerment: the era of entry, era of advancement, era of incorporation, and era of commitment. Each of these stages represents study participants’ growing commitment to activism, culminating in their transition to knowledgeable, skillful activists. While Kieffer begins to explore sustained commitment, he does not address what he deems “post-transition survival,” (p. 25), or the continued process of sustainability. In addition, his model still focuses primarily on the individual, and the internal motivations that lead to an activist identity, and falls short of offering ecological explanations for individual behavior.

Perkins, et. al (1990) expanded upon previous models of participation by calling for an ecological approach to citizen participation, suggesting that the phenomenon is determined by community level factors, as well as individual factors. The researchers suggest that empowerment should have a collectivist orientation, in this way differentiating itself from the construct of self-efficacy that it is often compared against. This conceptualization of empowerment is more conducive towards working on collective problems.
The study focused on the contextual factors that serve as predictors of participation, primarily in the form of voluntary block associations formed to combat neighborhood crime. The authors proposed a theoretical model of contextual determinants that consisted of five sets of predictor variables: demographics characteristics, built environment (permanent attributes) of the block, crime, transient physical environment, and social climate. Each of the variables in this model are understood to influence one another and not operate in a linear fashion. 48 blocks were selected to participate within three neighborhoods in New York City.

Data were obtained through telephone surveys, police records on crime, observations of the physical environment, and a survey of association members. Findings showed that social and physical environmental factors were more important than individual-level factors in its association block-level participation as a response to crime. The authors point to an example that while changing the demographics of a neighborhood is difficult, block members can much more easily come together to plan and execute a block clean-up.

Christens & Speer (2011) have similarly looked at the context of participation within local community organizations. A longitudinal study of local congregation-based community organizing showed that the surrounding contexts were instrumental in sustaining participation, particularly from a relational perspective. Important contexts for participation included relationships between members of the organizations and collaboration on finding out information on local community systems. One limitation of this study was that the authors did not find any relationship between personal
demographic factors and participation, but they do mention that more research is needed on the relationship between context and participation.

Wandersman (1977), Perkins, et. al (1990) and Christens & Speer (2011) locate their studies largely within the context of specific place-based issues. The context of participation within neighborhoods and blocks shares similarities, but also shows differences, with studies related to participation on political and social justice issues.

**Participation in Other Disciplines**

Scholars in various social science fields have theorized about participation in social movements. Once thought to be an irrational behavior, more recent theories of collective action and participation operate on the premise that the people involved in social movements are rational actors. Three different kinds of theories dominate the social movement literature, those based on (1) perceived costs and benefits, (2) identity, and (3) self-efficacy.

One theory that has held widespread influence within social psychology is resource mobilization theory (Ferree, 1992; Klandermans, 1984). Resource mobilization theory suggests that people are rational actors who participate in collective action when they have the resources to do so. Within this framework, people weigh the costs and benefits of participation and attention is paid to the ways in which people interact with one another (Klandermans, 1984). Mobilization is based on appealing to people’s value of the collective good. In coming from a social psychological perspective, this theory is grounded in the individual level of analysis. Klandermans (1984) believes that the interactions between individuals is the appropriate level of analysis for exploring social movements, focusing on individuals’ weighing of the costs and benefits of participation.
While Klandermans (1984) begins to incorporate context by relating the idea that people do not participate in movement work solely to release tension, the ideas still do not take into account the full range of complexities involved in social movement participation like ideology, the role the media plays, and identity factors. Recent theorists have begun to point out the gaps in resource mobilization theory and have looked to expand on the theory, as well as explore other factors that influence participation (Morris & Mueller, 1992; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spear, 2008).

More recent social movement scholars have pointed to identity as a major predictor of collective action participation (Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995; Klandermans, 2014; Morgan & Chan, 2016). Identity is considered a central feature of what is deemed the new social movement paradigm (Pichardo, 1997), the paradigm proposed to have replaced our ways of understanding social movements in the industrial age now that we have shifted into a post-industrial era. New social movement theory shows that current social movements tend to balk at hierarchical structures, instead favoring more open, decentralized leaderships (Pichardo, 1997) and focus attention on quality of life issues while placing collective identity at their center (Gamson, 1992; Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Collective identity is considered to be the “most central task” of new social movements (Gamson, 1992, p. 56).

Social movement theory treats identity as encompassing both individual social identities like gender, race, and social class, and collective identification with a movement. Individual identity factors generally become salient when people weigh the costs and benefits of participating within a movement (Sturmer & Simon, 2004), thus relating back to Klandermans’s theory on resource mobilization (1984). But this theory
has been challenged as being too individualistic, and not focusing on the target of social
movements, broad social change for the collective (Simon, et. al, 1998). Therefore,
collective identity must be treated as a broader concept than social identities.

Collective identification has become a focus of new social movement theory. In
psychology, Tajfel (1981) suggested that social movements should be treated beyond the
individual level of analysis, stating that social movements are “efforts by large numbers
of people, who define themselves and are also defined by others as a group, to solve
collectively a problem they feel they have in common, and which is perceived to arise
from their relation with other groups.” (p. 244). This defining of selves and others
provides the basis for theorizing on collective identity.

Simon, et. al’s (1998) study helped to break down and bring together the
components of collective identity theorized in both psychology and sociology. The
researchers considered people’s willingness to participate in social movements as being
comprised of five identity variables: identification with the social group (i.e. older people
or gay people), identification with the social movement (i.e. Gray Panthers), collective
motive (e.g. sharing the same goals for the movement), social motive (ex. wanting to help
and aid the social group), and reward motive (ex. specific benefits of participation for the
individual). Findings from both studies showed that collective identification with the
social group and with the movement were the greatest predictors of people’s willingness
to participate. Identification with the social movement proved to be the best predictor in
the studies.

The findings from Simon, et. al (1998) on collective identity are reflected in many
other studies throughout social psychology and sociology (Liss, Crawford, & Popp, 2004;
Mannarini, Roccato, Fedit, & Rovere, 2009; Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Liss, Crawford, and Popp (2004) for example, found that women who identified as feminists and had feminist life experiences (i.e. having a feminist mother or faced sexism) were more likely to engage in collective action. Mannarini, Roccato, Fedi, and Rovere (2009) similarly found that identification with an Italian environmental movement served as a catalyst for action. Additionally, collective identity also manifested as opposition to land developers who wanted to build a high speed railroad on parts of the land the movement protected. A common enemy serves as an important factor in collective identification.

While collective identity has become a main focus of social movement literature, it fails to understand the diverse experiences of people within different social movements, and the effects that may have on the ability of collective identity alone to sustain social movements. For example, while Simon, et. al (1998) shows that identification with both the movement and social group predict greater participation, it is unclear whether this collective identification is felt by only members of dominant groups. There is no racial or ethnic breakdown of participants, and while a breakdown of education is included, it does not account for generational differences, that older people would be less likely than people in the 1990s to have obtained a college degree. Similarly, Liss, Crawford, and Popp’s (2016) study used college undergraduates, who were overwhelmingly white (85%). The LGBTQ, Civil Rights, and women’s movements have been criticized for prioritizing the values of their most privileged members (white, male, cis-gendered, middle-class) (Brewer & Dundes, 2018; Kelly, 1994; Radke, Hornsey, & Barlow, 2016, Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011; Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1993; Swank & Fahs, 2013). Collective identity theorists continue to treat identity as disparate chunks,
that one would identity as a woman, as a gay man, etc., without understanding the ways in which our multiple identities intersect to create the goals and identification with the larger social movement. While writers have begun to address intersectionality and identity within social movements, and have suggested that intersectional thinking is paramount to creating inclusive movements, (Curtin, Kende, & Kender, 2016; Radke, Hornsey, & Barlow, 2016; Wiley & Bikmen, 2012), the literature is small and does not adequately address the relationship between power, intersectionality, and sustained collective action towards social change.

In addition to the above critiques, Breine (1982) has argued that the focus on “prefigurative politics,” the breaking down of centrality and hierarchy, like putting greater attention into collective identity, has made new social movements effective in terms of solidarity, but less effective in terms of action. Prefigurative politics refers to the idea that radically transforming the oppressive ways people relate to each other in movement spaces is as important as attending to economic and structural challenges (Cornish, Haaken, Moskovitz, & Jackson, 2016). NSMs have effectively called for attention to the group’s well-being, but may still struggle with both action, as well as navigating the community-diversity dialectic (Wallin-Ruschman-Patka, 2016).

Social movement literature has also pointed to self-efficacy as a factor in social movement participation. Self-efficacy is the idea that “people engage in collective action if people believe this will make it more likely that relevant goals are achieved.” (van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears, 2008, p. 506). van Zomeren, Saguy, and Schellhaas (2012) found that participative efficacy, the belief that participating in collective action can make a difference, predicts actual involvement in activism. The authors differentiate
group efficacy from participative efficacy, stating that group efficacy is the belief that one can help to advance group goals, whereas participative efficacy is the belief that taking action in participatory ways is what makes a difference. The two constructs are not mutually exclusive.

Self-efficacy is closely related to the agentic view of empowerment (Zimmerman, 2000). Similar to self-efficacy, collective empowerment has been considered as a vital tool for social change (Drury & Reicher, 2009). Because of this, one of the main issues with a self-efficacy approach is that, much like how empowerment is treated within community psychology, the feeling of being efficacious does not necessarily relate to what is actually efficacious in terms of social change. While activists might feel motivated to continue their work because they feel they are making a difference, the differences they make may not be reflected in community, societal, or political contexts. Gaventa (2016) addresses the issue of self-efficacy and empowerment head on, by confronting the issue that while participation has had individual benefits, we are still in need of action that addresses the intersecting inequalities inherent in social issues. He makes the point that while scholars and activists have focused on wellbeing, we have yet to address what it means to make an impact on political and social change.

**Participation as a process: Initial participation**

The bulk of social science research focuses on the factors that encourage people to participate in their communities. It is useful here, once again, to make the distinction between engagement and participation. While engagement refers to the emotional/attitudinal part of social change work, participation represents the active/behavioral component. Much of the literature on initial participation has looked
more at internal factors that influence participation, i.e. feelings and emotions, self-efficacy, perceptions of control, and personal identity features that lead one to begin participating in civic life (De Piccoli & Rolero, 2010; Liss, Crawford, & Popp, 2004; van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears, 2008), though there have been calls for incorporating contextual factors in order to understand participatory behavior (Klofstad, 2007).

Contextually, participation is influenced first and foremost by the networks in which one is embedded, usually starting with family characteristics. For example, people who participated in 1960s social movements tended to grow up in families that were more permissive and politically liberal, where parents included their children in decision-making (Duncan, 2012). In addition, children who grew up with mothers who defined themselves as feminists, tended to express feminist values themselves (Pavlova & Silbereisen, 2015).

Friends are equally as important in influencing participation. Klofstad (2007) followed a cohort of college freshmen that were randomly assigned to different campus dormitories, and found that students who engaged in more informal political talk with their peers were more likely to engage in civic action. People have also shown similar protest behavior based on the beliefs of their peer group. For example, in a network study of striking and non-striking workers from a cleaning company, researchers found that workers who interacted more exhibited similar strike behavior. (Born, Akkerman, & Thomess, 2016).

A “mobilizing episode” has also been conceptualized as the catalyst for initial social justice-oriented citizen participation. Kieffer (1984) expounded on the personal nature of mobilizing episodes, whereby an event that moves one person to become
involved in activism may not necessarily motivate another. But this experience of having “something happen” is shared among many activists who tell their stories, and reflects the same ideas inherent in critical consciousness and becoming aware of oppression (Freire, 1970; Kieffer, 1984). Other factors involved in people’s initial participation will be elaborated on within the contextual model of participation in the following section.

**Participation as a process: Sustained participation**

The social movement and participation literature has often focused on the factors associated with initial participation and what encourages people to act in their communities in the first place. Far fewer studies have explored the factors that sustain activism (Mannarini & Fedi, 2012; Morgan & Chan, 2016; van Stekelenberg & Klandermans, 2017). Sustained participation in social movements is what ultimately leads to the survival of those movements (van Stekelenberg & Klandermans, 2017), and scholars have mostly pointed to individual attributes as catalysts.

Some studies that have put sustained participation at the forefront have focused on factors like activist burnout (Gorski, 2015; Maslach and Gomes, 2016), suggesting mindfulness as a possible way of coping with the struggles of continued action. Still others have focused on how involvement in activism meets personal needs, for example being able to speak one’s mind about political issues or identity-related needs where one feels part of a group (Downton & Wehr, 1998). Persistent activists have also pointed to sense of moral obligation or duty to continue social justice work, pointing to these feels as being so ingrained in their character that they must act (Angelique & Culley, 2014).

Studies in community psychology have recently begun the work to look at the more contextual influences on participation. Mannarini & Fedi (2012) have pointed to the
concept of personal sustainability, which takes into account cultural experiences of individuals who pursue activism. In addition, they point to member-organizational relationships, whereby activists feel supported and bonded to the social movement groups to which they belong. Christens & Speer (2011) looked at the factors that sustain participants in community organizing and found similarly that relationships and collaboration were key for sustaining momentum, and that these factors were embedded within the settings in which community organizing occurred.

Very few studies have focused on the role that power and politics plays in the sustainability of participation. Angelique & Culley (2014), in a study of environmental activists, pointed to both psychological and sociopolitical dimensions of sustainability. The sociopolitical dimensions included the importance of formalized group structure and a lack of social power. The researchers found that a formalized group structure created an entry point for new activists and made outreach easier, as well as cultivated an environment for inspiring leadership. Social power was discussed as being an important macro-factor to addressing policy changes and other work done in the political arena. The lack of access and information about nuclear technology hindered democratic participation on the part of activists.

The few studies on sustained participation within community psychology show a promising future for this line of work, but while context has been addressed in different forms in each of these studies, we still lack a more nuanced understanding of the different temporal and spatial dimensions of these contexts.
Section II: Context

As evidenced from the above literature review, participation has largely been treated as a psychological concept, and less as an ecological one. Ecological thinking is paramount to community psychology. But context, an abstract construct, has largely been taken for granted within the field in the ways that we conduct our research (Luke, 2005). While community psychologists understand and incorporate context into our work and in understanding community and psychological issues, there are few models of context for participation in communities, and none that exist in terms of participation in larger social movements.

While a few models of participation have been suggested by community psychologists (Wandersman, 1977; Kieffer, 1984; Perkins, et. al, 1990), there is yet to be a model that demonstrates facilitating and inhibiting contexts for participation both inside and outside of social justice movements. The model presented in this study includes a more holistic picture of participation in context, adding the dimensions within and outside of the movement in which people participate. This model is presented here generally, and includes both temporal and spatial dimensions.
Table 2. Contextual Model of Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-participation</th>
<th>Sustained participation</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Within movement</th>
<th>Outside movement</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating Factors</td>
<td>Inhibiting Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a welcoming environment</td>
<td>Exclusionary practices (i.e., racism, trans-exclusionary, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured settings</td>
<td>Sociopolitical development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear leadership/role structure</td>
<td>Networks (supportive community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost/benefit ratio (benefits outweigh costs)</td>
<td>Exclusion from leadership roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental characteristics</td>
<td>Barriers to attending meetings because of time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following sections will explain each one of these dynamics in detail below. Some of these dynamics have been researched in the literature in greater detail than others, and this will be reflected in the research cited for each. First, a study on context would not be complete without exploring the local context in which the research takes place. To address this, I will first provide a brief history of activism within Miami and the structural factors which exist that influence activists’ work.

**Miami Context**

Miami has consistently been named the least civically engaged city in the United States (National Conference on Citizenship, 2010). This reputation has come about for multiple reasons and has manifested in Miami social life in a variety of ways. The causes
of this come, in many ways, from Miami’s physical geography, forced separation of minority communities, and lack of cultural integration.

The most prominent example of these combined causes comes from the creation of the interstate highways system in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The construction of the I-95 freeway through Overtown, a historically Black neighborhood and business district, hangs over the collective memory of Miami. One activist in 1981 called it “a sociological disaster for Miami. Many of the problems faced by the city today are traceable to I-95 and not to the refugee influx.” (Mohl, 1993, p. 140). While no different than the national pattern of highway construction uprooting Black families and communities in favor of “progress,” Miami’s history is unique in that for decades it saw the most racially segregated neighborhoods of anywhere in the United States (Mohl, 1993). Public hearings on construction were actively discouraged and when used, were only implemented to appease the local populace. Even protest from activists was sparse.

The destruction of Overtown coincided with an influx of refugees from Cuba, and shortly after in the 1970s and 80s, Haiti. Unlike immigration in other parts of the United States, many of the new arrivals were people seeking political asylum. The differential treatment of Haitian and Cuban refugees further embittered Black activists in Miami, who believed the treatment of Haitian refugees reflected the racism experienced similarly by African-Americans (Shell-Weiss, 2009). These issues caused a further divide between immigration activists and civil rights activists throughout the last half of the 20th century.

The last decade of the 20th century saw a shift in activism in Miami towards labor organizing. In 1990, a full two thirds of workers were employed in service industries in Miami-Dade County (Shell-Weiss, 2009). Many workers languished in poverty as they
also had to travel long distances to work in resorts and other tourist destinations. Organizing workers served as one way to combat economic injustice. Labor unions like the SEIU were able to boast some wins with campaigns such as “Janitors for Justice.” (Shell-Weiss, 2009). The broad-based labor movement that emerged in Miami became a model for other cities to show how people could work together across racial and ethnic lines to work towards justice.

The history of activism in Miami shows the uphill battle faced by residents in a city originally founded as a vacation destination. While Miami has consistently dealt with low civic engagement and a growing wealth gap, as well as climate and environmental issues, the solidarity between different groups in Miami has provided hope for more inclusive social movements in the future.

**Pre-participation/Within Movement**

**Facilitating.** Outside of the Miami context, factors associated with facilitating initial participation in social movements from within the movement include the creation and maintenance of empowering and empowered settings that are structured and include clear leadership and roles. Empowering settings include a shared belief system, opportunity role structures, strong leadership, and a peer-based support system (Maton & Salem, 1995). A peer-based support system based on shared values, not just emotional reactions to social issues can be particularly effective at creating and maintaining relationships within movement organizations (Speer & Hughey, 1995). In a review of three different types of organizations, Maton (2008) showed that support within a women’s liberation organization in Afghanistan stemmed from the shared emancipatory goals of members of that organization. Empowering settings act as welcoming and safe
environments for activists to develop a collective identity and shared strategies for change.

Strong, clear leadership and role structures can also facilitate participation. Both of these factors are represented within empowering settings (Maton & Salem, 1995) and movement organizations that adopt these strategies may be more successful in attracting members. Strong leaders inspire greater trust among other participants, which in turn can lead to greater participation and aid initial involvement (Born, Akkerman, & Thommes, 2016). Foster-Fishman, Pierce, and Van Egeren (2009) found that strong leaders moderate the relationship between neighborhood readiness and citizen participation. Other studies have found that activism “followers” point to leaders within the movement as inspiring them to create change (Angelique & Culley, 2014).

**Inhibiting.** One major inhibiting characteristic for initial participation within movements is organizations who practice exclusionary practices towards new and existing members. Practices within the Women’s Movement that are exclusionary include racism, trans-exclusion, and classism. Exclusionary practices do not necessarily have to be blatant, but can be subtly embedded within the culture of social movement groups and organizations, or even in the movement itself. These practices can manifest themselves as microaggressions (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011). Writers like Toni Morrison and Audre Lorde have addressed the lack of attention paid to race within white, mainstream feminism, and the realization that this white feminism was more focused on gender oppression and not the differential oppressions that women of color face (Sandoval, 1991). There have been few empirical research studies looking at these
characteristics (Brewer & Dundes, 2018), but discussion of the exclusivity of the larger Women’s Movement has been pervasive in the work of Black feminists.

