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Collective Action on Behalf of Women: Testing the Conceptual Distinction Between Traditional Collective Action and Small Acts in College Women

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Abstract

The current study examines the nature of actions that U.S. college women ($N = 267$) engage in to promote, protect, or enhance the welfare of other women. The study had two goals: 1) to distinguish between traditional forms of action (*traditional collective action*) and more informal, interpersonal, forms of action (*small acts*) among college women; and 2) to test whether the classic antecedents of collective action (gender identity, feminist identity, women's activist identity, efficacy, appraisals of gender inequality, and injustice standards) are differentially predictive of these two types of participation. A confirmatory factor analysis provided strong support for these two distinct forms of participation: traditional collective action and small acts. Moreover, whereas women's activist identity was the only predictor of traditional collective action, all predictors except gender identification and perceived group efficacy predicted small acts. Practical and theoretical implications for mobilizing college women for traditional collective action versus small acts are discussed.

Collective action has traditionally been defined as behaviors that individuals engage in with the goal of promoting, protecting, or enhancing *a group's* psychological and economic outcomes (Louis, 2009; Postmes & Brumsting, 2002; van Zomeren et al., 2018). Recent work has pointed to the complex nature of collective action and the need for systematic examination and reconceptualization of new forms of participation (e.g., "liking" a woman's post about women's issues on social media; advocating for gender equality in discussions with friends, etc.), given the rapid change in their nature and meaning (Marsh & Akram, 2015; Ohme et al., 2018; Stroebe et al., 2019; Theocharis & van Deth, 2018; van Deth, 2014; Zuckerman, 2014). It is important to study these new forms of action because they signal different types of engagement that are also legitimate forms of participation compared to traditional political acts (voting, signing petitions, etc.; Theocharis & van Deth, 2018). In the current study, we examined U.S. college women's engagement in various forms of action on behalf of other women. The study had two goals: 1) to conceptually distinguish between traditional forms of collective action (*traditional collective action*) and more informal, interpersonal forms of action (*small acts*) among college women; 2) to test whether the classic antecedents of collective action (gender identity, feminist identity, women's activist identity, efficacy, appraisals of gender inequality, and injustice standards) differentially predict these two types of actions.

Traditional Collective Action Versus Small Acts

A recent study by Stroebe et al. (2019), in which Dutch participants were interviewed about their participation in actions in response to human-induced earthquakes, revealed a broad range of actions, many of which were collective but ingroup-oriented (e.g., helping or encouraging ingroup members) rather than outgroup-oriented (e.g., action against the national government or cooperating with outgroup members to develop solutions). In addition, they found that traditional forms of collective action such as demonstrations and protests were rare. More frequent behaviors were individual-level responses directed at ingroup members such as cooperative or helping actions that were organized toward their ingroup or behaviors directed at communicating with others who experience the same injustice. These latter responses form an under-studied distinct dimension of behavior that can occur in response to both individual and collective events. As such, this research underscores the need

to broaden the scope of collective action research, to include a focus on these smaller, interpersonal acts that are ingroup-oriented (which we call *small acts*).

Another study conducted in Germany by Theocharis and van Deth (2018) found that the repertoire of political participation has expanded and includes both old and new forms such as voting, digital network participation, institutionalized participation (e.g., working for or donating money for a political party/candidate), protest, civic participation (e.g., volunteering), and consumerist participation (e.g., boycotting products). The new forms of participation involve actions that may not fit the classic definition of collective action, such as public acts (flash mobs) and private acts (political podcasts or other “self-expressive” acts). Some of these newer behaviors undertaken by young people are labelled by the participants themselves as social and non-political, which makes their conceptualization as political participation more challenging (Theocharis & van Deth, 2018). Across these studies, some of the behaviors that disadvantaged group members engage in appear to lack the goal of helping the group as a whole (e.g., women as a group), and rather are aimed at achieving some other ultimate goal, such as self-expression (Theocharis & van Deth, 2018) or helping individual target members of a group (Stroebe et al., 2019).

Women’s Collective Action on Behalf of Women

Kelly and Brelinger (1995) conducted one of the first systematic studies that examined women’s intentions to engage in collective action as well as actual participation. Women were asked to imagine a situation in which the government was proposing to introduce a new law, which was considered harmful to women’s interests, and then reported their willingness to engage in action (Time 1) and actual behaviors they engaged in (Time 2). Factor analysis revealed traditional forms of actions as such individual protest (e.g., “Signing a petition”; “Contacting your MP (senator)” and collective protest (e.g., “Taking part in a rally or demonstration”), but also informal and interpersonal forms of participation such as informal participation (“Discussing women’s issues with friends or colleagues”). However, their final scale measuring actual participation includes, and thus conflates, both types of actions (traditional collective action and small acts).