**Pre-participation/Outside Movement**

**Facilitating.** There are numerous and varied facilitating influences on initial participation outside of social movement organizations and groups. One major influence is the development of critical consciousness, critically reading the world around oneself to understand social power dynamics and then acting to change those dynamics (Freire, 1970). Through dialogue and analysis, marginalized groups are able to overcome structural oppression and more thoroughly understand the conditions in which they live. Diemer & Li (2011) found in particular that discussion with parents and peers about structural oppression had an influence on youth’s traditional political participation, i.e. voting and other civic activities. While this study does not address political activism directly, other studies have shown that parental beliefs have an influence on social justice participation (Pavlova & Silbereisen, 2015). Watts, Griffith, and Abdul-Adil (1999) also determined that critical consciousness is a key step in sociopolitical development. Within their theory, the critical stage addresses the desire to understand injustice and oppression, and the determination that social justice action is necessary to aid in liberation.

In addition to the internal process of critical consciousness, neighborhood norms also play a role in fostering participation. In order for participation to occur, personal characteristics like critical consciousness need to be fit with environmental circumstances, like neighborhood norms. Foster-Fishman, Pierce, & Van Egeren (2009) posit that neighborhood norms create shared meaning between community members. Being surrounded by neighbors who are actively involved in social justice-oriented
activism can help to foster that activism in others. They found that people who perceived their neighbors to be engaged citizens, tended to be more engaged in community activism themselves. Ohmer (2008) similarly found that people who perceived their neighborhood organizations to be effective at making change, believed they received greater benefits from participating within these organizations. In addition, people from communities supportive of participation also tend to participate more (Pavlova & Silbereisen, 2015).

Personal networks are especially important influences on initial participation in activism (Born, Akkerman, & Thommes, 2016; Campbell, 2013; Christens, 2010; Diani, 2012; Gister, 2012). In the case of unions, when members have more private communication and trust each other more, they tend to have the same strike behavior as their friends (Born, Akkerman, & Thommes, 2016). In a sense, having close ties acts as a form of peer pressure, both subtle and direct.

Similarly, access to networks and resources can determine whether people have the resources to participate in activism. This is called social capital. Social capital can be defined as “features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1993, p. 36). It is a multidimensional construct that depends on racial/ethnic diversity, neighborhood stability, and concentrated disadvantage. While social capital can lead to greater participation for people, it can also act in a reciprocal way, where participation actually leads to great social capital for people involved (Sampson & Graif, 2009). Social capital also operates at multiple ecological levels. For example, neighborhood, school, and family factors all impact youth’s initial civic involvement, particularly in regard to school social capital and parent involvement in their children’s lives (Mahatmya & Lohman,
Children who have greater access to these kinds of resources tend to be more involved in their communities as a whole. Community-based organizations geared towards social change also serve as a form of social capital, helping young activists to sustain relationships with older activists and help frame social issues (Ginwright, 2007).

Other important factors in initial participation from outside of social movements, particularly in terms of activism on women’s issues, include having taken a gender studies class (Stake, Roades, Rosoe, & Ellis, 1994); holding feminist beliefs (Pavlova & Silbreisen, 2015), and having experienced gender discrimination (Liss, Crawford, & Popp, 2004).

Political climate may also play a role in why people engage in activism in the first place. Political scientists have addressed these factors. For example, in Doug McAdam’s seminal work on the Black protest movement he describes the importance of a window in time when people become more sympathetic to human rights issues (McAdam, 1982). Current political climate may also be a kind of “mobilizing episode” to catalyze group and individual action for social change.

**Inhibiting.** Inhibiting influences on initial participation in social movements generally fall into the category of lacking key resources to get involved and transportation issues to make it to events and other activities. For example, those students who lack the support for developing critical consciousness would be at a disadvantage compared to their peers. In addition, when people have little social support to participate in organizing or activism, especially when those in their networks tend to not participate, they themselves may also be reluctant to take part (Born, Akkerman, & Thommes, 2016). This lack of support can also manifest at the community level. For example, one study
showed that while community members may feel positively towards participation, they nevertheless may not participate if they do not have access to the right recruitment networks or only have access to community services that are unsupportive of participation (Pavlova & Silbereisen, 2015). Societal stigmatization can also play a role in why people may not participate in activism. For example, women for whom feminism has been stigmatized are less willing to participate in activism for women’s issues (Radke, Hornsey, & Barlow, 2016).

**Sustained Participation/Within Movement**

**Facilitating.** While the literature on sustained participation has been sparse, there are a few factors that have been shown to facilitate continued activism from within movements. Relationships, organization, and leadership characteristics, as well as strategies to prevent burnout, have been shown as key to participant sustainability. These factors can be summed up as either structural or personal.

Strong leadership is one structural factor has been named by activists as an especially important motivating force for why they stay involved in the movement (Angelique & Culley, 2014; Downton & Wehr, 1998; Nepstad, 2004). Leaders act as role models for persistence and their enthusiasm and direction can make it easier for people to stay (Angelique & Culley, 2014). In addition, they can help to strengthen networks and ties between activists within these networks. For example, leaders in the Plowshare movement have close relationships with followers and facilitate new relationships between members (Nepstad, 2004). Communities can also sustain shared beliefs that might otherwise fall apart upon scrutiny. Successful and sustained activists subscribe heavily to these community beliefs (Nepstad, 2004).
Sustained activists show greater commitment to the cause than those who drop out. (Klandermans, 1997). This is reflected in beliefs and attitudes around self-efficacy and overall motivation to participate. Downton & Wehr (1998) found that persistent participants were more likely to head off burnout by arranging their lives around their activism. This includes becoming employed in social justice and movement organizations to get paid for doing the work they would be doing voluntarily anyway.

Community psychologists have been concerned not only with well-being and coping with injustice, but with the idea of thriving. Thriving is the reach of full potential, being fulfilled, and in terms of individuals, engaging in meaning making and satisfaction with life (Prilleltensky 2011; Seligman, 2011). Boyd (2015) conceptualized a theoretical model for thriving in the workplace that incorporates organizational contextual factors with resources that lead to behaviors and then thriving. The model highlights the importance of sense of community and sense of community responsibility to the employed person. The idea is that creating an environment that allows employees to thrive will make them more productive, happier, and able to contribute. While this theory has not specifically been applied to participation within social movements, one can see its relationship to empowering community settings (Maton, 2008) in encouraging and supporting the people who fight for social justice. Because this work does not generally happen by one person, but rather a person involved in a network or movement organization, these principles can be applied in those cases as well.

Collective action theories point to the cost/benefit analysis that participants engage in to determine whether or not they believe they should continue acting and whether this activism adds value to the movement (Morgan & Chan, 2016; Mannarini,
Fedi, & Trippeti, 2010; Antonini, et. al, 2015). Sustained activists, in the face of drawbacks, maintain commitment when they believe that the pros outweigh the cons for their involvement.

Inhibiting. There is not much research on inhibiting factors that preclude participation within social movements, though there is a literature on burnout. These studies have also sometimes compared those who are participators with those who have dropped out of movement work. Downton & Wehr (1998) found that activists who left movement work did not take the time for self-care and worked themselves to the point of exhaustion. While not specifically noted, organizations who encourage or discourage this type of work ethic may play a role in sustaining their membership and activist commitment. In addition, activists who feel strongly attached to the cause and the group are more likely to sustain their participation (Mannarini & Fedi, 2012). This could suggest that activists who are not strongly attached to the groups in which they work could burn out faster, especially if these groups do not work to value diversity in their membership.

Organizations may discourage participation from key stakeholders without realizing. Arnstein’s (1969) ladder of participation shows that citizen involvement in community life ranges in various degrees from manipulation to citizen control. Citizens may be included only to be educated or saved, without inclusion of their voice, experience, or leadership. While activist groups may include stakeholders, it may not be that those who are most affected by social issues are at the table to lead the way.

In general, when people don’t feel like they matter and that their voices are being heard, they are less likely to be productive members of a team (Prilleltensky, 2014). As
discussed earlier, this sense of not mattering could be related to the reproduction of societal power dynamics and the silencing of voices within movements that matter most (Gaventa, 2016).

**Sustained Participation/Outside Movement**

**Facilitating.** Participation is also sustained by factors occurring in neighborhoods, schools, communities, and the larger communities in which we inhabit. Previous literature has shown that when people strongly identify with the social movements in which they are a part that they are more likely to sustain their activism (Mannarini & Fedi, 1998; Pacely, Oswald, & Hardesty, 2014). This finding relates back to the idea of collective identity as a defining feature of New Social Movements that differentiates current movements from those of the past.

Downton & Wehr (1998) have specifically referred to “structures of political opportunity,” that is, tactics and actions that lead to increased public support as important to the sustainability of larger social movements. For example, the use of non-violent action is more greatly tolerated by the government, and can be used strategically by movement leaders for increased visibility and garnering greater support.

Culley & Angelique (2003) found that spousal support was especially important for women activists and facilitated their ability to stay involved both emotionally and resource-wise. In addition, women who were mothers stated that their maternal identity helped to fuel their continued activism. Besides these facilitators, there is much to still learn about what factors sustain participation in the long-term. Though covered less frequently in the literature, having adequate access to space and a supportive community are also important factors in the maintenance and sustainability of participation.
**Inhibiting.** Outside of the women’s movement and movement work specifically, gender can act as an inhibiting force for activists. Culley & Angelique (2003), in a study of female environmental activists, found that the women were treated condescendingly as being better suited towards follower roles than leadership ones. While not as relevant to the current study, male allies to the Women’s Movement have been critiqued for taking up space and dominating the conversation during protests. Though not specifically addressed in this study, lack of transportation and child care may also be potential issues for why women, especially poor women may not be at the proverbial decision table.

The reality of community participation is that those with power are better able to determine what the targets of participation are and how those with less power are able to be involved (Arnstein, 1969). Castile, Kagan, & Stewart (2004) have critiqued this power in participation by mapping participation and commitment on a two-dimensional spectrum. Activists tend to have high commitment as well as proactive participation. They contrast this with community psychologists and co-opted community representatives who also are proactive participators, but can afford to have lower commitment. The end result of this is that activists are more likely to burn out, while community psychologists and community representatives will be able to enjoy accolades and the privilege of staying employed. In addition, community activists are more likely to be ‘depowered’ if they do not have adequate resources to sustain their participation (Kagan, 2006). This unequal power distribution shows how even those who are committed to the same causes benefit differentially based on the societal power they wield. This also can be extrapolated to represent the lack of recognition of diverse voices within the women’s movement (hooks, 2015; Kelly, 2001; Torrey, 1979).
What’s Missing from Consideration?

Two potential sustaining factors for participation are missing in the above model. These are the consideration of power in sustaining activist movements, and the role that fun and humor play in creating and sustaining collective movements.

The consideration of power dynamics as a macro-level construct has not been included in much work on participation (see work from Carolyn Kagan as an exception). For example, Simon and Klandersman (2001) discuss power in the context of a struggle for power between multiple groups, but not in the Foucauldian sense of the pervasiveness of power. Gaventa (2016) has pointedly asked about the role that participation plays in fixing societal inequalities. He challenges academics to wonder about the inequalities in power differentials that lead to the silencing of those at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. One way is to focus on both economic and political issues simultaneously, to understand and challenge those intersecting inequalities. Without doing so, activists risk reproducing the status quo by looking at individual advancement, rather than the intersecting ways that politics and economics affect people’s lives.

Community psychologists have begun to discuss power in their work, but the focus of our work is rarely power itself (Fisher, Sonn, & Evans, 2007). Specifically, power has been looked at through the lens of community organizing. Speer & Hughey (1995) state that community organizing helps to create social change not through individual empowerment, but through challenging economic, legal, educational, social, and political systems. But power can be both a facilitating and inhibiting factor. Activists can leverage their resources, especially extensive networks, to challenge power, while at the same time be victims of oppression within a political system that does not seek to
meet their needs. In terms of the “within-movement” dimension, power differentials between activists can silence the voices with the most at stake in the process and outcome of movement participation (Wiley & Bikmen, 2012).

Another factor that has received little attention in sustained participation in activism is the role of humor and fun settings. Fun and celebration have been theorized to be one of the sustaining forces of community life (Berkowitz, 1987). Berkowitz (1987) proposes that community work does not meet the needs of the soul, our deepest personal needs that stir us to action. The focus on progress in community thinking has given way to sustainability because of the persistence of social problems and stagnation of participation. Berkowitz (1987) proposes that three ways to sustain our communities and ourselves in this work, through the utilization of resources, strengthening social support, and self-actualizing needs. He suggests that we need to pay attention to the role of celebrations and festivity, and that these are sorely undervalued in American life. While Berkowitz is speaking directly to community psychologists, it is easy to see how the same principles would apply to activists who are not only doing the hard work in communities, but in the national context as well. We have yet to know if and how activists’ “deeper needs” are being met in their work. While there are currently no studies around fun and revelry as a sustaining factor for activism, there is a small, but emerging, line of research has shown that humor can influence individual activists to avoid burn out (see Branagan, 2007; Gouin, 2004; Kutz-Flamembaum, 2014; Shepard, 2011 for examples.)

The literature shows evidence of contextual factors being instrumental in facilitating and supporting participation. The remainder of this section will review the
scant evidence on the external factors that sustain participation in activism in the long-term. Many of the studies conducted on sustained participation have been correlational, quantitative studies. To understand the lived experiences of participants, more qualitative data is needed.

**Section III: Intersectionality**

**The Women’s Movement**

This study will focus in particular on sustained participation within local manifestations of the Women’s Movement. The Women’s Movement in the United States is typically thought of as occurring in a series of “waves,” with the first wave denoting the activism related to women’s right to vote in 1920, the second wave as the activism of the 1950s-70s, with a focus on sexual freedom, the expansion of women’s roles outside of the home, and the Equal Rights Amendment. The third wave of feminism began to emerge in the late 1980s-1990s and began to adopt intersectional frameworks, rather than an equity framework. The waves metaphor has been attributed more to historians than activists, with the first mention of the terminology having been used in a New York Times magazine article in 1968 (Dicker, 2016). The metaphor has since been adopted by feminism as a representation of the ebb and flow of social change, channeling both progressive movement and backlash from the larger culture.

The third wave of feminism represents a backlash to mainstream feminism, and the conception that women’s issues are only white, middle-class women’s issues (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000). This study focuses in largely on those tensions, with a spotlight on current feminist movement through the lens of intersectionality.
Intersectionality

van Stekelenberg and Klandersman (2017) have pointed to the lack of research on multiple group identities and the role they play in the formation of collective identity within social movements. But while the authors point to the concept of multiple group identities, they stop short of discussing it as an intersectional construct, relying more on information about how people use their multiple identities as members of different organizations rather than the politicized identity categories of gender, race, class, etc. When he does consider these identities, they are treated individually, and not as intersecting or intertwined in ways that are revealing and salient for collective action (Klandersman & Simon, 2001). In this sense, collective action and citizen participation theories have yet to embrace intersectionality as integral to understanding why people participate in social movements and how their participation is sustained.

Intersectionality was born out of Black feminist thought as a response to both mainstream feminist and antiracist movements. While multiple works by Angela Davis and Audre Lorde throughout the 1980s referred to the interconnectedness between systems of oppression, intersectionality theory is attributed to an article by legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 critiquing dominant theories of feminism and anti-racism. Crenshaw (1989) charged that feminism and anti-racist efforts often fail to notice the differences within oppressed groups to best achieve liberation. Race and gender are treated as either/or categories whereby a person is either Black OR a woman, but cannot be both in meaningful ways at the same time. Furthermore, race, gender, class, sexuality, and other identities are not merely additive, but identities intersect in ways that are greater than the sum of their parts. Collins (2000) refers to intersectionality as the
intersecting nature of multiple oppressions, specifically calling to the ways that gender and race intersect to doubly oppress Black women in the United States.

**Intersectionality in Psychology**

Feminist psychologists have also begun to address and use intersectionality in their work. Unfortunately, much of that work has addressed the intersection of social identities, while ignoring the larger systems of domination in which they are couched (Rosenthal, 2016). This is not surprising considering most subfields of psychology focus on individuals, not on the contexts and power structures in which people live and work. Rosenthal (2016) has called on feminist psychologists and the field of psychology more broadly to begin to understand intersectionality beyond identity work.

Community psychology has yet to embed intersectional theory and thinking into the way we conduct our work with diverse groups. While there are exceptions within our field (see Angelique, 2012), and there have been past calls for inclusion (Mulvey, 1988) community psychologists have largely been guilty of reproducing the status quo by treating identities as separate categories without understanding the compounding and differential nature that multiple identities have on women’s experiences. As a field committed to social justice, community psychology would do well to understand and include intersectionality in our critiques of systems of domination and our work with community groups.

**Intersectionality and Participation**

Research has shown that one of the main factors in sustained involvement in social movements is identifying with the movement’s mission, actions, and people involved (Pacely, Oswald, Hardesty, 2014). But as stated previously, the research on
sustained participation, and even more so the contexts that sustain participation, is sparse. Without more qualitative data, it is still unknown if other identity factors play a role in sustained participation, for example, do women of color identify with the women’s movement as much as white women? In what contexts and spaces? And while studies show that identifying as a feminist is paramount to participating in collective action, we must ask, whose feminism?

The inclusion of people’s multiple, intersecting identities in understanding participation is further evidence of the politicization of the personal, which has been part of the feminist mantra since the 1960s. It provides an understanding that our identities are couched within larger systems of power that help to guide the ways in which we interact with our environments, and the ways in which our environments interact with us. Feminism is far from just being a White identity as Black women participate in feminist activism at equal levels (White, 2006), and intersectionality theory directly challenges that notion. Curtin, Kende, and Kende (2016) addressed intersectionality in collective action by interviewing activists about their multiple intersecting identities in terms of how it predicted their involvement in activism. They found that people simultaneously attend to both their advantaged and disadvantaged identities, and that acknowledging and dealing with their own group discrimination, they sought out other causes as allies. One possible way of attending to multiple intersecting identities in collective action work is through the formation of coalitions that directly address differences within the larger group and explicitly deal with inherent power differentials (Wiley & Bikmen, 2012).

Intersectionality is not just personal identity construct, but a structural one as well (Collins, 2000). Our multiple, intersecting identities and oppressions are shaped by larger
systems of domination. Our consciousness of these identities, and our affinity for them, are shaped similarly. Collective action and participation theories have largely treated social identity as individual variables without attending to the ways in which power influences and shapes identity as social constructs. To call intersectionality merely an identity construct misses out on the larger processes at work in determining the meanings of these identities in how they interact to form our social locations. Social identities are interwoven with context, and as people who bear multiple social identities, and multiple oppressions laden with their own unique traumas, we are part of a constant social dialectic with society at large.

**An Intersectional, Contextual Theory of Sustained Participation**

Work inside of social science fields on participation has considered context as important in understanding the reasons why people participate and why they continue to participate in activism and other community activities. Also, research in these same fields has shown how vital identity (collective identity, identification with the movement, intersectionality) is to participation. What continues to be elusive is the link between intersectionality, context, and power that drives activists. Intersectionality works as a kind of “meta-context” to understanding the ways that identity is both an individual and a structural phenomenon. Our intersectional identities play a large role in how we interact with and view the world around us. In addition, multiple oppressions work to preclude participation from some people and not others. Social movement theorists have often looked to identity as a key factor for involvement, but not in the ways our personal identities interact with the notion of collective identity, how interlocking systems of
oppression can be antithetical to the idea of collective social change, or how the concept of collective identity is potentially limiting for large swaths of people.

An intersectional, contextual view of sustained participation will critique and amend social movement theories by bringing in a community psychology lens to understand how the contexts of women’s lives facilitate or inhibit their further involvement. From family obligations to larger power structures, there is much that still needs to be understood about how our personal and structural identities create and sustain social movements, and more importantly larger social change.
Ch. 3 Methodology

Qualitative methods have begun to be used more pervasively in community psychology research. While context continues to be one of the driving factors for community psychologists, we have been guilty of using acontextual methods to study community issues (Luke, 2005). Qualitative methodologies allow researchers to see across time and understand the richness of stories in a way that quantitative methodology cannot do. The researcher, in an interpretative capacity, is as much a part of the research as her participants. Good qualitative data necessitates forming a relationship between researcher and participant in a way that does not just use participants for their demographics or single-line answers to questionnaires. Instead, shared construction of meaning leads to greater understanding of multiple levels of context (King-Westergaard & Kelly, 1990). Luke (2005) has called for the utilization of contextual methodologies in community psychologists. Though we highlight the importance of context in our research and practice, as a field we still tend to use traditional acontextual methods to capture context. Qualitative analysis is one way of diving deeper into participants’ lived experiences. This study will use a feminist grounded theory approach to understand the process of sustained participation in women’s activism.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory’s main premise is in the name itself, the construction of theory that is grounded in data. While all qualitative research is indeed grounded in data, grounded theory has unique qualities that sets the methodology apart from other qualitative procedures. First and foremost, a grounded theory study must culminate in a theory derived from the actual words of participants. Glaser & Strauss (1967) developed
this methodology to combat what they saw as “armchair theorizing,” instead proposing a process for researchers to keep their findings as close as possible to what their participants are saying. In addition to theory development, data is analyzed in grounded theory using constant comparison (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Constant comparison is the process of looking at similarities and differences in data and grouping based on these factors to create concepts, which are then further grouped together to create categories or themes. These themes are then developed further to create core categories which leads to theory development. Grounded theory is an iterative process, whereby data collection and analysis happen continually throughout the research project. The iterative nature of grounded theory also influences its focus on process within the research questions. In this way, grounded theory is concerned with action and movement within the research itself, and puts emphasis on processes in which participants are engaged (Cresswell, 2012).

Grounded theory comes from the theoretical world of pragmatism and symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is focused on the meanings people attribute to their experiences, and that these meanings are derived through social interaction with people and the larger social world (Wuest, 1995.) The theory emphasizes the dynamic nature of these social interactions and operates under the assumption that the world is not static or rigidly structural.

While grounded theory can be argued to have been created from a positivist epistemology (Cresswell, 2012), Charmaz (2014) introduced constructivist grounded theory as a different way of understanding the researcher’s role. In constructivist grounded theory, theory does not “emerge” from the data, but instead is constructed through our interactions with participants and settings. In this way, the researcher is
considered part of the world with our participants and cannot be extricated from the work she constructs with her participants. Charmaz (2014) also emphasizes action; eschewing the rhetoric of emergent data from Glaser and Strauss’s positivist grounded theory.

This focus on process, as I look across time at both initial and sustained participation, is one of the reasons grounded theory is used for this project. In addition, because I approach my work through a feminist lens, I use a constructivist grounded theory, understanding that my role as researcher is to work with my participants to better illuminate the process of sustained participation. I elaborate more on approaching research through a feminist lens below.

**Feminist Approach**

There is no one feminist method (Harding, 1987; Riger, 1992). But while there may be multiple ways of conducting feminist research, approaching research from a feminist perspective generally consists of a few characteristics. First and foremost, women’s voices are centered in feminist research. Women can be “knowers” and their experiences are legitimate sources of knowledge (Wuest, 1995). Historically, psychological research has focused on men and their experiences within controlled settings. Feminist research focuses primarily on women’s lived experiences. Second, feminist research should include intersectional analyses in that women’s multiple intersecting experiences are viewed as complex parts of their identities, not as separate categories to be pieced out. Feminist research privileges contextual influences (Campbell & Bunting, 1991). Third, a feminist approach recognizes that the diversity of methods and methodologies only enriches the research literature. Reinharz (1992) describes how her seminal text, *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, adds her voice to the literature
and is not meant to be the authority about what method and methodology in which to subscribe. While the term “compassion” has not explicitly been used to describe this work, taking a compassionate approach to others’ work is the key to understanding and critiquing research.

While I identify as a feminist, in terms of my research, I identify more specifically as a feminist community psychologist. Feminist community psychology integrates feminist theory with community psychology principles. Mulvey (1988) was the first to call for an explicitly feminist lens within community psychology, outlining the similarities between the two orientations, particularly the focus on the personal as political. Both feminist theory and community psychology seek to understand context and move away from internal process explanations for human behavior. Instead the understanding is that contexts, especially those rooted in societal power, shape human interaction and more generally, the human condition. Feminist community psychologists have pushed the field to a greater, more nuanced understanding of topics like empowerment (Riger, 1993) and class (Angelite, 2012). Feminist community psychology calls not just for greater focus on women’s issues, but also a focus on process. For example, Mulvey (1988) suggests in the classroom moving away from pure lecture-based classes to make sure personal experiences are incorporated as learning tools. But while feminism has begun to influence small parts of the community psychology literature, we still lack an explicitly intersectional feminist lens in the field (Angelite, 2012).

Some scholars have addressed the integration of feminist theory with grounded theory. Wuest (1995) describes how both feminist and grounded theory are concerned
with understanding multiple realities and that participants (women) are the experts on their own experiences. Feminists focus on lived experiences, and grounded theory with its emphasis on theory that is grounded in participants’ realities, is a manifestation of that focus. In both, it is also understood that the researcher cannot be separated out from their projects. Therefore, reflexive practice is important for both feminist research and grounded theory.

**Reflexivity.** As a feminist community psychologist, I believe that it is important for me to outline my own experiences and connection to this dissertation work. Reflexivity has been defined as the “self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious *analytical* scrutiny of the self as researcher” (England, 1994, p. 82). Kim England (1994) stresses the importance of understanding reflexivity as not merely a form of navel-gazing, but as a methodological process in itself that can illuminate new ideas and hypotheses, as well as a way to confront researcher bias and continually process the interactions between researcher and participant. A reflexive stance confronts head on the positivist notion of observational distance from research “subjects” and begins to integrate the researcher back in as a less than objective figure.

As a United States-born, white, cis-gendered, middle-class, able-bodied, post-graduate educated woman, I understand that my life experiences are very different from some of my participants. While I have always been drawn to and engaged with feminist activism in different forms, I operate from a place of privilege knowing that I do not stand to lose the most from oppressive and discriminatory policy changes, or from violence in my safe, guarded apartment complex community. I came to community members from a private university, a relationship which is fraught with tension and
exploitation in many communities. It is impossible to disentangle these identities from my work, but in confronting them and being honest about my positionality, I opened myself to my participants in an honest and revealing way.

**Participant Recruitment.** Participants of this study were recruited through my personal and professional work with the Femme Agenda Coalition, Women’s Fund Miami-Dade, and theoretical sampling. I was introduced the Femme Agenda Coalition through work with the Women’s Fund in Miami-Dade County and began attending meetings in May 2017. As I began to get more involved with the organization, I thought about how I could include them in my dissertation work. At the monthly Femme Agenda meeting in November 2017 I told members about my dissertation study to gauge interest in participation. In addition to monthly meetings, I attended Femme Agenda events at the Miami Worker’s Center to find participants. The Gender Justice Organizer, who also facilitates Femme Agenda, served as a key contact for recruiting participants. Femme Agenda and The Women’s Fund served as starting points for data collection and sampling, but as my study continued, I began to reach out to women associated with other organizations. Theoretical sampling was also used to contact other women activists in Miami-Dade County to ensure that diverse voices were represented in this grounded theory.

Theoretical sampling is “the gathering of data based on analysis of previous data.” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 69). As stated, grounded theory is an iterative process and does not follow a linear pattern of data collection to analysis. In this study, because of my focus on intersectionality and various contexts inside and outside the Women’s Movement, it was important to sample a diverse, array of voices that can help to enrich
the grounded theory. Theoretical sampling led me to find women who had left certain organizations and activist spaces within the feminist movement to understand not just the factors that sustain participation, but also those that complicate involvement.

**Miami Context.** As stated in the literature review, Miami-Dade County has faced both unique and common challenges when it comes to equity issues and activism. For example, Miami has consistently held the honor of being one of the least civically-engaged communities in the United States (National Conference on Citizenship, 2010). This coupled with the historical discrimination and racism that has manifested in the destruction of Historically Black communities (Mohl, 1993) has fractured communities throughout the County. While institutionalized racism and community development is by no means unique to Miami, the influx of immigrants from the Caribbean and Latin American countries has helped the city and county to develop an identity all its own.

The various activist groups that do exist in Miami were all mainly established in the 1990s and 2000s. Today, Miami has developed a more stable nonprofit and activism infrastructure, though organizations are not without their growing pains. Two organizations have been instrumental in helping me recruit participants for this study. They are described below.

**Femme Agenda.** The Femme Agenda Coalition, a program through the Miami Worker’s Center, was born out of a summit on gender economic justice at the Center in October 2016. The aim of the coalition is to fight against gender oppression as it manifests in other social justice issues in Miami, particularly the feminization of poverty. The Femme Agenda Coalition has been instrumental in planning events such as The March for Black Women and numerous monthly gatherings for domestic workers,
Femme Saturdays, and Women’s Circles that act as consciousness-raising meetings. In addition to these events, the Coalition aims to meet once a month to discuss strategies and events for raising awareness and combatting gendered oppression in Miami.

**The Women’s Fund - Miami-Dade County.** The Women’s Fund of Miami-Dade County has served as a funder for gender-oriented organizations and programs throughout the County. The organization has provided over $4 million in support to various community organizations for the past 25 years. In addition to their role as community grant-makers, the organization is currently undertaking a project to create gender pay equity throughout Miami-Dade County by partnering with organizations and businesses to better document wages.

**Participants**

Nine women involved in activism on women’s issues in Miami-Dade County participated in this study. Participants’ level and type of involvement in activism varied, with some engaged through their work at non-profit organizations and others devoting their time to unpaid activism full-time. Women also represented different races, sexualities, and ethnicities. Before participating in interviews, women filled out an open-ended demographics questionnaire where they were asked to disclose their race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability level, whether or not they were an immigrant, and first language. In addition, women could add any other salient identities in an open-ended section at the end that they wanted me to know about. (see Appendix B for questionnaire). Table 3 below shows the breakdown of participant identities.
Table 3.  
*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>White Non-Hispanic, Heterosexual, able-Bodied, English as a first language; she also wanted me to know that she was once disabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Black African-American, Heterosexual, described her physical ability as “strong”, English as a first language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Black Jamaican, Queer, able-bodied, English as a first language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>White Caucasian Female, Queer, age-related limitations, English as a first language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Black Haitian ciswoman, Pansexual/queer, able-bodied, First language Haitian creole, immigrant. She also wanted me to know that she is from a poor socioeconomic background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>Mestiza Latina, Straight, Physical ability “ok”, Spanish as a first language, immigrant; she also wanted me to know that she identified as a “mama”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Indigenous/Latina, Spanish as a first language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>Black Caribbean-American/African-American, Queer, able-bodied, English as a first language; she also wanted me to know that she is the child of immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>Caucasian/White Jewish American, Heterosexual, able-bodied, English as a first language; she also wanted me to know that she is over 65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Target participants were women involved in activism on women’s issues in Miami-Dade County. Participants were either doing this work voluntarily or through employment, but their activism was intentional, meaning they pursue this work for reasons related to social justice. Inclusionary criteria also included that women must be over the age of 18, must have been involved in activism for at least 1 year prior to data collection, and specifically must have been involved in activism within Miami-Dade County. Participants’ activism occurred at multiple levels of analysis including local neighborhood activism all the way to activism on national women’s issues. Because of my own language limitations, participants had to be able to speak English, even if their first language was not English. Exclusionary criteria included women who were involved in activism that did not focus on women’s issues.
Data Collection

Data was collected as individual interviews with women activists. Participants were read the informed consent and asked to verbally agree or disagree to being interviewed. Interviews ranged from 35 minutes to an hour and a half depending on the participant and how much they wanted to say about their experiences. Though I had prepared a loose interview protocol to prompt our conversations, participants were able to guide the discussion to wherever they believed was relevant. Overall, interviews were conversational and semi-structured with guiding questions to help keep the conversation on track. If participants were telling a particularly important story, I did not interrupt, instead asking clarifying questions as were appropriate.

Interviews were held in the location of the participant’s choosing. This was to ensure that participants feel comfortable, as we will be discussing topics that might bring up traumatic past experiences. I frequently met participants at coffee shops and their offices or open spaces at local non-profits. All interviews were recorded on my personal voice recorder with participant permission. Participants were told they could have copies of the transcriptions of these interviews if they so wished.

In addition to the interviews, participants were given a questionnaire assessing demographics, as well as the length of time they have spent doing activist work. Because I am addressing the intersectionality of identities as they inform activist work, demographic data is important information to collect. In the literature review, I addressed how studies have often left out key demographics or have used a convenience sample of college students to study participation.
Grounded theorists suggest that in data collection the research should seek thick description. This means engaging in methods such as taking extensive field notes and obtaining detailed narratives from intensive interviews with participants (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) states that data collection methods must come from the research questions and not vice versa. Adhering to this principle, I conducted intensive interviews because my questions about identity and contexts in sustained activism direct me towards having a deep understanding of women’s lived past and present experiences. In addition, data collection and data analysis are a continual, iterative process and throughout this research project I engaged in building upon each participant’s words.

**Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed using the *Atlas.ti* qualitative data analysis software. In line with grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014), analysis consisted of three layers: initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding. This coding process led me to two organizing conceptual categories related to the topics outlined in my literature review on citizen participation, context, and intersectionality.

While I utilized specific coding techniques from both Corbin & Strauss (2014) and Charmaz (2014), Charmaz’s focus on a constructivist grounded theory guided my analytical thinking.

The chart included below shows the movement from open coding to theoretical coding and the creation, ultimately of core categories that form the basis of the grounded theory of women’s sustained participation in activism.
Initial Coding. Initial coding, also referred to as open coding, is the first step in grounded theory analysis. In this stage, participants’ words were given names that categorize and summarize their meaning. Initial coding goes one step beyond the transcription to begin sorting statements into analyzable pieces of data (Charmaz, 2014). Initial coding requires close reading of the data to ensure that the researcher is not yet interpreting, but naming and summarizing. According to Charmaz (2014), initial coding should be “simple, direct, and spontaneous” (p. 113). She also notes that researchers are constructing codes and that language matters in how we communicate these codes to both our participants and readers. Creating codes that reflect action is also important to this active, constructive process.

Charmaz (2014) comes to grounded theory from the perspective that the researcher is not an empty vessel that can rid herself of preconceived notions of the world. In this way, she argues that researchers should adopt sensitizing concepts as starting points for analysis. She points specifically to social justice research thinking in terms of power and oppression, two sensitizing concepts that help guide my own thinking in this project. Sensitizing concepts do not prescribe what the research will find, but
instead orient the researcher to a specific way of approaching their work. If a sensitizing concept does not reflect in the data, it can be dropped in favor of more appropriate concepts.

In this study, I followed a line-by-line coding process where I coded each line of the data in ways that reflect action. While it may seem tedious, line-by-line coding allowed me to confront my assumptions about the data in a way that thematic coding does not. Charmaz (2014) suggests that line-by-line coding can help the researcher “identify implicit concerns as well as explicit statements.” (p. 125).

Focused Coding. Focused coding is the stage of grounded theory where constant comparison takes place (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This means a few things for data analysis. First, focused coding integrates initial codes into categories for easier synthesis. This entails making decisions around which codes best fit together. In addition, focused coding helps to move the research into a more theoretical direction. This stage involves finding the links between initial codes and comparing them to see how these codes both account for the data and can be brought together in more powerful and meaningful ways. In my coding process, I utilized focused coding in a nonlinear way, meaning that subsequent interviews helped to illuminate some of my initial codes in ways that helped me integrate codes within and between interviews.

My analysis resulted in eleven categories. These categories are listed in the above chart. Categories were then organized to created core categories or “themes” that further refined and narrowed codes into a grounded theory.

Theoretical Coding. Theoretical coding is the final stage of the data analysis process where the researcher creates core concepts that lead to the construction of a
grounded theory. Core concepts are the main themes of a research study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). They are abstract enough to be able to explain what is going on with participants within a research study. These concepts should not be forced, but must logically follow initial and focused coding. Theoretical codes reintegrate the categories that have been pieced apart in the previous coding stages (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical coding is a strategy to gain clarity towards the creation of a grounded theory.

I use theoretical coding in this study to create core concepts that integrate intersectionality and sustained participation. My analysis resulted in three major themes that form two core categories of this study. These are “becoming socially conscious through experience,” “defining identity,” and “managing multidimensional relationships.” While “becoming socially conscious through experience” is elevated to one core category, the dynamic between defining identity and managing multidimensional relationships forms the other. While discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4, two core categories were most appropriate to form the grounded theory because participants talked about initial participation and sustained participation as two related, but distinct processes.

**Memoing.** Memoing is the process of recording thoughts and insights related to data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The process is different from the collection of field notes in that they solely represent analysis, and are not pieces of data that have been jotted down during an observation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Memoing is an important research task that helps researchers formulate theory by keeping track of notes, thoughts, and reflections throughout the process. I utilized memos throughout the coding process to think through the theoretical implications of my interviews with participants.
Though I did not face any major methodological issues, memoing helped me to keep track of my personal process and emotions as I tended to participants’ words. In this way, memoing is also a way to engage in a reflexive process. Koch and Harrington (1998) have suggested keeping a reflexive journal throughout the research process, and my memos for this study served the dual purpose of keeping track and asking questions of the data, and understanding my positionality throughout as a middle-class White woman.

Assessing Study Quality

It is equally important in qualitative research as it is in quantitative research to be able to assess that one’s findings are “good.” This means that the study is generally trustworthy, that an outside person would find the process logical and easy to follow and understand why the qualitative researcher made certain decisions. Because qualitative research is often not conducted from a positivist epistemology, the standards of validity and reliability would not be appropriate judging criteria for the trustworthiness of qualitative study. Because I operate from a constructivist epistemology and believe that multiple “truths” can be held at the same time, the use of other criteria is more useful. An alternative framework for judging the soundness of qualitative research was developed in order to assess overall quality. Typically this means assessing a qualitative study on the basis of its (1) credibility, (2) dependability, (3) confirmability, and (4) transferability. (Lincoln & Guba, 1995; Shenton, 2004). In addition to these four standards for quality, Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) propose a fifth criterion, action orientation, that I also attended to in this study. As a community psychologist, I am committed not only to
understanding the theoretical underpinnings of community life, but also to the real-world application of that research towards the community good.

**Credibility.** Credibility is perhaps the most important criteria for trustworthiness for qualitative studies. Credibility is sometimes referred to as external reliability, borrowing from terminology in quantitative research (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013), though it is most similar to the quantitative concept of internal validity (Shenton, 2004). Credibility refers to how well the research sticks to participants’ realities. My use of a grounded theory methodology helps to establish the credibility of the findings, because inherent in grounded theory is the intention to stick closely to the data and participant voices. Coding is first and foremost based on the actual words participants use first, before bringing together those codes into more intricately linked selective codes. In addition to the methodology choice, Shenton (2004) suggests making established connections with participants or organizations before data collection occurs. In terms of this criterion, I have been working with The Women’s Fund, attending meetings with the Femme Agenda coalition since May 2017, and have volunteered with the host organization, the Miami Worker’s Center, as well.

Two other important ways I establish credibility is through member checking and triangulation. Member checking gives participants a chance to see how I am making sense of what they say in interviews and correct or add clarification as they believe is needed. I checked back with participants as I began the coding process via email and one in-person meeting with a participant. Equally as important to member checking for this study is the use of triangulation. Triangulation is the assumption that multiple sources can more acutely help researchers understand a phenomenon or process. While triangulation
is often discussed in terms of the use of multiple different data collection methods (interviews, observation, focus groups), it can also include triangulation of different data sources, multiple analysts, or multiple theories (Patton, 1999). In this study, I addressed the issue of triangulation by using different data sources at different time points. To do this, I asked participants to see if and how their perspectives have changed during the course of the study.