Based on interviews with U.S. college women ($N = 20$), Fieck et al. (2020) developed a model that describes the process of mobilizing and maintaining engagement in action among college women. Before the interview, college women indicated the frequency of pro-women activities in which they had engaged within the prior 6 months and then, during the interview, discussed some of these activities. From these interviews, Fieck et al. (2020) concluded that these actions appear to be motivated by three distinct goals: 1) *information dissemination* (to inform others/get informed); 2) *social influence* (to persuade others to engage in action); and 3) *support* (to offer help to other women). These goals are often achieved through participation in interpersonal, informal acts, or *small acts*, which are distinct from traditional forms of action documented in prior literature (protest, signing petitions, or voting), yet still influence political, civic, and organizational participation via traditional or institutionalized channels (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014).

Some of these actions occur face-to-face, whereas others occur online, on social media. For example, making other women aware of sexism (Foster, 2015), exchanging information that is vital to the coordination of offline protest activities (Jost et al., 2018), or reading news or books about social or political issues or other information-seeking activities (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014) align with the goal of information-dissemination. Women’s engagement with social media about important political or social issues (e.g., posting about women’s issues on Twitter or Facebook) aligns with the goal of social influence. These actions have been conceptualized as “consensus mobilization” (Klandermans, 1984) or persuasive action (Postmes & Brunsting, 2002), whereby individuals are trying to inform or convince others that “a certain state of affairs is unacceptable and can be changed” (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987, p. 519).

Given the small sample size in Fieck et al. (2020)'s study ($N = 20$), a systematic quantitative examination using a large sample is needed to examine the nature of these informal small acts that college women engage in. In the current study, we examined the conceptual distinction between traditional forms of action (protesting, voting, fundraising, signing petitions, etc.) and these small acts. As part of this test of distinctiveness, we propose that collective action and small acts will be predicted by different antecedents among college women.

Predictors of Collective Action Versus Small Acts

In this study, we focused on the predictors of collective action proposed by van Zomeren et al. (2008) as part of their integrative social identity model of collective action (SIMCA model). This model proposed that appraised injustice, perceived efficacy in achieving the goals of social action, and social identity have unique effects on collective action. Indeed, van Zomeren et al. (2008) found that social identity, and particularly activist identity (see van Zomeren et al., 2018), predicts collective action directly as well as indirectly through appraised injustice and perceived efficacy.

Three forms of social identity positively predict women's action on behalf of their group: *gender identity*, *feminist identity*, and *activist identity*. Across studies, identification with one's disadvantaged group (e.g., gender identification) is a strong predictor of collective action (e.g., Burn et al., 2000; Iyer & Ryan, 2009; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995; Mummendey et al., 1999). Similarly, feminist identification is associated with increased feminist activism among community women (Weis et al., 2018; Yoder et al., 2011; Zucker, 2004) and college women (Fieck et al., 2020; Liss et al., 2004; Nelson et al., 2008). Weis et al. (2018) found that women who identify as feminists report greater willingness to intervene in situations of everyday sexism. Specifically, participants with more favorable attitudes toward prototypical feminists were more likely to identify as feminists and therefore more likely to stand up to everyday sexism.

Feminist identity can become politicized when it involves not only accepting the label of feminist ("I am a feminist") but also endorsing collective political ideology around women's issues—a phenomenon Duncan (1999) calls feminist consciousness. This feminist consciousness (or *group consciousness*) involves acknowledging one's disadvantaged group situation, rejecting justifications of ingroup disadvantage, and favoring collective action that would improve the situation for the ingroup (Duncan, 1999; Gurin et al., 1980). Duncan (1999) found that feminist consciousness mediated the relationship between women's personal experiences of injustice (sexual harassment) and their engagement in collective action.