**Dependability.** Dependability is the qualitative corollary to reliability, that under the same research circumstances, the work could be repeated and attain similar results. Qualitative research, with its focus on the in-depth analysis of specific cases cannot be held up to these same standards. Instead, dependability asks the researcher to include detailed descriptions of the processes within the study, so to allow other researchers to understand and judge the extent to which the research adhered to good and ethical research standards. In this sense, my study adheres to these standards of practice and include in-depth detail of the data collection and analysis. This in-depth detailing is a form of thick description, describing the process in sufficient enough detail to allow the reader to understand explicitly what was done (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I also utilized memoing, the practice in grounded theory of the researcher recording their own thoughts and experiences as the research takes place, an iterative form of analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Memoing acted as a way to stay organized and detail the “minutiae of what was done in the field” (Shenton, 2004, p.72).

**Confirmability.** Complete objectivity is an impossible research standard. Even more so, it may not even be an appropriate aspirational goal. Regardless, it is important for the researcher to take steps to assure that they equip their participants and readers
with the knowledge of their own biases and perspectives on issues related to their studies.

In this sense, confirmability is the process of making sure “that the work’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher.” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). One way to address issues of confirmability is through engaging in a reflexive process whereby the researcher lays bare their own assumptions, life experiences, and beliefs that may affect their work. Because this study operates under a feminist perspective, reflexivity is an important part of that work. Earlier in the methodology I have included a reflexivity section, and continued to engage with and check my own biases throughout the study process. In addition, I also engaged in peer debriefing throughout the data analysis stage. Other colleagues in my field, as well as in education, looked at how I am making sense of the data to make sure I am thinking through all aspects of the data without just confirming my own biases.

**Transferability.** Transferability is analogous to the quantitative measure of external validity. The basic question is, how transferable are these findings to other contexts? (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). Qualitative research is not as invested in the generalizability of findings as quantitative research. It is not an aim of these types of studies. Nevertheless, it is valuable to see how the concepts developed in grounded theory can hold sway in other settings. Like dependability, I address transferability through the use of thick description so the reader will be able to ascertain how those methods could be reproduced in other contexts.

**Action orientation.** While not originally included in the criteria for a sound research study by Lincoln and Guba (1985), utilizing an action orientation can be seen as
moving qualitative research even more in line with community psychology principles and values. An action orientation addresses what the study actually does for participants and allows the participants to also have access to the findings. Feminist research should not use participants for their stories, instead research should be in service of its participants. Research in general is often criticized as being filled with jargon and inaccessible to communities outside of the ivory tower of academia.

Similar to an action orientation is the concept of “catalytic validity” (Lather, 1986) that social change researchers can use to assess their work. Catalytic validity works well for openly ideological, values-driven research like the feminist perspective where research is intended to move participants towards critical consciousness. Both action orientation and catalytic validity are addressed through this study. First and foremost, I worked to ensure that the study findings are accessible to the activists with whom I work through the use of non-academic language when relaying results. In addition, this study’s findings can be used to inform actionable steps that social movement organizations at all levels of analysis can utilize to ensure sustainable and equitable membership. In my discussion, I include a section in my discussion that outlines these research-informed actions for activist communities.

Summary

This study used a feminist grounded theory methodology to explore women’s experiences in activism and the contextual factors that sustain participation in the feminist movement. Using Charmaz’s (2014) constructionist methodology, theory was constructed through interviews with women in different stages of their activism throughout Miami-Dade County. The next chapter outlines the contextual model
constructed from these interviews and highlights the different contexts that influence initial and sustained participation, as well as the ways that women’s multiple intersecting identities and oppressions play a role in how they sustain within various feminist movement spaces.
Chapter 4: Results

This chapter will explain the process from initial participation to sustained participation for women involved in feminist social justice movements. I will tell the story of women’s experiences by guiding readers through the process that women themselves have described in their journeys from initial to sustained participation. I will move through the different contextual levels, explaining the different factors at each level that women pointed to as having an effect on their continued participation in social justice movements.

This grounded theory of women’s sustained participation in activism reflects the process that women go through from initial participation to sustained participation in activism within the context of Miami-Dade County Florida and the larger sociopolitical context of the United States. While initial participation and sustained participation are linked, women have talked about them as related but distinct processes. Because of this, the grounded theory contains two core categories. The core category of initial participation is *becoming socially conscious through experience* while the core category of sustained participation is *the dynamic between managing multidimensional relationships and defining identity*. A few different processes that are at times frustrating and at times healing for women in feminist movement work exist in that dynamic between managing multidimensional relationships and defining identity. Each of these processes exists within different contexts: at the individual level, within movement spaces and organizations, and within the community. All of these processes are couched in the larger sociopolitical context where social power plays a role in how women are
able to interact within relationships, movement spaces, and community contexts. (See model below).

This theoretical model of sustained participation also shows the relationship between different contexts. As women become engaged in social movement work, two main influences, the formation of values through relationships and mobilizing episodes, lead women to start questioning their environments and become socially conscious. This social consciousness influences women to become involved in activist groups. Women then must strike a balance between how they manage their relationships and define themselves, both in terms of their values and their social identities. The arrows in the sustained participation section of the model represent the interaction between different contexts and the negotiation between identity and relationships within those spaces. The dynamic between managing relationships and defining identities also influences the environments around them.

Figure 2. Theoretical model of sustained participation in activism
Each of these research questions is addressed through this model of participation. The contextual factors that affect sustained participation are shown within various levels of analysis below. The core category of the dynamic of managing multidimensional relationships and defining identity addresses the second research question on the dynamic between context and identity. Each of these answers will be explained in greater detail throughout the chapter.

Three overarching themes were constructed from interviews with women activists. The chart below, introduced in Chapter 3, shows the breakdown of each of these themes with the categories that will be discussed for the remainder of this chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Open Codes</th>
<th>Becoming socially conscious through experience</th>
<th>Defining identity</th>
<th>Managing multidimensional relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Categories/Dimensions</td>
<td>Mobilizing episodes</td>
<td>Defining identity in terms of social identities</td>
<td>Recreating oppression in movement work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attending community events</td>
<td>Defining identity in terms of values</td>
<td>Having “deep” relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forming values through relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td>Engaging in emotional labor</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling marginalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-care/healing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Hurt people hurt people”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Data analysis chart.

**Initial Participation**

*I feel like one major thing is like once you get woke, or once you have your eyes open to what's going on, you can't go back. There's no way you can go back to a corporate job and work for these people and make a bunch of money and not be wondering where's this money coming from? What am I exploiting to be able to get this? There's no way you can go back.* [Participant 8]

When it comes to initial participation in activism, participants across interviews discussed the different experiences it took for them to become socially conscious. For
these women, social consciousness is both the understanding of deeply rooted inequality and feeling a responsibility to act because of that understanding. Each woman discussed coming into consciousness to a degree by forming values through relationships and experiencing mobilizing episodes. Each of these categories is discussed in greater detail below.

**Forming Values through Relationships**

Women discussed learning and incorporating values of having a connection to the spiritual, something greater than oneself, helping others, and speaking against injustice as precursors to activism. Some of these values were instilled by relationships with family members. Participant 2, a Black woman raised in the Midwest, discussed how her grandmother was influential for her spiritual development, something that still guides much of her activism today. She goes on to describe her as:

> My nanny. Oh my gosh, Lady Bush. She was the end all and be all. Ever had issues, ever had problems, you went to Nanny and she directed you to the Word of God. That's why I'm so spiritual, biblically-sound. Any problem you ever had she never gave an answer, she said go to the Bible and read such and such and such and such. If you had any problems after that, come back and talk to me. So literally I lived my life knowing if there was anything wrong I could turn to this book and I would have an answer and it's helped me through all my drama (laughs), all my mess, all my mistakes, all my everything because the Word of God, that's always at my foundation. (Participant 2)

This participant’s nanny helped to guide her towards trusting the Bible, which has grounded her spiritually within activism. While family could serve as positive role models, not all participants agreed wholeheartedly with the values that came from their family members. Participant 6, a Mestizo Latina woman who was raised in Ecuador, in particular talked about how, though she disagrees with her mother on how to best arrive at societal change, her mother was always trying to help others:
So at the same time, for example, my mom was a very...and person full of solidarity. So from a very privileged place she was always taking us to the soup kitchen and trying to help people. I remember when I was little she brought in this homeless person from the street, which was a really dangerous thing to do by the way, but anyway (laughs). (Participant 6)

In reflecting back, she can see how her mother’s actions may have been dangerous, but also that her mother was so committed to helping others that she would welcome those in need into their family home. While Participant 6 differed from her mother in terms of larger societal values, her mother’s actions influenced her journey to becoming an activist. Family relationships were described as instilling contradictory values in some instances as well, leading some women to question what and why they were being raised in certain ways. Participant 8, a Black woman with Caribbean roots, points to how her pastor father raised her and her sister:

I tell my dad like even though we were raised in a household where children were supposed to be quiet and ladies do this thing this way, I was like you messed up when you also told us to defend ourselves and speak out and don’t be silent, so I'm like this is your fault because you told us this one thing and I heard the other thing, like no don't be silent (laughs). So it's like, that's, I mean my dad raised, there's two of us girls and he always wanted to raise us to, like he wanted to be able to provide for us so we wouldn't have to depend on any man. When I went off to college, before he would let me take my car to college he made me change a tire by myself in the driveway. (Participant 8)

In recalling her upbringing, she notes that it is this contradiction in values that led her to rebel against the notion that children were supposed to be quiet, and women were supposed to depend on men to protect them. In wanting to protect his own daughters, her father taught them life skills that would help them be more independent as they grew older. In saying that he “messed up” she implies that her father would have liked her to be more “ladylike” in a traditional sense, but that teaching her to speak out allowed her to question that notion.
In addition to family members, women pointed to mentors in their workplaces and communities that helped give them professional opportunities and model ways of living authentically. Participant 1, a White woman who has dealt with housing issues, points to a mentor of hers in the community who has supported her through serious illness and hardship:

*I look at the way my friend/sister/mentor...lives her life. The [Local Foundation] is her foundation. And what she has done as a very privileged person in many ways but someone who also has this very keen sense of understanding of human beings that I do not see often at all. We are very much aligned as people. It was the most beautiful blessing to come out of a crisis, I think, I probably ever experienced in my life is her presence in my life.* (Participant 1)

In using the word “aligned” she refers to the values that the two women share. Seeing these values reflected in someone else allowed her to know she is not alone. Participant 2, who had discussed her nanny earlier, went on to talk about professional mentors that provided her with opportunities to learn more about maternal health, an experience that led her to become more involved in research and later activism on behalf of youth in the court system.

*I was a part of that team that did that work and the two leaders, Doctor Austin out of Tampa and Gwen out of St. Pete, when I say integral in my learning and understanding the fight of maternal child health and just their years of knowledge and their years of just doing the work, um, and in how they just poured the work down, and me being young, a young nurse, you know, I'm just getting my feet wet and this whole entity allowed me to be a part of it, to be published now, like I'm published, like I was just like, dude! I'm published! Like, you know? And to go to the convention which was in Denver when, that was 2007-2008, and to present to these thousands and thousands of health care, public health practitioners was amazing.* [Participant 2]

Each of these experiences helped women to define their values and apply them to the way they see and interact in the world. This coupled with women’s mobilizing experiences led to a greater consciousness for activism.
Mobilizing Episodes

Each woman discussed their initial participation in terms of having one or more mobilizing episodes that started their journey to activism and understanding about inequality in the world. Mobilizing episodes can be defined as “something happening” where women feel the need to be active on feminist issues. Each is personal to women’s individual experiences, though there is overlap for some women in the types of influential experiences they name. Mobilizing episodes occurred in a number of spaces and included a number of different kinds of experiences, both positive and negative. Some women discussed having multiple mobilizing episodes at different points in their lives.

Sometimes mobilization occurred through the spaces in which they were a member where their experiences did not match up to the values of those spaces. In other instances it meant seeing discrimination up close and trying to understand why it existed. For some women it meant facing discrimination and trauma firsthand in ways where activism served as both a catharsis and a way to make change. And for some, they were mobilized because of attending an event or having an experience that validated their discomfort with the status quo and showed them that they were not alone.

Two women mentioned school as a mobilizing space where they were able to learn in distinct ways about inequality. For one Black participant, her experience at university exposed her to racial tension and violence at a predominantly white institution and set her on a path to look for connections to minority-related groups and activities.

She explains:

I went to a predominantly white institution. So being less than 1 percent African-American you had to hone in on everything minority to help you get through. So I think that’s kind of where the activism piece started, because we had some rough patches at Mizzou with racial tension, sexist things, rapes on campus, all those
things. It just drove me. Because I even had an incident in undergrad where a friend of mine, two African-American women were attacked on the parking lot. We were able to get away but it was just the fact that we, having that experience. (Participant 2)

For another woman who grew up in Ecuador, school was a space where she was able to learn about politically liberal philosophies that she was not exposed to at her home environment.

I was a little more aware of what was happening and what I was questioning, I started looking into groups or peers and teachers in my school, because even if I went to this private school there was some very commie teachers that have like super Marxist teachings. So I found sort of like the avenues to leave home a little more with my politics and to deal with everything that was happening. (Participant 6)

While school served as a space where some women learned about injustice, other women saw inequality in their communities or while traveling, and these experiences illuminated the universality of these types of problems. For Participants 1 and 7, both of whom grew up at least partially in Miami, seeing discrimination as children led them to start asking questions about race. For Participant 1, a White woman, this included an experience seeing race riots in Overtown, a historically Black neighborhood in Midtown Miami, in 1980. She describes this experience in this way:

I remember 1980 sitting in the backseat of my parents’ car, driving to synagogue here and we lived further south in the suburbs, the synagogue we belonged to was in this area and I was six in 1980 and Overtown was on fire...just burning, and learning about social justice in that way, and being a small child and seeing a fire and just thinking what is this? What’s going on? And learning at a very young age about race. In a few different ways, but that was one of the predominant events I remember as a young child as it concerns, I guess, community justice. (Participant 1)

For Participant 7, this experience included the culture shock of moving to South Florida as a teenager and seeing symbols of racism worn proudly by her classmates and realizing that this was further proof of the divide in local ethnic communities.
I was raised on stories of the conquest. My dad's Peruvian and part Indigenous and my mother is Argentinean. I think definitely experiences that I have, that you have in life kind of shape your perspective and your sense of justice and what's right and wrong in the world and when I was 15 we moved to South Florida to a school system where the racial divide was White and Latino and it was highly polarized and it was the first time I saw Confederate flags, people wearing them or on their cars and something that I thought was a relic of history. (Participant 7)

Participant 5, originally from Haiti, had a similar experience noticing the differences between her life in the United States and her family’s life in Haiti. She describes going back to the island to visit her family one summer.

... the first two weeks I was staying with one of aunts and she basically like lived in a shack and I was just kind of, I remember physically it was like a culture shock. I was like I don't understand how I have, I'm living a certain way in the United States and I have family back home, like you know, living in complete...I had never seen poverty like that before, you know?...It's like, I think when I came back from Haiti that summer, my awareness of that kind of stuff was heightened and I started noticing the same things in the United States, like poverty and why don't people get paid enough at their jobs, and also too realizing at home, for the first time realizing whoa, wow my family's not rich either. We're actually struggling too. So that's what really opened my eyes to it. Seeing that back home from my own family living in a country without even access to bare necessities and then coming home in the United States and seeing that it's a global issue. (Participant 5)

The shock of seeing her family’s situation in Haiti made her question the things she had taken for granted in the United States. The visit, as she states, “opened her eyes” to struggles at home. She began to be conscious of inequality and to see the similarities between her family in the States and her family abroad.

While some women pointed to experiences where they saw inequality, others talked about experiencing discrimination firsthand. Participant 8, a Black woman, talked about an experience where she faced overt racism and for the first time realized that these overt displays of prejudice still existed:

I remember when we were walking down the street, we're in our business casual walking to the courthouse and people are screaming at us out of their car. We don't have signs or anything, they're screaming at us out of their cars. And I remember
this one lady specifically said, um...she said, um something like, “we better not find y'all along or don't walk alone”...like it was bizarre. It was really, really bizarre...And that again, that was the first time that I was like you know, like, we're not post-racial. All this stuff is not gone. Even though it's like, you're Black and you know that you're Black and whatever, but it's like people still do this. People are still like this. (Participant 8)

Though she knew racism still existed, experiencing such random overt racism led her to conclude that racism is more deep rooted than she had previously realized. Other women’s mobilizing episodes came from discrimination that affected their professional lives. Two women in particular talked about their experience with gender discrimination in the workplace just as the second wave feminist movement had begun. Participant 4 talked specifically about her experience becoming pregnant while at her first job as a teacher in the 1960s, and the school policies that forced pregnant women to stop working:

I was teaching in a middle school and I became pregnant...I kept on teaching school and at some point I became aware that the policy was as soon as you became pregnant you were supposed to take a leave of absence. Because they didn't think that you should continue teaching when you were pregnant. This was in the early 60s... So that just made no sense to me so I just didn't tell anybody...And at that point that's when I found out it was just the personal policy of the person in the hierarchy who was in charge of this area of education in California. I thought personal policy? So this one person doesn't think women should work while they're pregnant? So all these women have to leave their jobs? (Participant 4)

Participant 9’s experience echoed this kind of professional gender discrimination as a catalyst, albeit this time more directly with invasive questions by a hiring manager about her fertility:

So I had an interview as a management trainee. It happened to be at a McDonald's. You know, not a job I really wanted, but we needed a job. And the man who was interviewing me said, "I'm not going to hire you, you're going to have babies and all my work to train you for anything will be useless." And I said, "I'm not going to have babies. I just told you, my husband is in law school for three years. I'm going to be the sole means of support. I'm going to be working, I'm not going to have babies. No man can come here and promise you that he will be here for three years, but I will be here for at least three years in Miami working." And he was like, "Well, what kind of birth control are you using?" [Participant 9]
Both participants 4 and 9, who are White women over the age of 65, spoke about these incidents as experiences that sparked anger and caused them to question the systems in which they lived. These experiences of discrimination were part of the catalyst for both of these women to act on injustice in their lives. Both of these women made a point to assure me that this was a “different era” and that this type of discrimination was not so blatant today. But even almost a half a century later, Participant 1 gave some perspective on the importance of continuing to share stories of trauma with a wider audience.

I’m an incest survivor. I survived thirteen years of incest. I’m a white, Jewish female from Miami and sometimes, although people are aware that incest can happen to anybody and does, that these things happen in the context of what is perceived to be great privilege, and again, in some ways it is, but in other ways it just doesn’t look the way people think it does. When I was in my early 20s I started speaking about my story publicly and now it’s been 20 years that I’ve been telling my story in different ways at different times for different reasons. It’s definitely something that when you can tell your story publicly it really indicates that you have started to find your voice in your experience and taking your power back…(Participant 1)

Sharing these personal stories of discrimination is a way for women to take ownership over their own experience as well as being a force for mobilization to social justice action. In addition, sharing stories also had the effect of showing women they were not alone in their experiences, that gender and racial prejudice was indeed alive. In this way, in realizing that the problem was greater than just the individual, these women then felt responsible to act. Participant 4, who had previously discussed being discriminated against for her pregnancy within her teaching job, succinctly describes the benefit of sharing stories and how that eventually led her and other women she shared with to action.

And, you know, it was a straight job from then (laughs) to everything I’ve done since then so being around other women who provided an opportunity to talk about
our, the similarities in our situations really solidified a lot of problems that, at that moment in time, that women thought were personal problems they had. They didn’t realize because there wasn’t this kind of encouraged and more formalized sharing of women’s stories with each other that these were things that other women, lots and lots and lots and lots of other women were dealing with too. So that provided people, provided women with a feeling that they were normal, first of all. That it wasn’t just an isolated problem, the problems that they were facing in their lives, and that organizing, doing something together about it, was the way to deal with this. (Participant 4)

Participant 7 echoed the relationship between action and feeling like one is not alone in their experiences:

I think when I came to Mujeres Unidas one of the reasons I knew it was where I wanted to be at the time it was kind of like a support group model where people were kind of coming in to share stories with one another and in that storytelling was where there a level of political analysis was forged, like this not alone, right? I’m not the only one experiencing this. Other people are experiencing this and it helped to create a kind of collective analysis and was channeled into immigrant rights’ work, anti-domestic violence, and women's rights work in a way that to me felt very organic. [Participant 7]

Participant 8 took the idea of these consciousness raising spaces further and talked about how smaller, personal conversations where people begin to question power and their own role in oppression can lead to participation on a larger scale.