Further politicization of social identity can lead to the development of an activist identity. Kelly and Breinlinger (1995) found that women's identification as an activist for women's rights resulted in stronger motivation to participate in collective action than feminist identification. A collective identity is politicized to the extent group members actively engage in a power struggle on behalf of their group once they become aware of shared grievances of ingroup members, blame the system or an outgroup for the ingroup predicament, and their group's power struggle becomes embedded in a larger intergroup context (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Indeed, activist identity predicts action engagement on behalf of the group via group consciousness (Duncan, 1999; Gurin et al., 1980). As such, politicized activist identity becomes an agentic form of social identity that affects group members' intergroup appraisals and actions, including increased collective self-understanding (Cole & Stewart, 1996; Drury & Reicher, 2000; Duncan, 1999; Schmitt et al., 2019; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Simon et al., 1998; Stürmer & Simon, 2004). In their revised SIMCA model, van Zomeren et al. (2018) note that identification with a politicized group (e.g., activist group) is particularly important because it includes identity content—information about "what it means to be part of 'us' [that ingroup]" (p. 127)—namely group consciousness.

Savaş and Stewart's work (2019) on lifelong activist women underscores the role of group consciousness in the development of activist identity: the personal experience of accumulated disadvantage and injustice based on their social identities as well as seeing the oppression of others like themselves gradually made these women activists politically and socially conscious. These experiences become part of self-definition, propelling activists to engage in activism on behalf of other women. Similarly, a recent qualitative study of activist identity among college student activists (Horowitz, 2017) revealed the role of politicized activist identity and particularly the role of categorization ("them"—an outgroup who suffers—versus "us"—an ingroup who fights on their behalf) in creating a common conscience that links the ingroup to the outgroup.

In addition, prior work has found that *perceptions of high ingroup efficacy* (i.e., belief that the ingroup can change the situation through action) also predict collective action (Hornsey et al., 2006; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995; Tausch & Becker, 2013; van Zomeren et al., 2004). For instance, low perceived group efficacy regarding social change undermines the willingness to undertake actions to reduce social inequality or discrimination among the disadvantaged (Radke et al., 2016) and among advantaged group members (Stewart et al., 2010).

Finally, disadvantaged group members are more likely to engage in action when they appraise social inequality as unfair (Jetten et al., 2013), underscoring the importance of *appraisals of injustice of ingroup disadvantage* as a strong antecedent of action (Iyer & Ryan, 2009; Van Stekelenburg et al., 2009; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Work on how groups make these appraisals have focused on *injustice standards*, defined as thresholds of evidence needed by disadvantaged group members to conclude that ingroup disadvantage is unfair to the disadvantaged group (Miron et al., 2010, 2011, 2020). Lower thresholds for identifying an act as unjust predict greater perceptions of unfairness of intergroup inequality, which in turn predict greater willingness to reduce inequality among disadvantaged group members (Miron et al., 2011). Having a low injustice threshold thus entails greater moral vigilance among disadvantaged group members for detecting and appraising the injustice of ingroup discrimination and inequality. van Zomeren et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of including moral convictions—beliefs about what is right and what is wrong about group-based inequality or discrimination—in the prediction of collective action among disadvantaged group members. In the current study, injustice standards can be conceptualized as moral standards used by women to make judgments about the morality (unfairness) of gender wage inequality (e.g., distributive injustice; see Miron et al., 2011).

Based on this literature review, we predicted that higher activist identification, appraisals of injustice, perceived group efficacy, and lower injustice standards will each be associated with more frequent engagement in traditional collective action behaviors. However, Fieck et al. (2020) found that localized forms of identity such as gender identity and feminist identity are also proximal predictors of small acts among college women, in addition to activist identity. These multiple social identities are outcomes of college women's life experiences, university climate, and family values and conflict, but also are proximal factors pushing college women to engage in small acts. Moreover, because of their motivational nature as behaviors designed to help other women, small acts should be predicted by the other antecedents of action proposed by van Zomeren et al., (2008, 2018): appraisals of injustice, perceived group efficacy, and lower injustice standards. In sum, we proposed that one conceptual distinction between small acts and traditional collective action is that small acts are motivated by multiple forms of social identity (gender identity, feminist identity, and activist identity), whereas traditional collective action is motivated primarily by politicized activist identity.

Overview and Importance of Current Study

College women are an important constituency in the fight against inequality because of their status as a disadvantaged group and developmental characteristics that shape their activist engagement. College students are still in the process of exploring their identity (Erikson, 1963) and have less developed social and political

attitudes compared to older adults (Stewart & McDermott, 2004; Zucker et al., 2002). Activism is linked to identity development in younger adults and is precipitated by specific life and historical events (Fieck et al., 2020; Savaş & Stewart, 2019). Moreover, adolescence is a formative period for the development of a politicized identity and student activism (Stewart & McDermott, 2004). For instance, Savaş and Stewart (2019) found that over half of the women activists in their sample reported beginning their activism during their adolescent or young adult years (ages 16–24 years).

Thus, it is important to study the forms and antecedents of student activism in college women as these forms of engagement predict future mobilization for social change. College women, unlike long-time activists, are taking their first steps in becoming involved in actions that benefit other women and some of their behaviors (small acts) may take the form of behaviors aimed at learning and informing others about gender inequality (an information-dissemination goal), persuading others about women's issues (a social influence goal), as well as helping individual women (a support goal). Thus, prior definitions of collective action must be broadened to include smaller acts of activism (see also Zuckerman, 2014). Feminist scholars (Moane, 2011; Savaş & Stewart, 2019) have argued that, given the historical exclusion of women from politics, "smaller acts, including interpersonal processes, solidarity, and inclusion and diversity within groups and communities need to be counted as political" (Savaş & Stewart, 2019, pp. 16–17).

To test the hypothesis of conceptual distinctiveness of traditional collective action and small acts, we identified behaviors that could potentially constitute forms of action undertaken by college women (Fieck et al., 2020; Kelly & Breilinger, 1995). We included items assessing traditional forms of collective action (e.g., spending time working on a women's campaign or attending a large social demonstration or rally) and items measuring engagement in smaller, interpersonal, acts (e.g., posting on social media about women's issues or standing up to sexism directed towards a woman) (see Supplement A in the online supplement for the initial set of items). We employed the 2-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) by first examining our measurement model to establish the latent factors for collective action and small acts and then specifying a structural model to test our research hypothesis regarding the proposed differences in the antecedents of each latent variable.

Method

Participants and Procedure

In total, 267 college students (266 self-identified as female and 1 as non-binary; $M_{\text{age}} = 19.45$, $SD = 1.20$; $\text{Range}_{\text{age}} = 17 - 37$ years) from a medium-size university in the U.S. Midwest completed the survey. The majority ($n = 229$) were from the Psychology Department participant pool and completed the survey online in exchange for partial course credit, whereas a small sample who were female college students from the same university recruited through snowballing by the last three authors completed a hard copy of the survey ($n = 38$). Five participants from the latter group were randomly selected to receive a \$10 Amazon gift card. A CFA with 2 latent factors and 6 indicators per factor requires a sample size of approximately 200 participants, when the factor loadings are .50, and approximately 100 participants when the loadings are in the .65–.80 range (Wolf et al., 2013). As such, our sample size was adequate. Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the sample. Participants reported high frequency of social media use, $M = 8.52$, $SD = 1.78$, on a 10-point scale, ranging from 1 = *very rarely* to 10 = *very often*. College women completed the questionnaire during a period of one year (April 2019–March 2020), during the Trump presidency. All measures were presented in the order listed below. The study was approved by the first author's university Institutional Review Board.

Table 1 Participant Demographic Information

Demographics	Categories	%
Race/Ethnicity	African American/Black	3.7%
	Asian American/Asian	5.6%
	European American/White	80.1%
	Hispanic/Latino(a)	4.1%
	American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.7%
	Multi-ethnic	4.1%
	Other	0.7%
Year in School	Freshman	48.5%
	Sophomore	24.6%
	Junior	9.7%
	Senior	17.2%
Current Employment	Full-time	3.1%
	Part-time	59.9%
	Not currently employed	37%
Marital Status	Married	1.5%
	Not married	98.5%
Political Orientation	1 = Extremely Liberal	5.2%
	2	15.6%
	3	16%
	4 = Equally Liberal and Conservative	39%
	5	8.9%
	6	5.2%
	7 = Extremely Conservative	5.2%

Total $N = 267$. Only a portion of the participants were asked about their academic level (year in school; $n = 134$)

Measures

Collective Action on Behalf of Women

To operationalize traditional collective action and small acts, we wanted enough items to identify each factor (i.e., at least 3), while minimizing the risk of inflating model fit by including an excessive number of indicators (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Brown, 2006). From the original pool of 57 items (see Supplement A in the online supplement), we selected five items representing more traditional forms of action and five items representing interpersonal smaller forms of action that were motivated by each of the three goals proposed by Fieck et al. (2020) (information dissemination; social influence; and support; see Table 2).