I truly believe that, like, we’ve also said that revolution starts at the kitchen table. Those conversations at the kitchen table, those small conversations where we’re changing hearts and minds and getting more people to again dig into their power and find the place where they feel like they can’t stay silent anymore and they're right next to us in the streets or wherever we're at. Like that's what's gonna take us to the next level. [Participant 8]

Consciousness of social justice issues also came from attending events where the gravity of the consequences of political and social action were highlighted. One participant talked about attending one event where she realized that people die for their beliefs, race, and ethnicity.

I finally was able to get to an event and it was a May Day action. So it was a May Day action and it was planned by the Black Lives Matter Alliance Broward and it was, yeah, I was there and it was like, this is amazing, you know, we take things for
granted, you know our work day, all those things and I finally learned that at that moment that people actually die. People coordinated like you know labor, community activists, organizers, all type of folks willingly came together and some people died. A lot of people face police violence just for an 8 hour work day, so learning more about like May Day and all that stuff really is like what sparked me joining the movement. (Participant 3)

Sometimes the larger political context served as a mobilizing episode for women to shift gears within their movement work. For Participant 7 this meant leaving national work to focus on Florida, a key battleground state in federal election: Then I feel like it was really the election for this, this last election in 2016 that was a real catalyst for me to want to leave the national work and to be really focused on Florida. [Participant 7]

Taken together, the themes that represent initial participation show the process of waking up to injustice because of various contextual influences. Some women were influenced by their relationships with family and mentors where they learned values that drew them closer to larger social justice movement values of caring for others and standing up for themselves. In addition to relationships, each woman discussed how something happened that made them understand inequality in the world and that understanding this meant taking a responsibility to change it. Sometimes this meant seeing discrimination occurring to others and other times it meant experiencing discrimination themselves. Still other times it meant attending groups and events that made them realize that prejudice was not just an individual problem and they were not alone in their experiences.

**Sustained Participation**

And it's not even really the identity, it's the oppression that I experience in life because of who I am. So those definitely inform my politics and they're the passion behind why I care about certain issues because I'm directly affected by it, you know? (Participant 5)
I want to use a quote from the Combahee River Collective, and I might not say it exactly, but it's just a healthy love for myself and the liberation of all Black people. I think that I committed myself to doing that and I know that other people who really care about doing that and I'm in community with them is what keeps me in the work, you know? People who generally love me - they love me on my good days, on my ugly days, on my angry days, on my happy days. It’s knowing people who have a genuine love for me and the work and I’m doing it with them is what makes me so passionate...(Participant 3)

As women shift from initial participation to sustained participation in activism, two themes emerge. While mobilizing episodes and relationships are what bring women into activism, it is the dynamic between identity and managing their multidimensional relationships that keeps them involved. In this section I will first discuss the theme of defining identity, whereby women define themselves and who they are both in terms of their social identities and in terms of their values. Second, I will discuss the theme of managing multidimensional relationships and show how for women involved in activism, who they are, and how they continually experience oppression, shape their relationships with others both inside and outside movement contexts at the individual, movement, and community levels.

**Defining Identity**

Women talked about identity primarily in two different ways. First, women defined their identities in terms of their social identities like their race, gender, and class status. Two, women defined their identities in terms of their values. One of the questions I asked to all women interviewed, “what parts of who [they] are inform their activism.” Women’s answers to this question ended up illuminating how they saw themselves in relation to their activism, and the reasons why they act. When it came to social identities, participants who identified as women of color overwhelmingly mentioned their race and gender together when asked this question:
Yeah, so I'm a cis-het Black woman which means that I identify with what I was assigned at birth which was female. [Participant 3]

I think for sure definitely being Black, being a woman, and also being an immigrant, and also not just that, but being an immigrant from Haiti, a country that's even amongst immigrants a lot of times not embraced. I would say those top three things. [Participant 5]

I'm a Latina indigenous woman living in the United States so I think my race and my gender are things that I bring into my political work. [Participant 7]

Um, so I would say being a Black woman. Being a Black woman that was raised in like a Christian household where, I mean years ago, like, it's a very patriarchal family, my extended family. The man is the head of the household according to the Bible and he is the final say and all of that stuff like that. Informs me now because I don't want to go back [to a patriarchal family situation], no absolutely not. [Participant 8]

While each of these women responded to the “parts of who you are” question directly with these answers, Participant 2 stated her race and gender as motivation up front in response to my first interview prompt, to talk about her journey to activism:

I: So my first question for you is, tell me a little bit about some of your experiences in the past that led you to become involved in activism.

Being a Black woman in America (laughs).

For Participant 2, being a Black woman is reason enough to have to be an activist and regardless of other parts of her journey, it is always at the forefront. But though she talks about being a Black woman at multiple points throughout the interview, Participant 2 also feels she must choose one identity to prioritize. She says:

The persistence, the endurance, being a Black woman, it hurts because we have to relive so many things and then in the intersectionality of it, do I pick being Black over being a woman or do I pick being a woman over being Black? And at the end of the day, I'm Black first. And that's a reality that I've had to accept. And then I'm a woman second. And then I'm disabled third. And for whatever reason, the Black stands out. And so in the heightened-ness of everything activism which I've worked in, Black has always been the factor. No matter if it was youth, child, police, woman, always Black. Always minority. [Participant 2]
For each of the women of color participants, their race and gender together define who they are as activists. This is in contrast to the ways that White women responded to this prompt. When asked which parts of who they are inform their activism, White women responded with value traits such as “the person who has been wronged;” “I love a good fight;” and “I have seen inequality close up.” Participant 1 did discuss her race at another point during the interview to discuss trauma from her childhood and the ways that privilege can mask this kind of trauma. While quoted earlier, as a reminder, she discusses incest like this:

*I’m a white, Jewish female from Miami and sometimes, although people are aware that incest can happen to anybody and does, that these things happen in the context of what is perceived to be great privilege, and again, in some ways it is but in other ways it just doesn’t look the way people think it does.*

White women did seem to be aware of their privilege in the ways they discussed historical tensions between women of color and White women within feminist social movement spaces, but mostly stopped short in discussing their own race and discussing their Whiteness in any explicit ways as having an effect on their activism. This racial tension within movement spaces will be discussed in terms of relationships within movement contexts later on in this section.

While not all women discussed their social identities in detail, especially White women, most women interviewed talked about how their identities were defined in terms of their values. These values were represented as different strengths that women had that facilitated their continued involvement. Many times these strengths included a deeper sense of responsibility to justice or compassion for others around them. Besides the examples given above, participants gave other examples of how their identities are driven by their values. Participant 6 gave another specific example:
... [I] just have a very deep sense of responsibility and commitment to making, to
justice, to justice in general, right. And I think that what, I mean, as I say, my
upbringing, seeing all these horrifying biases, and it's like ways in which my
family and the people around me perpetuated these injustices in my country, that
was something from early on I was like, this needs to change so I try my hardest
to be part of the change. (Participant 6)

Participant 7, in addition to her social identities, described herself as:

... someone who's always had a deep sense of injustice and just like kindness and
compassion to other human beings. I actually like to listen more than I like to talk
so I enjoy building relationships which I think is so much a part of organizing and
activism. (Participant 7)

Here Participant 7 speaks about how these values of compassion and commitment to
social justice affect how she interacts in the world around her and builds relationships
with people both in and outside of movement spaces. For all women interviewed, these
relationships formed the backbone of what facilitated or hindered their continued
participation in feminist activism.

Managing Multidimensional Relationships

Women discussed different types of relationships with people in their lives, both
in and outside of feminist activism, that either sustain or hinder them, and many times,
are capable of both. Women in social movements are constantly negotiating these
relationships and discussed how the complexity of these relationships affected their
participation. Managing these relationships in and outside of movement spaces is
couched within the larger political and social contexts that govern our world. These
include movement spaces, county-wide politics and community spaces, as well as
national and social contexts. The opportunities and struggles of doing activism work
within non-profit contexts, which participants referred to as the “nonprofit industrial
complex,” also played a key role in how women negotiated who they are and their
relationships within these spaces. I will discuss these relationships within the different contexts that women discussed moving from individual and interpersonal, to within movement spaces, community context, and the larger sociopolitical contexts.

**Interpersonal context.** In the context of their relationships, women talked about different types of relationships and ways of relating to other people both inside and outside of movement spaces that facilitated and hinder their involvement. At the interpersonal level these include the categories: “deep” relationships, engaging in emotional labor, self-care/healing, and “hurt people hurt people.”

**Deep relationships.** One of the central ways women talked about their relationships in terms of their activism was in mentioning that “deep” relationships were key to their continued participation. Participant 3 defined deep relationships as:

> ...beyond planning an event together but is actually trying to figure out how you could know somebody on a fundamental level, their family life, how they grew up, you know. I think there’s just so many different things...like instead of just coming together and being like, “oh let's plan this event,” it's actually like “how are you doing right now? How is everything going with you?” Actually showing commitment to knowing that person because everybody who's a part of the movement has a story and I think it does us a disservice to say that we don't have to know each other on a deep level to do work. [Participant 3]

Deep relationships involve both knowing people intimately and caring about their humanity. These types of relationships involve a commitment that goes beyond just doing the activities associated with activism like responding to politics. Women discussed cultivating these deep relationships with other women in movement spaces. In these spaces they developed deep and long-lasting friendships with other women. Because activism demands much more from people who identify as activists, these deep relationships aid women in continuing the work and forming tight knit circles of other women that they can rely on. Other participants especially echoed the notion that
Participant 3 stated, that deep relationships with other women involved check-ins about their well-being. In response to what keeps her going as an activist, Participant 5 said:

*I'd say my relationships with all of the people in the group. Like genuinely we're all friends. We're in community together but also we hang out, you know, we call each other, we check in on each other, we cry together, we do everything together. So I think that's what really is keeping me coming back is the genuine relationships that are with everyone and the genuine love that's there.* [Participant 5]

Participant 5 was not the only participant to use the word “love” to describe her relationships with women in movement. Participant 8 talked about love in the sense that it will be the force that allows people to transcend and understand justice for marginalized people:

*...it's not voting, it's not like political parties, it's building relationships and building trust with each other, because that's where we find that radical love, that radical honestly, that radical care...* [Participant 8]

Participant 6 talked specifically about the love she has with her “sister friends” and how they help her maintain her activist in intangible ways:

*So I think that for me, and this is very personal, that the fact the social group that I am with are women activists is critical and I wouldn't be able to survive without them. Not because they do anything concrete. It's not that women need to go shopping and I can't have any...it's just that that community is solid and I love them and I feel loved by them. So I think that without my sisters that I build with here that I wouldn't be able to, I think that a lot of my confidence in the work that I do is informed by the space that I have with my sister friends who are activists too. There are a lot of loving acknowledgement of what we do and I think that that helps a whole lot.*

*I: So it's those relationships that you've built too that are really a sustaining force?

Yeah, they are lifting and validating and just like supporting and acknowledging that's something that doesn't happen in places where there's men a lot so...* [Participant 6]
She goes on to say that because of her schedule and caring for her children that she does not have much time to see these women regularly, but knowing that they are there and that she has a network to rely on is comforting in itself.

Women talked about the different reasons these deep relationships developed. In some cases, women talked about sharing values and being like-minded about goals, even if they had different ways of understanding the world because of their social identities. Participant 2, who had discussed racial tensions and frustration with White women not understanding and owning their privilege, had this to say ultimately about the group of women with whom she was active:

*We're all like-minded women at the end of the day, even though I'm the only Black there, but it's genuine love and concern, it's genuine wanting to be better and do better, like, it's like a sisterhood, I'll be honest. And even with your sisters you have to let people know you're out of order, so that's what keeps me coming back. It's that intimacy and that feeling of a family, like you never feel, it's amazing how anything that happens, Black, they always reach out. How are you doing [Participant 2]? Are you ok [Participant 2]?* [Participant 2]

Participant 2, like Participant 6, uses the metaphor of a family to describe her relationships with other women in these activist spaces. Also, just like Participants 3 and 5, checking in is one of the major examples she uses to point out how women care for one another and cultivate these deep relationships. Participant 4 echoes:

*I think that what kept me closest and most involved in any of the organizations is real relationships with other people in the organizations. So if there were other like-minded people that I shared values with that are as active as you are, that were as up for stuff as you are, and I want to invest in the organization and see it succeed and flourish, that keeps you involved. Because no one wants to be the only person out there trying to do this stuff on their own.* [Participant 4]

In addition to values, women pointed to finding comfort and cultivating deep relationships in spaces where women shared the same social identities. This was
particularly true for Black women with whom I spoke. Participant 3 describes these relationships as “decolonizing her existence” and describes more fully in detail here:

*I think literally being in the movement has allowed me to gain parts of myself, like decolonize my existence which has allowed me to be like these are all the things that I've discarded or that I try to be a molded person of what society wanted me to be and I came into a movement that was like actually we take you as you are, what you are is what we want you to be and it has allowed me to be more comfortable saying actually I’m a Black, queer woman who is poly and you know, and I'm an organizer and I think that being, having access to people who explain it and give the history behind it and decolonizing just who I am has been a liberating experience in general. [Participant 3]*

Having deep relationships with other women who experience the same compounding oppressions has shown Participant 3 that she is not alone and that she can be her true self with her feminist group that is made of primarily of women of color.

*...just building like deep relationships with folks I'm doing the work with. I think that's what keeps me in it. Like the fact is like I can go out for dinner with folks and we could be talking about stuff that's not activism related even though it always ends up that route because it's a part of our existence and what we do but just knowing that I can call somebody when I'm sad, frustrated, happy, have good news, bad news, and I have that relationship, you know, with folks? I think is definitely what keeps me involved. So making sure spaces are very healing and deep relationships with folks I'm doing the work with. [Participant 3]*

Deep relationships can be strategic as well as healing. Describing one instance, Participant 3 talked about how having deep relationships allowed her group to find out that one of their members was actually a police officer who was attending the meetings to keep tabs on the group’s activities.

*And even in our group one time there was, in Broward, before I got involved there was a guy who was a police officer who was a paid person to infiltrate the organization and they knew actually by digging deep and asking questions his name wasn't even his real name and he actually worked for the Fort Lauderdale Police Department. So I think that you know by building those relationships you can kind of see where people are at and you know it will help get rid of a lot of the skepticism that is unwarranted toward people or folks. [Participant 3]*
Deep relationships here serve as a form of self-preservation for the group and allow activists to get to know the true intentions of those who participate. Getting to know people well is a way to reveal potential inconsistencies in how they present themselves.

**Emotional labor.** While deep relationships form the backbone for most women’s sustained participation in activism, some women discussed frustrations they had at times in maintaining these relationships. In particular, women of color pointed to the amount of emotional labor they had to endure to get White women to understand and include their experiences and ideas as valid. Participant 2 defined emotional labor in terms of relationships with White women in movement spaces:

> Trying to get folks to understand that they messed up and their history is what it is and you have to deal with your sphere of influence and you can't expect us to always explain to you why we feel this way. It's not the Angry Black Woman syndrome, it's the We're Tired as Hell syndrome, like give us a break. You want us to answer you, but you want us to answer you the way you want to be answered. [Participant 2]

Emotional labor stands in stark contrast to the relationships where Black women felt they could be their whole selves. Participants 5 and 8 also talked about the emotional labor forced upon them in majority White feminist spaces. For Participant 5 in particular, this emotional labor caused her to step down from a leadership position, and then almost entirely, within in one of the groups she participated.

> And also too it's a lot of labor on me as a Black woman. Why am I always debating my existence with y'all. And so that was kind of like the last straw for me and I just stepped down because it shouldn't have been that hard to support a March for Black women. [Participant 5]

Participant 8 also talked about staying out of certain feminist spaces because of the time and energy they must put in defending both their identities and points of view.

> The things that have kept me out of feminist spaces in general is because, especially after Women's March, they've been dominated by white women. And
white women that haven't woken up enough to like make this space tolerable. So I mean we've been in a couple meetings that have been like, emotionally exhausting and I would even call them, not physically violent, but emotionally violent.

[Participant 8]

This emotional labor that women of color must be engaged in in predominantly white feminist spaces is tempered by the feeling that Black women, and women of color more generally, “have to be there” in those spaces so that they are represented. Participant 2, the only Black woman in leadership in the local chapter of Women’s March, talks about this feeling of responsibility:

Many, many things that easily could push you away but what keeps me coming is that I have to be there. Because if I’m not there, who’s gonna be there?

[Participant 2]

Participant 8 talked more broadly about the role of Black women in White feminist spaces.

Someone's gotta be there. Yeah. Someone should be there to keep pushing the envelope and keep challenging and keep saying you’re not doing this right and stepping out and doing what we need to do...yeah. [Participant 8]

Both women discussed being a part of these spaces to make sure White women were addressing the needs of Women of Color within movement spaces. They both inferred that without Black and Brown women being present in these spaces, White women were likely to ignore these issues because they are shielded from understanding Women of Color by their white privilege.

**Self-care/healing.** Relationships at the individual level also include relationships women have with themselves as activists. Many women spoke about healing and self-care as necessary components of doing movement work. Sometimes taking a step back or taking time for oneself was a necessary action to keep momentum and hope long-term. Participant 3 sees self-care as a way for her to do her work better and combat fatigue.
I think you know I try to go on jogs regularly. I do different things that are on my, I guess what you’d call a bucket list so trap yoga, twerk fitness. I’m going to a twerk fitness class tonight at 7pm. I love to travel so I think it’s doing things that putting things, like putting yourself as a priority. Saying I deserve those things and by doing that and knowing that it makes me more whole when I do come back into the work so yeah like doing 5ks. I did five 5ks this year, I did one and I’m doing a 5k at the end of next month in Ft. Lauderdale. And I’m doing a run for Haiti in April so I definitely want to make sure that I’m constantly doing things that keep me like physically and mentally healthy because I think that makes me more whole when I do come into the work. [Participant 3]

Participant 1 talks more broadly about self-care and critiques the culture of social justice movements that insist people always work and never turn off.

There is this mentality in a lot of social justice work where you just never turn off. I don’t think that that is healthy and it’s not because I think that crises only happen between 9-5. That’s not realistic. But I think that there are ways to...learn that it is not selfish to take care of yourself. And that you often have more to give when you do that than having less and that that is ok. There is a perceived strength behind this idea of never turning off and always being in the struggle. I think that’s ego and I think that’s weakness. I don’t think that’s strength. That’s my opinion. I think sometimes people are addicted to that type of engagement and it’s not healthy. [Participant 1]

She echoes Participant 3’s belief about being about to be “more whole” in movement work when you take time off. The implication is that when women take time out of movement spaces they can focus on their own health which will then affect how they interact with others within these spaces.

“Hurt people hurt people.” As stated earlier, one of the reasons women came to activism was because of experiences involving discrimination and trauma. The recognition that others face this discrimination and trauma as well is one way women become socially and politically conscious. Though sharing these experiences can be cathartic for women, they also recognize that others who have experienced similar trauma have the ability to hurt others as a form of self-preservation. Transferring one’s emotional
pain to other activists serves as an enervating force at the individual level. Participant 7 stated succinctly that “hurt people hurt people.” She goes on to explain:

...I think oftentimes we can sometimes lose focus on what we're up against is so big and can feel scary and overwhelming and it's like much easier to just attack another organization or another individual that you know as opposed to focusing on our collective shared enemy. And you know, so I think I see that play out in ways that can be really draining. [Participant 7]

She describes this type of interaction as “draining” implying that it takes energy away from the movement as a whole to fight for social justice. Participant 8 more directly stated that this type of “drama” that occurs among people in movement spaces has made her actively want to stop participating in activism.

Even in doing gender justice work is a continuing combatting of violence and hearing stories of women that have been sexually assaulted that are trying to survive and don’t know how to, and understanding again that those are the people that want to be in these spaces. And they are, we are the people that can’t fully show up because of those traumas. There’s also been, I mean, human drama about who said what and how it was said and things like that have made people paranoid about who is for them who's against them, that have cause rifts in organizations. There’s been drama around people's intentions like, “oh you knew we were doing this event and then you did something right on top. You did it on purpose,” and then the intentions, and again, because we're all traumatized people, we're all hurt people trying to survive, so I mean those are the things that have also made me be like I'm not coming back. [Participant 8]

Each of these types of relationships shows how, at the individual level, women feel the push to stop and pull to sustain their participation based on different types of relationships. Lots of times women have deep relationships with women with whom they also must put in emotional labor. This shows the complex make-up of the interplay between relationships and identity for women in movement.

**Within movement contexts.** While the previous section discussed primarily interpersonal relationships, the following level of analysis covers the structures of activist spaces and organizations. These structures within social justice organizations and groups,
including leadership, meeting structure, and accountability, are referred to as a whole as movement spaces. Movement spaces are the places where social movement work happens. Within the context of social movement spaces, women talked about some of the facilitating and hindering forces that kept them engaged in movement work. Some of these had to do with relationships that influenced the structure of movement spaces like job flexibility, structures that support mothers, and leadership roles. Others had to do with the climate of social movement spaces like recreating oppression and harm and hypocrisy.

**Supportive organizational structures.** Many of the participants worked for nonprofit organizations in Miami-Dade County. Some of the organizational structure that they said helped facilitate their activism could be directly attributed to the benefit of having a paid job that encourages that type of work. For example, Participant 8 talked about the flexibility she had at her job to work on the types of projects that most interested her and travel to different events that fit into her activism:

> Yeah, flexible schedule, um, flexible schedule and the means to like incorporate all the things I want to do and need to happen in a job I can get paid for. And also because of like the connections of all these non-profits and all of that stuff, it offers me the opportunities to get more training year round which I haven't been able to get anywhere else. So the opportunity to engage with Sister Song which a reproductive justice organization based out of Atlanta and their trainings to be able to go to their meet ups and things like, to be able to get trained in D.C. on legislative policy. To be able to travel to Tallahassee during session and spend time there advocating on behalf of things we want, it's given me the opportunity to do all of that and incorporate all of that back into my work also. [Participant 8]

Flexibility also served to be important for women with outside responsibilities. Two participants are mothers with school-aged children. They described how the organizations they worked with where they were allowed space to be mothers helped to sustain them
through on-site childcare and incorporating the input of these mothers directly into organizational practices:

*Everybody, I think it's three guys, everyone else is women in the organization it's like sixty something people and so a lot of them are moms and have children and so for example, the organization has a Moms Caucus that designs the policies for the organization. So we design all the policies. So for example when we have retreats, the organization pays for half of the tickets for the children to come to the retreats and provide several days of childcare and open space if kids [come]...so it's a huge improvement. I have never felt in an individual way that my children have been seen as a nuisance or a problem or an obstacle for me to do the work and I know that's true for everybody else, on top of policies for everything else... [Participant 6]*

*The other thing that I think sustained me, I think that I had to really question as I became a mom and started a family, was my relationship to political work kind of changed and what that was gonna look like. And feel really, you know, grateful because I was in a women's organization I really felt like I had a space to just claim...I was going to bring my baby to work and I think I was able to. I don't know, I don't know what would have happened if I wasn't in an organization that wasn't so explicitly feminist. And you know, my daughter came with me to meetings and marches and everything else and it helped that the office had childcare for every meeting that we had and so there was often a childcare space that my daughter could go in for a few hours a day, close by. [Participant 7]*

These spaces helped these participants feel validated as mothers and supported within their organizations. But not every organization with which they worked had supported motherhood in the same kind of way. Participant 6 also talked about in an experience she had with a prior organization where she was told her work was more important than attending one of her child’s events. She talks about how she has always prioritized her children and describes how she reacted to being told this:

*I remember one occasion where my kid was about to get an award for a science fair and I was in this strategy meeting that was going over the time so I'm like hey, I gotta go and they're like, “You can't go. This is more important than anything. You have to figure out with your partner, can he go,” and this, this, this. And I was about to freak out. I was like fuck you, I have my priorities straight and whatever. And I of course just left and went to the science fair. [Participant 6]*
As a mother, Participant 6 constantly stated that her children would always come first for her before her other commitments. Her children were her primary motivation for her work as an activist. For Participant 6, spaces that actively welcomed children were the only ones in which she decided to work.

Strong and solid leadership also served as a supportive organizational structure both in and outside of nonprofit organizations. Participant 4 stated that strong leadership was a trait she looked for in organizations that she chose to be a part of:

...well an organization that functions somewhat efficiently and effectively that has some clear leadership who are engaged in what is happening and other people who are enthusiastically involved. I mean that's what I look for. At this point when I think about doing something with an organization I'm looking for an organization that has good strong leadership because otherwise you get involved in things and you end up holding the bag because people leave and you're there and you've been involved and they want you to step up and do stuff like that and I don't want to do that. [Participant 4]

Other women talked about leadership as important in different ways. Some women suggested that the best course for leadership in feminist organizations was to let the most marginalized members lead. Participant 2 stated:

They just need to put us out front, period, and be ok with it. Bottom line. No ifs, ands, or buts about it. Let Black women lead. Step back. Let trans women, let someone do it other than you, period or point blank. Don't question it, don't try to figure it out, put them in the center and move forward. [Participant 2]

Participant 3 discussed horizontal leadership as the ideal model and talks about what that means in the context of her feminist activist group.

... we practice nonhierarchical leadership, that's very intentional because we see with hierarchies the power dynamics and how they really hurt people. I would never want to have the power to fire people. I believe in collective decision-making. I believe in like you know collective people power in real ways...We're horizontal leadership, we make collective decisions about everything and then people fall in line where they feel they are the best fit and it's not like a directive where it's you need to do this, this, and this and if you don't, bye. It's actually everybody has a say
in how things go and everybody has a say in how the collective is going to move forward, you know. [Participant 3]

Collective decision-making equals the playing field and allows everyone in the group to have equal amounts of power.

**Recreating oppression in movement spaces.** The recreation of oppression in movement spaces was mentioned by most women at some point throughout their interviews. Recreating oppression is the recreating of dominant organizational practices or prejudice that hinders the work of organizations and their members.

In terms of practices, a few of the women talked about how activism on a broader scale was more concerned with metrics and chasing votes than with addressing underlying issues and taking a longer-term perspective. They described much of the work they saw happening in organizations as reactionary. Participant 1 described this type of work as “number chasing” and went on to describe what that looks like:

> So instead of saying like, well, like look at the campaign and look at the numbers and look at the electoral college and look at you know, all of these different components that are, again, metrics-based and number based and monetary and look about what our values have become in society and you start, I think, to really understand how this happened and why this happened. I don’t want to ever be that person, someone involved in activism that says, all I need to do is just hold another protest, or give myself another reason to yell and scream and want to change something without saying how do we change the underlying problem? [Participant 1]

She does not want to be a part of the culture that focuses on immediate needs versus long-term needs. Other participants reflected this thought as well, and expressed their frustration with doing work that meant dropping longer-term change-oriented work.

Participant 8 talks about her experience working for a labor union:

> I stayed there for about a year and SEIU taught me the tangible logistics of organizations, the training and ladders of engagement and phone banks and all this other stuff, so I really appreciated it for that, but I hated the electoral arm of
chasing votes because that's what we did. We did community work until it was election time and then it was like drop everything, chase the votes, like, we need people, and this was right before Trump so it was like everybody's going crazy. What can we do to get votes? What are we doing chasing these votes around? And I didn't like that. I didn't like that at all. [Participant 8]

In addition to having to chase votes and money, activists talked about how social movements were siloed in the United States and that the model itself should be re-examined. Participant 7 explains this as a reason why she left a previous organization where she worked:

...some issue organizing in the U.S., sometimes it feels like it's so siloed...you're talking about this one campaign, like your job is to talk about this one campaign and everyone you meet, your job is to bring them into this one campaign regardless of what they're going through or what they want. It was something, I think, about the model that wasn't working for me...[Participant 7]

Women who discussed this model mostly talked about how limiting numbers chasing and siloing could be for the movement as a whole. Participant 6, while expressing her own frustration, offered a tentative solution for how movements could and should sustain their members and the movement as a whole:

The other thing is the movement is tiny. My kids are just, they're around a loving community, but a block away from the organization's headquarters, nobody knows who the fuck is working there and they are going to be just as exposed as if they were working anywhere else. We need to do a lot more work in actually building consciousness in the community instead of trying to get people to come to the meeting. We should be having the conversation on the street every single day. And that is something that the activist community is not doing is actually the rigorous day to day, not sexy, not publicized work door to door or in the parks and actually building awareness in people who will never come to your meeting or participate in much, but they still have to have the conversation. [Participant 6]

Participant 6 here echoes Participant 8’s notion that “revolution starts at the kitchen table” and that it’s the everyday work and everyday conversations that are going to have a better chance of reaching people than trying to get people to make a more full-time commitment. Participant 6, like Participants 7 and 8, believes that long-term commitment
is the best way to reach people, feel like the work is meaningful, and sustain social movements.

“Number chasing” and organizational practices are two ways that social movements recreate practices from other types of organizations, like for-profit organizations, that most activists actively try to move away from. While these practices exhaust women in activism, other types of behaviors and recreation of oppression in movement spaces are much more insidious. Participant 4 discusses how feminist spaces in particular can recreate oppression. She speaks from her experience with the National Organization of Women:

...at a national meeting the women of color there wanted to caucus separately. They wanted to have a Black Women's Caucus, and the leadership, which was really driving it, which was all-white, said no we don't think you should do that, it should be an open meeting, you know, everybody should be able to come. I thought, why are people threatened by having any specific group meet with just their own group to talk about things in a safe way where they can be truthful and open about what they think and say? I don't understand why, so there were things like that that I found troubling. And you know, NOW's history has had a lot of stumbling blocks. For a long time lesbians were seen as a threat to the future of the organization in particular, and the Women's Movement as well. So that had to be overcome. That had to be cured by lesbians standing up and saying hell no, you're not driving us out. This is our association too. Move over, make room, and this is the way it has to be. So there were things like that that I found very educational. There's a lot of lessons to draw from that. Even organizations with the best agenda, best intentions, suffer from a lot of the same pitfalls and shortcomings and shortsightedness we ascribe to any other number of organizations that aren't feminist-based. [Participant 4]

While Participant 4’s speaks about her experiences in feminist spaces that happened decades ago, other women talked about how feminist spaces in Miami continued to recreate oppression through racial dynamics between White women and Women of Color, particularly Black women. Many women specifically talked about tensions within
Women’s March that looked different at the national level than in the local Miami-Dade chapter. Participant 2 pointedly explains:

*Women's March? That's y'all's issue with Donald Trump. I didn't live with racism, sexism all my life...that's new for y'all. That's not new for me. But it's a big enough movement with a big enough platform that I need to be at the table. Because I need to keep you on target to what the national agenda is. Because the national agenda is to center Black, Brown, and marginalized people. That's what it is. Not to center White women and their issues with Donald Trump. And so I know for me...I have to be there to keep us on. It will get diverted, because that's just what White women do. And some of it is intentional, I think, most of it is not. But if the national platform is center Black and Brown, marginalized, that's what we need to be doing at all costs.* [Participant 2]

Other participants also felt that Women’s March was not a space for Women of Color.

Participant 6 also points out that the national Women’s March was supposed to center Black and Brown women, but does not believe that they have done that in reality.

*Yeah and even in the national space I think there was an intention to bring women of color to the leadership but then everything that happens underneath that mixed with all the people participating in the Women's March has been really messed up too so it is a little bit of a front to have all these women leading it because it's not really a women of color movement no matter how many women of color you have at this stage.* [Participant 6]

Participant 8 described one particular instance where she felt dehumanized in a movement space in an interaction with a White woman.

*I've had a white woman tone check me before, like, “you can't talk to me like that because we're not gonna want to be with your cause.” And I'm like this is not a fucking cause, this is my life. This is my life, it's not just a cause you can check in and out of.* [Participant 8]

For Participant 8 her participation in activism is based on her identity as a Black woman. In pushing back that her participation is not just a cause, but her life, she shows that her safety and well-being hinge on changing policy and fighting against racial and gender oppression. She believes that White women, because they benefit from racial privilege,
have the ability to check in and out of social justice spaces without having to confront racial oppression in their lives.

Because of some of their experiences in spaces with predominantly White women, Women of Color have created alternative spaces where they, as Participant 3 stated earlier, can “decolonize [their] existence[s].” Participant 7 talked about the benefit of having these spaces:

*I think some of the things that I've tried are, so in like the immigrants’ rights movement creating space for women of color, um, across some of the organizational divides, understanding that maybe as women of color that we can find common ground with one another and maybe we can find common cause in our frustrations with patriarchy or white supremacy.* [Participant 7]

Participant 3 describes one group she’s involved in that privileges Women of Color’s experiences after being in movements with predominantly White women or Black men:

*...we formed pretty much like a year ago and it started out just like...monthly potlucks at [one woman’s] house, you know drinking wine, talking about all the frustrations of being in the movement and then thinking about how do we talk about patriarchy and how it shows up in our movement? How do we talk about trans violence and we'll read articles and we'll have discussions.* [Participant 3]

Participant 5, also a member of this Black Feminist activist group, talked about the parallels between her experience with this group in South Florida and what she has read about with historical Black Feminist groups like the Combahee River Collective.

*I was reading and I was just like wow, there's so many parallels between their experience from branching off from a national white led feminist movement and starting their own collective where they had to create their own space to do that work and support each other and build friendships and build bonds. That's literally like the same trajectory that the Incomfirmistas have had. It's the same exact thing. You know, a lot of us came from Women's March and organizations like that and got tired of fighting with them and it's just like hey, we can do it ourselves.* [Participant 5]

This group provides Women of Color with a space outside of mainstream feminist spaces that practices horizontal leadership and shared decision-making. While women talked
about the importance of having these alternative spaces, they also understood the importance of working together across racial lines to combat gender oppression.

Participant 1 reflects on this work in our current political climate:

*I think it’s an interesting time to be a woman. I love being a woman. I do believe that it’s women that are going to make a monumental change but not until we can recognize women who are different from our own identity as a woman and work with them and learn what that looks like. And for all of us, own our privileges and, in all of the ways that we’re privileged. That is going to be a big shift in the world I think.* [Participant 1]

In addition, Participant 8, who talked about the emotional labor and pain she faced within mainstream feminist movements, stated that while this recreation of oppression is pushing Women of Color out of these movement spaces, she understands that White women are starting to “get it” and that in some respects, she tries to be patient with their coming to consciousness about racial and gender injustices.

*I think that a lot of them do and there’s a part of me that wants to be patient and understand it just like I’m undoing 28 years of heteronormative socializing, they’re undoing multiple decades of like white supremacy. So there’s a level of like patience that’s required that I can’t expect you to do this in a week and two years. But on the other hand I’m like people are dying because of the ways that you’re thinking, so I’m gonna need you to get with the program. You could get it a little bit quicker! (laughs)* [Participant 8]

**Harm and hypocrisy.** Recreation of oppression could also be seen more specifically in how organizations’ values matched up with their actions. A few women discussed hypocrisy in movement spaces as being difficult to navigate. Participant 3 talks about getting fired from one social justice nonprofit whose espoused values did not match with how they treated her. Her story is provided in full in the quote below to show the full extent of how she was treated by this organization:

*I was fired from an organization that says that they believe in restorative justice, which is a community non-punitive approach to handling conflict, and when I was fired- no employee improvement plan, no conflict resolution process, no restorative
justice process, nothing. I was just told one day at what was supposed to be a check in meeting that I no longer work for the organization because it's not a fit and I “was undermining the leadership of my boss” and so it made me really think about like, being a Black woman you can’t do anything. If you're quiet, you're subordinate, if you're loud, you're subordinate, if you speak up for yourself, you're angry. My existence at this organization that claims to be restorative justice was seen as a threat and it’s like, where do you exist when you even come to an organization that is mostly Black led and still there your existence as a Black woman is being questioned, you know? And to know that I so passionately care about the work I so deeply care about restorative justice, that an organization led me go with no warning, and you also claim to care about reproductive justice, you don't, how do I survive after I leave here? There's no security for me to even pay my bills, eat, do anything, so its like an organization that claims to do all these things in the community yet they throw away one of their workers like that. To me that seemed like a very big contradiction and that gave me a lot of disillusionment too because, it's like, this is an organization that says they fight for things in the community, and still says that to this day, and I still feel like I got no restoration in me being fired from this organization almost three months ago now. [Participant 3]

For Participant 3, being fired from an organization that did not live their values was discouraging for her sustained participation in activism. She paints their outward actions with their inward values as a “contradiction,” especially as they concern her treatment as a Black woman. Participant 1 also talks about hypocrisy in how people in feminist spaces talk about their values as opposed to their actions. She talks about seeing this firsthand while serving on committees:

*Being a part of these committees is one of the more challenging things that I’ve done in my adult life. Part of it is because people say that they believe in justice, they believe in women's rights, they believe in equality, they believe in inclusiveness, again, all of these things. But then their beliefs are not aligned with how they are behaving. We really believe that people should be held accountable. We work to keep ourselves accountable. We, think we have to assess those things and some of the people I’ve worked with are very much geared towards the advocacy that looks very much like stand out on the street and hold a sign. And I think that’s part of it, absolutely, but it’s a piece of it, it’s not the whole of it...Owning their privilege is not something they’re comfortable with. Looking at things like that, I’ve been in a lot of spaces years where we’ve had these conversations. We’ve had some really charged Women’s March meetings where we’ve looked at how people of different race and ethnic backgrounds have interacted with each other and how other people who are there who are listening to people talk respond to what they are seeing and hearing, and just what they’ve*
witnessed. It’s very challenging but it’s also what keeps me coming back is knowing there’s hope for change and what we’re doing, that every day we make progress in some way. [Participant 1]

As opposed to Participant 3, Participant 1 sees this hypocrisy as a place to start conversations, and though it is challenging, she believes that facing these challenges up front gives hope that these actions can eventually line up better with the organization’s values.

**Community context.** All of the feminist and social justice work that women are currently engaged in occurs within the context of Miami-Dade County Florida. Participants spoke about their interactions within these contexts as being facilitating for their activism in the sense that certain community resources exist that help in terms of knowledge and training. Participants also spoke about the ways that community contexts could inhibit their participation in the sense that speaking out at local governmental meetings never amounted to any change. Throughout their interviews women discussed how Miami-Dade politics and the ethnic breakdown of South Florida affected their work with various communities. Some women talked about the dynamic between different ethnic groups as a positive form of vibrancy for the County that leads to positive feelings about working in this context:

*And then coming to Miami, it's, there is a little bit of that culture, also that White, more elitist liberal spaces, but I think that people here are a lot more integrated. Even if there is a lot of segregation, there is all over the place, but I think in their daily life people have to interact with people, each other, and live more in community with each other. There's more a sense of solidarity.* [Participant 6]

Others talked about the tension between different ethnic groups in Miami, particularly between non-White immigrant and non-white American born groups. Participant 2 talked
about the difficulty she faced moving to Miami as an African-American and how “Black” means something different within different communities:

*Even in Miami-Dade County, it's even a difference in the minority piece because Black is one thing, even though everybody else is a minority they still receive a privilege that we don't get. So that's a double whammy when you have to deal with the Cuban population and the Haitian population and when I first moved here in January 2003 as a nurse, Jackson Hospital, I started July at the hospital, I was in a culture shock...These people are dark and darker than me and they treat me like I am the bottom of the totem pole. What the hell is this? And so I realized how Miami was structured and how it's, you know, white privilege, it doesn't matter how dark your skin is if you come from a certain group. [Participant 2]*

While this did not stop Participant 2 from continuing in her activism, it provided a new challenge in terms of what she knew about race relations. Both race and ethnicity played a significant part in determining the power structures of County life and politics.

Participant 6, who talked about how people of different ethnic groups interacted more in Miami than her previous community in New Mexico, specifically addresses the tensions that exist in the county:

*... that has been a real eye opener here is all the tensions and all the intentional tensions people in power have created between Black and Latino communities that have percolated over time and are really hard. [Participant 6]*

Besides power issues between different ethnic groups, many of the participants discussed a frustration with County politics. Implicit in this frustration is a feeling that because of these entrenched power dynamics, very little in terms of progressive change would come to marginalized communities. For example, Participant 4 talked about how attending City Commission meetings felt like a futile effort, and while not necessarily inhibiting involvement, made her feel that interacting with city officials on important issues was frustrating and complicated:

*I think it's very difficult, anything that you have to bring to an entity like the County Commission or the City Commission or certain state legislatures, I think*
those are very hard because I go to a lot of the commission, council meetings and stuff and you go to speak on something because it's important. People know that people in the community want or don't want this. They listen to you and it never seems to change any decision that they make. And I've talked to others about this, you know, it's getting to the point where it seems like a total waste of time to speak in front of a body like that. [Participant 4]

Participant 2 echoed this sentiment, but saw her role in those meetings as someone who could challenge the status quo by asking tough questions:

And so you get the police to come and you know, they do they political thing. And you'll follow through with the garbage because you just gotta do what you gotta do. And in my opinion, you really don't care. So you come, you smile, you make face, and do all that, and you go right back to doing what you've always done. I'm the person in the meeting that asks the hardball questions. I'm the person that, yo, like real talk, let's have this conversation. And so because I'm a Black woman, and most of them in Miami-Dade, well not Miami-Dade, the City of Miami, a lot of their leadership are Latino men. So they look at me like who the hell are you. [Participant 2]

In City Commission meetings, Participant 2’s identity as a Black woman becomes even more salient because of the predominantly male, Latino commissioners that sit in positions of power. She believes that both her race and gender impact the way commissioners react to how she asks questions and speaks in front of the panel.

Some participants also discussed the infrastructure for social change work in Miami and how it affects the ways progressive activism can be done in the County. For example, Participant 6 talks about her arrival in Miami in the early 2000s and how the lack of meaningful social justice organizations affected her ability to do that type of work.

I got a job with the now defunct ACORN. But it didn't work out for me. It was a couple weeks and I was supposed to start a chapter here in Miami because there was zero infrastructure. When I came here the social justice infrastructure was nonexistent. I looked and I couldn't find anything. [Participant 6]
While Participant 6 talked about these struggles, she also acknowledged that the social justice infrastructure has grown in the past 20 years and that organizations who drive both social change initiatives and support activists have multiplied. Participant 2 points to one organization in particular in Miami that has helped support activists and change makers in meaningful and tangible ways:

> And there's one organization...where I've been able to harness that for all the leadership programs I've been through with them, um Step up Miami and um, Current Leader Training Institute and just different types of classes to harness that and to be able to make it work for everyone. So coming up with a plan and how do you, you know, make your passion policy. Meeting with legislators, going to Tallahassee, just coming up with something that's going to affect the change and so if I could say one organization that has been pivotal with me and that, [Local Organization]. [Participant 2]

Participant 2 points to the fact that this organization not only provides resources, but provides technical training that addresses the “how” of social change work. When I asked how she came to know of this organization and it’s trainings, she said a friend sent her an email with information. While formal resources exist in the community to support local activists, informal networks still help to facilitate that flow of information.

**Larger political context.** One of the biggest larger political issues women discussed was the non-profit industrial complex. Women talked about how the influence of capitalism on social justice work was largely a hindrance on getting anything meaningful done. They specifically talked about how competition for small amounts of resources were the reasons for the reactivity seen within non-profits, as discussed earlier. Participant 3 goes on to discuss her own experience with becoming “disillusioned” with social movement work because of this:

> I think the nonprofit industrial complex, which is the whole, you know, everyone fighting for the same pots of money, has gotten in the way. There's been a lot, you know, I think having expectations of people who don't necessarily, in my
opinion live up to that, has made me, you know, disillusioned by the movement. People who that this is their vision and their mission and you see firsthand that they're not living up to that, you know, especially for organizations that, I've for the most, half of my activism has been completely free. I've been out of work for three months and it's realizing that the folks I'm doing the work with that I've built deep relationships with, if there was no money in the picture it would still get done, right? [Participant 3]

Participant 6 also discussed funding more specifically as a reason why some work in social movements is prioritized, and the work that isn’t “sexy,” as discussed earlier, does not get done as much as she believes it should.

I think it's also like the funding sources and the not for profit. If you are in the New York Times you get a ton of money but if you are, go to the park and talk to people nobody will ever know so you're not going to get the money so it's like we've been becoming more PR...And the nonprofit industrial complex and how that affects how we can even do our work because there are these larger sources of funding. Yeah, and the work is not sexy, the work that really would change is not going to get anybody excited. [Participant 6]

Not only did women believe that the non-profit industrial complex got in the way of making real change, but it makes women have to choose to prioritize their work over their mental health because of short timelines. Participant 8 discusses this type of burnout in the following exchange:

...our responsibility to funders is a thing. And that pressure from executive directors or from funders that come down on us that seems like it makes no sense, that you know freaks everybody out, is a thing that people I know have been fired, brilliant people that I know have been fired over. People have left organizations over.

I: Nonprofit industrial complex issues?

Yeah, like funding, you're not meeting these deliverables but at the same time you're also going through a lot personally and then also the expectations from social justice organizations to be nicer, you know? But then like still trying to understand that like we got money and we have to give, we have to do something for that money. So it's like you can't go on a mental health sabbatical for a month to get yourself together.

I: Yeah you have to be here...
Yeah, to do the work. And that takes a toll on people. And some days it takes a toll on me. Some days there's work that I'm like, why are we doing this? Like because we got money? And why would you agree to such stringent deliverables? Why would you know, just to get money? Because that's just going to stress us all out. [Participant 8]

The non-profit industrial complex affects all of the different ways women interact within their interpersonal relationships, movement spaces, and with the community at large. It adds another layer of stress to women’s work. Participant 1, for example, earlier talked about how self-care is discouraged within non-profit and movement organizations. But for all of the inhibiting forces on women’s movement work, their relationships and supportive organizational structures help to sustain them.

**Conclusion**

Participants’ experiences reflect the complexities of conducting feminist activism work in Miami-Dade County and on a larger national scale. Women’s values, relationships, and social identities help to guide and sustain their work within the context of opportunities and challenges implicit in organizational and community life. These opportunities and challenges are not mutually exclusive. Contextual elements are recognizable in these interviews in the ways that they impact activism can be both facilitating and inhibiting, and lead women to new opportunities within feminist activism spheres. The last chapter of this dissertation expands upon the grounded theory model to discuss each research question in greater detail with implications for future research and action.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Feminist activism throughout history has helped to shape perceptions of gender and the roles of women in U.S. society. It was not long ago that rights we as a nation take for granted were not afforded to more than half the population, including the rights to vote and financial independence. Still today, women struggle with rights to bodily autonomy, freedom from both interpersonal and state-sanctioned violence, and equal pay for equal work. But equality is only one goal of feminist action. Gloria Steinem, a feminist pioneer, once said, feminism is about ultimately changing the oppressive systems we have in place. It is not enough to get “a piece of the existing pie…It’s about baking a new pie.”

The fight for broad social change is studded with challenges and setbacks. Activism is tough work. Those who have dedicated their lives to fighting for justice generally sacrifice higher-paying jobs, as well as aspects of their mental and physical health. Unlike other fields, activism requires a person’s whole self – their mind, body, and spirit, as well as those aspects of the lives of the people closest to them. Within the feminist movement, which has been fraught with internal tensions throughout history, women have navigated activism while also holding equally demanding roles as mothers, survivors of violence, and organizational executive directors. The ways women have sustained their activism are a true testament not only to their individual will and resilience, but also to their supportive social contexts.

This study illuminated, despite the obstacles, what contexts help to sustain long-term feminist activism. Moving beyond individual characteristics, I sought to understand and explore the contexts that help shape women’s lives, as well as the way their social
identities relate to the various settings in which women fight for social justice. Through these women’s stories, I constructed a picture of how it looks to continue to work towards a more just world where people are treated with dignity and respect. This research adds to the small but growing body of literature that explores sustained participation in activism through the lens of women’s lived experiences.

In this study, I have outlined a grounded theory of women’s sustained participation in activism. In Chapter 4, I elaborated on a visual model of the process of sustained participation at multiple levels of analysis. This grounded theory also addresses, albeit indirectly, both research questions posited at the beginning of this paper. This discussion chapter address those research questions in greater detail, tying those questions to existing literature in ways that both confirms and expands previous findings. Following the general discussion of the research questions, I will point to general implications of this research for activists and academics, followed by implications for action. I will conclude this chapter by addressing some of the limitations of the current study as well as future directions for researchers interested in studying sustained participation and context.

**Context and Sustained Participation**

My first research questions asks, “What are the contextual factors that influence women’s sustained participation in activism?” Findings from this study showed that a number of different factors, positive and negative, influence women’s sustained activism. Many times these influences could be construed as positive and negative at the same time, and the way women perceive relationships, work settings, mentors, and larger society is not black and white. In addition, women referred to these factors at different
levels of analysis. While immediate day to day activities and relationships were referred to most often, participants recognized how the settings in which they are embedded have a profound effect on how they are able to sustain their activism over long periods of time. Some of these influences were referred to more constantly than others. These include mobilizing episodes, relationships, movement level settings, and the nonprofit industrial complex.

**Mobilizing episodes.** While the main focus of this study was sustained participation, all women talked about having some sort of mobilizing episode that provided the momentum for initial participation. Mobilizing episodes, a term that comes from Charles Kieffer (1984), connote the “birth” of the activist in the sense that they have awoken to a social justice orientation and are becoming engaged in the work. As I discussed in my model, participants’ entry into activism took multiple forms including facing injustice oneself to trying to make sense of oppression in the world at large. Many times, it was not just one moment that encouraged activists to begin their work.

The idea of mobilizing episodes was confirmed in some ways by this study, but it differs from Kieffer’s (1984) original conception in other ways; first, in that women did not always come to activism because of personal oppression. Kieffer (1984) mentions that initial participation is not spurred by consciousness-raising, but for many women consciousness-raising played an important role in their journeys. In this way, mobilizing episodes and consciousness-raising are not mutually exclusive. Take the case of Participant 6. While she had struggled in her corporate job with not being able to participate in community engagement, it was participation in a May Day action that furthered her critical consciousness on social justice issues. In addition, the impetus for
mobilizing episodes also came from the larger political climate in the United States. For some women, the election of Donald Trump signaled that “enough is enough” and that they needed to do something to create change. Lastly Kieffer’s (1984) idea of mobilizing episodes were generally negative or unjust experiences that spurred action. For the participants in this study, these experiences were sometimes just the opposite, affirming experiences where they felt they were not alone in the ways in which they saw and experienced the world.

In another contradiction to Kieffer’s (1984) model, this study shows that mobilizing episodes did not occur just once. These episodes helped to spur women at different points throughout their activist careers. For example, as previously stated, the election of Donald Trump served as an initial mobilizing episode for some women. For others who had been involved in activism for longer periods of time, events such as the recent presidential election served as a re-emergent mobilizing episode because of the ways it engaged newer segments of the population in activist work. As a “re-emergent mobilizing episode,” the election once again ignited women and helped to stave off burnout. This was evident in the ways women recounted their stories to me. Many times, their journeys consisted of a series of moments, not just one, and were a combination of seeing, experiencing, and being alive during periods of great injustice.

**Deep relationships.** One of the most important sustaining factors for women was their relationships with others both in and outside of activism. Personal networks, especially family, served as crucial impetuses for involvement. Previous research has discussed how having a feminist mother or family member was an indicator for college students who were involved in feminist activism (Liss, Crawford, & Popp, 2004), but the
women in this study showed that family influence extended beyond feminist ideals and helped to impart values of social justice, caring, and strong leadership. Many times family members conveyed contradictory values (i.e. that women should be cared for by men, but also speaking up in the face of injustice) or values that were liberal in an ameliorative, but not transformative sense (i.e. providing shelter for a homeless man, but not fully questioning the system in which people become homeless). While women in this study navigated the contradictions that their mentors and family members expressed, participants also pointed to the social support they received from these same people. While not all participants’ families provided that support, other early relationships provided the love and care that helped them on their journeys.

While these early relationships were important, one of the biggest takeaways from this study is that participants’ relationships with other women activists formed the backbone of their sustained participation in feminist activism. As stated in the literature review, community psychologists have previously discussed that relationships may play a role in helping to sustain participation (Christen & Speers, 2011; Mannarini, Roccato, Fedit, & Rovere, 2009). From these studies it is still unclear what those relationships look like. In this study, many of the women I talked to use the word “love” to describe how they feel towards the people with whom they are involved in movement work. They deeply love the women with whom they are in communion, who they work with towards equality, and with whom they fight for dignity for all women. Community psychologists, and social movement researchers generally, have not much discussed love as a sustaining force for activism. On one hand, Angelique and Culley (2014) conclude their discussion of environmental activism around Three-Mile Island by stating love as the reason why
they as researchers do the work they do, but they also state that the main motivators to act for engaged citizens in their study was anger and stress related to the effects nuclear pollution had on their community.

The current study shifts the focus from anger to the love of participants for one another. Morgan and Chan (2016) called for a greater understanding of factors beyond anger in initial participation to understanding the dynamics underlying sustained participation. In addition, Gass (2012) discusses how though anger can fuel initial participation, it is a poor catalyst for long-term action. Chronic anger, according to him, has the ability to diminish capacity for love, hope, and understanding. Gass (2012) points out that patriarchy dictates that we focus more on the head than the heart. He urges researchers and activists to value emotional intelligence as highly as intellect, and that we should “reclaim the power of Love as a force for change.” (p. 31). bell hooks (2000), in her brilliant treatise on love, extols a similar point, that we not only need to reclaim, but get over our collective fear of love as a source of radical change. This study begins to answer that call in pushing psychologists and community psychologists to understand the strengths on which activists rely to keep fighting. While anger and stress can certainly motivate initial participation, it is love within relationships and movement spaces that forms the basis of sustained participation for the participants in this study.

In focusing on the importance of deep relationships, the activists in this study illustrate how social movements have shifted to the new social movement paradigm (Pichardo, 1997). In new social movements, activists favor connection over hierarchy. In addition, activists in new social movements tend to favor settings that are open and decentralized, that focus on the well-being of the group in addition to their work and
causes. In addition to relationships, women spent a lot of time discussing the movement spaces in which they are members.

**Movement spaces.** To reiterate, movement spaces are the places where people interact specifically on issues related to social movements, including organizations and groups where activists come together to plan and act on these issues. While relationships were a primary sustaining force, movement spaces held a lot of power in determining whether or not women would continue to stay involved with a certain cause or group. Conversations generally included aspects of these settings that were liberating as well as the aspects that were hurtful or harmful. Participants also discussed aspirations for what they would like to see in movement spaces.

While each woman I talked to had grievances with their organizations, past organizations, and activist groups in which they work and participate, Black women in particular in this study spoke of the harm that can come from settings where their humanity is denied. These women overwhelmingly expressed the opinion that when White women were a part of feminist spaces, that they had a hard time decentering their experiences and understanding the multiple oppressions faced by Black women and other women of color. These sentiments are not new. Women of color have consistently voiced their marginalization within social justice movements (Brewer & Dundes, 2018). The participants in this study continue to validate those experiences.

It would be remiss to not mention the context of Miami here. While Miami is not unique in some ways, it is unique in other ways when it comes to racial hierarchies and power. “White” in a Miami context includes light-skin Latina women, who elsewhere in the United States may not be granted the same privilege because of language and cultural
differences. This issue is addressed further in the discussion of the second research question.

Within organizational spaces, women expressed that some nonprofits did not legitimize their experiences. For example, one woman pointed to the hypocrisy of being employed at an organization that sought to build power for youth of color, while having to face discrimination for voicing her opinions as a Black woman. She was deemed hostile and outspoken for speaking out about unfair situations in the workplace. She was ultimately fired. Another woman discussed feeling pressured to choose between family life and work life by staying late and missing one of her children’s school events. In the end, her obligations to her family won out. This study shows that the pull between prioritizing life outside of the workplace and doing their work without questioning leadership or unfair policies was a major issue for women activists. In some cases it resulted in their termination from the workplace. This tension is not unique to the world of activism, but shows the ways that societal expectations for women and work also apply to other areas of their lives. The harm and hypocrisy faced in formal organizational spaces, and the alternative experiences of women who participate in informal groups, is also reflected in the discussion of the non-profit industrial complex below.

Women’s experiences with their activist groups and organizations were not entirely negative. Most discussed how organizations helped to facilitate their work as well. These facilitators were discussed as different structures organizations included, as well as strong leadership that helped to set the direction for organizational goals. One participant discussed how having a Moms Caucus at her organization helped to make the workplace more accessible for women with young children and helped to value their
experiences as working mothers. Other social justice workplace structures that facilitated women’s sustained participation include flexible schedules, office childcare, and collective decision-making as a value and component of how changes are made within the group. This finding is consistent with, and builds on Boyd’s (2015) study about creating an environment that helps employees to thrive. This study shows how this idea translates to activist groups and social justice-oriented workplaces.

While empowering settings were discussed in the literature review (Maton, 2008), another way of thinking about facilitating environments within movements is through the concept of enabling structures (Evans, Hanlin, & Prilleltensky, 2007; Evans, 2015). Enabling structures are rules, roles and values that help to guide social movement groups and organizations through built in critical reflection and dialogue. One group in particular instituted enabling structures through the establishment of collective decision-making and horizontal leadership as both built into the collective both structurally and in terms of their values.

The concept of prefigurative politics (Cornish, et. al, 2016) also offers a different perspective on how groups and organizations can structure themselves to better reflect the vision of the world in which they would like to live. To reiterate, prefigurative politics refers to the idea that radically transforming the oppressive ways people relate to each other in movement spaces is as important as attending to economic and structural challenges. A lack of attention to prefigurative politics is postulated as one of the reasons the Occupy Wall Street movement ultimately failed; the movement celebrated freedom at the expense of investigating claims of sexual violence and other oppressive behavior (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014). These oppressive relationships were one of the main
concerns women discussed in their interviews. More on prefigurative politics is discussed below in relation to the second research question on the relationship between identity and context.

Some women in this study also mentioned the importance of strong leaders as facilitating their sustained participation. This finding is consistent with other studies that show that leaders who act as role models and can help to facilitate and foster relationships amongst others in their groups are successful at keeping other members sustained (Angelique & Culley, 2014; Nepstad, 2004). These leaders are not always in charge of organizations, sometimes they are better at forming relationships across sectors and bringing people together. In this study, leaders were not always formal leaders of organizations, but those that helped to inspire others to create change.

Both Perkins, et. al (1990) and Christen and Speer (2011) pointed to the importance of understanding context in relation to community participation. This study helps to build on the assertion that relationships and community and organizing structures are crucial for sustained participation. Unlike the place-based neighborhood studies that these researchers focused on, this study shows how within movement context is important for sustained participation on issue-based initiatives as well that are located within specific cultural contexts.

**Non-profit industrial complex.** The limitations of working within nonprofit contexts to do social justice work is one of the main concerns women discussed for their sustained activism. Some participants referred to the idea of the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC), the formal name of the connection between non-profit work and capitalism that hinders radical social justice work (INCITE! Women of Color Against
Violence, 2007), when discussing these issues. While women were angry that the system in which they worked was tied to private funding, many times from wealthy individuals or foundation arms of powerful corporations, the general consensus was that the NPIC was a necessary evil of working within nonprofit contexts. Thinking about their work, some women discussed that understanding the NPIC made them not want to come back to formalized activism in non-profit contexts.

Though the power of foundations and the state to control funding and timelines was seen as limiting and dangerous to radical action, for many of the women in this study, their activism was facilitated by their jobs working for non-profit organizations in or based out of Miami. Employment at social justice organizations allowed them to get paid for their activism. Some participants talked about how the ability to get paid for work they were so passionate about allowed them to sustain their work financially. The contradiction between understanding the dampening of radical initiatives and relying on non-profits for employment was not explicitly brought up by participants, but warrants more discussion. Some women saw their social justice activism as inexplicably tied to non-profits, while others realized that true liberation would never be able to come from these types of formalized settings. In fact, one woman who talked about her informal activist group comprised mainly of women of color as being reluctant to ever formalize because of fears related to the NPIC.

Funding and time represent only two aspects of the NPIC that impact activists. Another issue is that philanthropic organizations are able to impose their will on which issues receive the most attention, and use their own frameworks to shape how social issues are addressed (Buffett & Buffett, 2014). One funder himself has referred to this as
“philanthropic colonialism” (Buffett, 2013). This refers to the practice of funding agencies seeing themselves as saviors on issues in which they do not have expertise. He uses the example of the distribution of condoms in a brothel area to stem the spread of AIDS, which then only increased the price for unprotected sex. Oftentimes the wealthy people who try to solve these problems through philanthropic foundations have been the same people who have created them in the first place.

The study participants who worked in nonprofit organizations understood the cycle of funding and social problems. They expressed frustration on not being able to work on long-term projects because of money being funneled towards short-term political campaigns and projects, and that this money dictated the topics on which they would spend their time. The NPIC has very little concern for the individuals and organizations on the ground doing the work to retain and meet funding goals. More on the NPIC is discussed in general implications of this study below.

**Dynamic Between Identity and Context**

In my second research question I asked, “how is the dynamic between identity and context reflected in sustained participation in activism?” Women’s identities play a huge role in how they interact within their work as activists. The contexts discussed in the previous question, which help to shape women’s sustained participation in activism, can determine whether women feel their experiences matter or whether it is worth trying to make changes at various levels of analysis. Even the way women describe themselves has implications for how they see themselves in relation to other feminist activists. Women of color all discussed their multiple, intersectional social identities when talking about what parts of who they are inform their activism. White women described themselves more in
terms of personal qualities (e.g. “the person who has been wronged”). This reflects the role that privilege plays in the ways women see themselves in the world. Even in a largely Hispanic county like Miami-Dade, whiteness is able to mask discussions of race when it comes to how women describe themselves in the world. The identities women focused on generally were related to identities that were most salient for them in terms of privilege and power.

These identities can be seen in the context of how women in movement spaces relate to one another. One sentiment that came up many times for women in these interviews is that “hurt people hurt people.” Participants acknowledged that many people who identified as activists, with whom they participated in demonstrations and meetings with, had also faced trauma in their personal lives. While sometimes trauma was related to abuse by family members and trusted loved ones, many times it related to racism, sexism, and the intersection of oppressions. Sometimes in movement spaces, infighting would get in the way of fighting the common enemy, because according to one participant, there is a lot of fear in being up against systemic issues that seem too big to resist and change. Women of color especially would become frustrated by White women who they felt wanted solidarity on gender issues that mostly affected middle- and upper-class women, while not supporting causes that Black women brought to the fore. This study contributes to the idea that relationships are facilitators in movement spaces by showing the complexities of the relationships between women with different identities, oppressions, and traumas within these spaces. The idea that those experiencing trauma can also inflict harm upon others fighting for social justice is one area that needs further exploration by both researchers and practitioners.
As stated earlier, the concept of prefigurative politics is one place researchers can begin thinking about transforming oppressive movement spaces to better reflect a more just world. As stated earlier, prefigurative politics critique and seek to change the status quo around oppressive practices within social movement spaces (Cornish, et. al, 2016). One possible strategy for addressing harm and hypocrisy in movements spaces is through the creation of critical collective spaces (Wallin-Ruschman & Patka, 2016). These spaces intentionally attend to the diversity-community dialectic that can impact the well-being of social movement organizations and activist groups. Instead of focusing on safety, the focus becomes critical dialogue of hierarchical and oppressive structures, as well as imagining alternative relationship building strategies. “Brave spaces” are another way of reconceptualizing safe spaces in the context of teaching. Instead of the focus on safety and freedom from harm, which tends to set an impossible standard, an emphasis on courage is chosen instead (Arao & Clemens, 2013). While not without their own flaws, critical collective spaces and brave spaces offer alternative ways to think differently about how women can interact in movement spaces.

Some, but not all, women who were interviewed had been involved in varying degrees with Women’s March. In fact, this dissertation started with a reference to Women’s March, one of the most recent widespread examples of feminist activism on the national levels. Not all women who participated in Women’s March events or spaces felt welcome, and some felt that these spaces were hostile towards them because of their race. Women of color in this study expressed similar concerns and disillusionment as women in a recent study on Black women’s perceptions of the inaugural Women’s March (Brewer & Dundes, 2018). Particularly, women in both studies stated that the Women’s
March only happened because of White women’s anger over the election of Donald Trump.

While it may sound as if women’s experiences in activism were a constant struggle, some women who broke off from Women’s March and other formal organizations, found solidarity with women who shared their social identities and could intimately understand their experiences in the world. This was particularly true of women of color participants. One participant stated that her involvement in movement work allowed her to “decolonize her existence,” meaning that instead of living up to societal expectations of who she should be, she could come out openly as a queer Black woman. In a sense, movement work helped women to gain aspects of themselves they would not have been able to learn about outside of these spaces.

In addition to the dynamic between women’s social identities and contexts both facilitated and hindered women in their activism work, power played a large role in who was able to take risks in demonstrations and protests. This played out in two different ways. In the first, women of color felt the need to act on behalf of their communities because of their marginalized place in society. This is particularly evident in one participant’s assertion that the issues she fights for are her “life, not a fucking cause.” While some women, because of racial and class privilege, could leave the world of activism to return to their everyday lives, women without these privileges constantly felt the effects of a lack of societal power. Kagan, et. al’s (2005) matrix of participation and power showed which actors in society face the biggest risks in participating on social justice activism. This study contributes to that understanding of participation and power by pushing to the forefront the relationship not just between professional roles and
participation and power, but intersectional identities and participation and power as well. In addition to this model, this study builds on Gaventa’s (2016) assertion that social movement participation has yet to address multiple intersecting inequalities by showing that women of color in Miami are working hard to create movements that are intersectional in their focus and in their outcomes.

**General Implications**

This study has general implications for how we think about sustained activism. These implications are tied to ideas for future research that can build on a contextual view of sustained activism for women in feminist movements. Three notable places where more research is needed are in the domains of collective identity, the role of celebration, and the nonprofit industrial complex and the role of power.

**Collective Identity.** Creating collective identity is considered the central task of New Social Movements (NSMs) (Gamson, 1992). The discussion on identity and context shows implications for how we think about and approach collective identity within social movements. It also raises a number of questions. For example, what if you are defined by others as being part of the group but you yourself don’t feel that way? Discussions of collective identity must include a discussion of power. So far in the academic literature, collective identity and power have been discussed in the context of “politicized collective identity,” that is, collective identity that intentionally engages members in a collective power struggle (Klandersman & Simon, 2001). In contrast to this particular intersection between power and collective identity as addressing intergroup power relations, we must also address intragroup power relations, and pay close attention to the prefigurative politics of feminist social movements.
As already stated, one Black participant’s assertion that Women’s March is “y’alls problem with Donald Trump,” and further statement about how as a woman of color she’s dealt with oppression since she was born, shows that current iterations of the feminist movement still mainly reflect White women’s concerns, even when those movements are led by women of color at the national level. Previous studies have shown that identification with the social movement is a catalyst for action (Mannarini, et. al, 2009), but collective identity as it is currently theorized does not reflect intersectional social identities. Instead, in this instance, the collective identity of the feminist movement privileges womanhood above multiple intersecting oppressions that need to be addressed by the movement and may therefore alienate certain groups of women. This study shows that movement spaces need to work more on creating inclusive environments that not only make people feel safe and welcome, but also reflect who they are in terms of their social identities. One line of future research should look to document how feminist social movements come to form collective identities and explore the process through which decision making happens.

**Celebration.** While the role of relationships in activism has begun to be documented by community psychologists, as discussed previously (Christens & Speer, 2011), the role of fun and informal gatherings more broadly came about in this study as being important to women’s overall activism experiences. One participant added at the end of her interview that the three most important things for sustaining her activism were, “fun, keeping those personal relationships, staying pissed off.” While this was the only participant to talk about having fun in activism directly, other women discussed the importance of doing activities outside of activism with their activist friends. Perhaps this
participant, who had been an activist for over 40 years, was able to use that perspective to think about activism in a less urgent way, in a way that combines levity with the constant struggle for justice. More research is needed to look at how fun and leisure activities should be valued as a vital piece of why people want to continue participating in fights for social justice. Previous research has discussed burnout and different strategies to combat it (Gomes, 2015; Maslach & Gomes, 2016), but none have yet to focus on how movement settings can embrace fun and celebration in meaningful ways to enhance people’s experiences, help to form and cement a collective identity amongst participants, and foster deep relationships. Social movement researchers could look at the role fun and celebration play in the lives of those community activists.

**Nonprofit Industrial Complex and Power.** The nonprofit industrial complex serves as a perpetual cloud over the heads of women who are doing their activism through human service and social change organizations in Miami. To date, very little research has looked at the role of the nonprofit industrial complex in hindering activism, though work outside of academia has begun to address the infusion of capitalism in social justice work. For example, some writers have suggested that nonprofits and activists need to think outside the box to change strategies and structures related to social change (Cohen, 2014). One notable example of an “outside the box” initiative is the Family Independence Initiative, an organization that focuses their funds on giving low-income communities money and power to change their own communities, instead of focusing that money on providing services for the same community. Social justice researchers should look more closely at the role of the NPIC in activists’ everyday work and the strategies used to resist or comply with the demands of capitalism. Further, community-
engaged scholars should explore their own relationship to this system, and how our work may help to facilitate and perpetuate oppressive structures, and what is really at stake for us as actors in that system.

Besides these three categories, potential other lines of work for researchers could include looking specifically at how movements maintain momentum in the face of public attacks and research on what sustains ally activists in movements who do not share the same social identities of the people whose causes they are fighting.

**Implications for Action**

This study can also offer implications for action on behalf of community practitioners and activists. First, a next step specifically for women involved in this study is to have facilitated discussions to talk about the findings amongst other activists in Miami to see how we can start a larger conversation about these issues. Some participants have already expressed interest in being involved in larger conversations with other community members around these issues. These conversations could represent a starting point for women in movement spaces to build a more inclusive, collective movement among activists in South Florida and use the principles of Radical Imagination, explained below, to begin the exploration of my own social location as a privileged researcher and partner as well. Next, organizations and activist groups can more intentionally build in enabling structures that allow for reflexivity and greater attention to the potential unintended consequences of their work on members of the group. These structures could take on the form of transformation teams (Evans & Kivell, 2015), small groups that foster conversations about organizational practices related to the groups’ internal and external purpose and direction, as well as inclusiveness. Lastly, organizations and social justice
groups can build in more fun, informal activities to promote bonding and positive relationships between activists, as well as the importance of caring for oneself and others outside of movement-specific spaces.

**Alternative research approaches.** In addition to the implications for participants, the feminist ideology that guides this study demands a reflexive look at the research approach as well. As researchers, we must explore how we can play a collaborative role with activists, rather than just including them in research as participants. The authors of the text *Radical Imagination: Social Movement Research in the Age of Austerity* call for a different way of thinking about researchers’ role in social movement research (Khasnabish & Haiven, 2014). Instead of acting as paternalistic purveyors of knowledge in terms inaccessible to the public, we should understand our own role in relation to activists and social movements. This work must happen in partnership with social movements. Using the idea of the radical imagination, we should radically re-imagine how researchers interact in these settings. This includes understanding our own social location within university settings, the historic relationship between university and community, mobilizing these privileges in the service of social movements, and also contributing to radical academic literature.

Khasnabish and Haiven (2014) refer to this researcher role as “convoking” the radical imagination with social movement activists. This means that researchers collaborate with activists by providing resources and opportunities to explore possibilities that are not yet known to researchers or activists. Perhaps a reimagining of what research can provide for marginalized communities and social activists, while helping to provide supportive structures for these movements, can contribute to more sustained, healthy
movements long-term. Other methodologies that incorporate the idea of “convoking” should be used in further research with social movements. These include participatory action research strategies that include activists in research question formation, data collection, analysis, and dissemination, as well as, ethnographic studies that are engaged in work in solidarity with movement activists (e.g. Graeber, 2009).

**Limitations**

Like every piece of research, this study is not free from limitations. First, this study had a limited sample of women involved. While women came with a diverse array of experiences, only nine participants completed interviews about their experiences. Though grounded theory calls for theoretical saturation, and this study did meet that requirement, there could be richness in hearing other stories. Particularly, no transwomen participated in this study. Further research should include these voices as well to get a more holistic picture of women’s sustained activism and the facilitators and challenges in participating. Another limitation of this study is that a grounded theory does not necessarily translate to a formal theory that is generalizable to the population as a whole. This study is grounded in the context of Miami-Dade County and therefore speaks mostly to the experiences of women who live and work there. More research would be needed to see if this grounded theory has applications beyond South Florida.

Grounded theory falls short of creating formal theory, but it also falls short in what is perhaps a contradictory way. As stated earlier, research should incorporate activists as partners, rather than just participants. While constructionist grounded theory methodology allows for the construction of theory from participants’ words, the ultimate analytic decisions fall on the researcher with no responsibility to follow up with specific
actions. In this way my analysis alone can only ever paint a partial picture of the experiences of women engaged in activism work. My situatedness as a white, middle-class doctoral student utilizing a specific qualitative methodology is a limitation in this sense. This is not to diminish the validity of this work, but should be noted as the reality of much work still being conducted in academia, even in progressive movement spaces.

Because the purpose of this grounded theory was to create an integrative, localized theory of women’s sustained participation in activism, this study did not look at points of divergence amongst women activists. Most women expressed similar sentiments about why they stay involved in feminist activism. Though I pointed to a few instances where women thought about their positionalities in different ways (i.e. how Black women view their roles in predominantly White spaces), there were certainly other places to flesh out this divergence as well. Future research should attend more directly to how women might view themselves in terms of their activism work in similar and competing ways, and how these contradictions can lead to a richer understanding of women’s sustained activism.

Lastly, Cuban culture, a significant part of what drives the overall culture of Miami, loomed large over this study. Many participants, in discussing how the city and county affect their activism work, talked about the dominance of Cuban people in the local government as well as in spaces connected to financial power. As I sampled participants for this study, I did not interview any Cuban feminist activists. This perspective could be useful in understanding how a dominant social identity can either facilitate or hinder sustained activism in marginalized, social justice spaces. Further research should incorporate these perspectives.
Conclusion

This study used an intersectional feminist perspective to reimagine how activism is sustained long-term. Using grounded theory as a methodology, this study explored the contexts of women’s sustained participation in the feminist movement, as well as the dynamic between women’s social identities and their various context that affect their participation. Women in this study pointed to the importance of relationships, supportive organizational structures, and the nonprofit industrial complex as areas of their lives that push and pull them towards and away from their activism. This study helps to build on previous work in community psychology and similar fields that emphasize the importance of understanding sustained participation in activism. This work also suggests that we devote more time in our work to understanding the role that love plays as a liberating and transformative force for change, as well as understand the limitations placed on activists’ work due to capitalism and the nonprofit industrial complex. There is hope that the feminist movement can continue to grow and evolve as greater attention is paid to the processes and structures that both facilitate and hinder participation. I would like to conclude this study with a quote from a participant that was not included in the analysis, but speaks to the connections and relationships fostered by activism, the primary reason women sustained their activism:

*Someone a few years ago said something that will probably last with me forever...he said that activism and movement spaces feels like church to him and I started think about that and on a spiritual level, this work very much is church. It's like a religion. It's the place that I feel the closest to God when we're out in the streets. Because those are the places where when you're out in the streets and you're surrounded by police officers, nobody's thinking about anything else but protecting each other. You're in tune to everything that's going on, you're worried, you're connected on a very different level. Like you're aligned in your purpose at the very moment, like, those are the places that I feel closest to God. When I'm in service to Black women whatever that looks like, whether that's a women's circle*
here or hosting a dance class or whatever, those are the places that I feel like I'm walking in my purpose and those are the things that I feel are going to get me into heaven (laughs). [Participant 8]

To reiterate, activism is hard work. It will always be hard to stand as a minority against the status quo to fight for human rights. This study is one small step in understanding how that energy can be sustained through organizational practices, relationships, and acknowledging systems of privilege and power. Perhaps through love and connection with one another, we can help to create and sustain more inclusive social justice movements.
References


Hull, Scott, & Smith, (1993). *All the men are black, all the women are white, but some of us are brave: Black women’s studies.* New York: Feminist Press.


Appendix A
Interview Guide

Research Questions:

(1) What are the contextual factors that influence women’s sustained participation in activism?

(2) How is the dynamic between identity and context reflected in sustained participation in activism?

The interview will begin with a brief introduction of myself, the field of community psychology, and why I am interested in studying women’s activism. I will talk a little bit about my personal experiences before the beginning of the interview. Participants will be allowed to control the flow of the conversation, but the researcher will remain honest and answer questions as they arise. Participants will be asked to complete a brief demographics questionnaire (See appendix B) before starting the interview.

Each interviewee will be asked the following question at the end of the interview:

Opening Prompt

Tell me a bit about some of your experiences in the past that led to you becoming involved in activism.

Interview Questions and Probes

Below are listed the main interview questions that participants will receive. Every participant will be asked the same four questions in the left-hand column. Below each question is the domain under which it falls. I will not say the domain name to the participant. In the right-hand column are sample probes to help elicit answers if participants feel stuck or if they mention specific issues. Many of these probes will be dependent on the specific responses from participants and cannot be fully anticipated by the researcher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Interview Question and Domain</th>
<th>Probes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tell me a bit about some of your experiences in the past that led to you becoming involved in activism.</td>
<td>Do you have any specific memories that led you to activism? Are there any key experiences you can point to specifically?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Were there any people or events that influenced you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What parts of who you are inform your activism? (Intersectionality)</td>
<td>How do these parts of you specifically relate to your work around women and gender issues?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In what ways has your race or other identities informed your activism?
Are there any memories specifically related to any of your identities that have informed your activism?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What parts of your journey have been specifically impactful for how you stay involved in activism?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beyond your personal characteristics and motivations, what specific factors have helped keep you involved in activism – what helps?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond your personal characteristics and motivations, what specific factors have hindered your involvement in activism – what gets in the way? (Context)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you come to think about activism?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think motivated you to…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What helped you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What made it difficult for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What parts of the activist spaces you’ve been involved in have helped to sustain you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite challenges, why do you stay involved in feminist activism?

| Is there anything specific that keeps you coming back to activism? |
| Are there any times when you have had to take a break? Describe that story for me. What were they? |

Is there anything you would like to add that you didn’t think of earlier in the interview?

The researcher will anticipate the “who you are” question to have multiple different kinds of probes considering the varying and multiple identities that women may have. Probes about race, sexuality, and other social identities will only be mentioned if initially brought up by the participant.
Appendix B

Demographics Questionnaire

This survey will help to make sure that who you are in being accurately represented in the writing of this dissertation. You do not have to share any information that you do not feel comfortable disclosing.

How would you describe your:

Gender Identity______________________________________

Race _______________________________________________

Ethnicity____________________________________________

Sexuality____________________________________________

Physical Ability_____________________________________

First Language________________________________________

Are you an immigrant? □ Yes    □ No    □ I would prefer not to answer

Is there anything else you would like to share about your various personal identities that you don’t think was captured here?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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