Table 2 Standardized Factor Loadings from Measurement Model

Items	Factor Loadings	
	Loading	<i>p</i>-value
Factor 1: Traditional Collective Action		
1. Signed a petition supporting a women's issue	.773	< .001
2. Spent time working on a women's campaign (fundraising)	.656	< .001
3. Attended demonstrations, protests, or rallies about women's issues	.594	< .001
4. Voted for a woman candidate in a political office	.408	< .001
5. Donated money to women candidates for Congress	.434	< .001

Factor 2: Small Acts		
6. Challenged a sexist remark that was said to a woman (Support)	.654	< .001
7. Supported a woman's post on social media about women's issues ("a like on Facebook" or retweeting) (Support)	.685	< .001
8. Actively sought out knowledge about women's issues (InfoDis)	.695	< .001
9. Convinced others that supporting women's issues is a good thing (Influence)	.750	< .001
10. Advocated for equality for women and men in discussions with peers (Influence)	.734	< .001

$N = 267$. All items loaded on their specified factor (all p 's < .001) with standardized loadings above .40. The correlation between latent factors was .554 ($p < .001$), indicating a statistically significant relationship between Traditional Collective Action and Small Acts. Goals of small acts are included in parentheses after each Small Acts item: Support = Provide Support; InfoDis = Information Dissemination; Influence = Social Influence/Persuasion

In the selection of behaviors tapping into our two conceptual dimensions of action, we were guided by prior work that clearly conceptualized signing petitions, voting, fundraising, donating money, and mass protesting as more traditional forms of participation (Kelly & Brelinger, 1995; Theocharis & van Deth, 2018). The commonality among these behaviors is their engagement with structural inequality and systemic issues of representation for women as a group. In contrast, and as suggested by Fieck et al. (2020), small acts can take the form of behaviors aimed at learning and informing others about gender inequality through disseminating information, social influence, and providing support in face-to-face and online interactions. These actions occur within individual interactions—albeit still as group members—that promote or enhance the welfare of other women. Participants answered each question about the acts they engaged in over the past 12 months, using the following instructions and 7-point scale: “In the last 12 months, how often did you engage in the following activities?” (1 = *didn't do that activity*; 2 = *once in 12 months*; 3 = *once in 6 months*; 4 = *once in 3 months*; 5 = *once a month*; 6 = *once a week*; 7 = *once a week or more often*).

Women's Activist Identification

This identity variable was assessed with one item used by Kelly and Brelinger (1995): “I would describe myself as someone who is actively involved in promoting women's issues.” This item was rated on 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*) with 4 as a neutral mid-point (*Neither Agree nor Disagree*).

Gender Identification

This identity variable was assessed with a single face-valid item adapted from Postmes et al. (2013): “I identify with other women.” This item was rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*) with 4 as a neutral mid-point (*Neither Agree nor Disagree*).

Feminist Identification

Consistent with prior work (e.g., Burn et al., 2000; Duncan, 1999), this variable was measured with one item: “I am a feminist.” This item was rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*) with 4 as a neutral mid-point (*Neither Agree nor Disagree*).

Perceived Group Efficacy

In order to assess perceived group efficacy rather than perceived individual efficacy, we adapted the three items from Kelly and Brelinger (1995) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$) by changing the referents such as “every individual” and “people” to “woman/women”. These items include, “Every woman can have an impact on the political process”; “Women working together can change government policy”; “There is not much point in participating in political campaigns: one woman's participation won't make any difference”. The last item was reverse-coded. The items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*) with 4 as a neutral mid-point (*Neither Agree nor Disagree*).

Injustice Standards Regarding Gender Wage Discrepancy

As in prior work (Miron et al., 2020), injustice standards were measured with 5 items ($\alpha = .82$; e.g., “For you to consider the existing gender wage discrepancy in the United States unfair to women, the wage gap would have to be found in what percentage of occupations?”; “For you to consider the existing gender wage discrepancy in the United States unfair to women, the percentage of women whose well-being and lives are negatively affected by this discrepancy would have to be.”). Each item was accompanied by 11-response possible options in 10% increments ranging from “less than 10%” to “more than 90%”.

Appraisals of Gender Inequality

Appraisals of unfairness and severity of existing gender inequality in the United States were measured with two items (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$): “In my opinion, the gender inequality is negatively affecting women in the United States”; and “In my opinion, the gender inequality is very unfair to women in the United States.” These items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*) with 4 as a neutral midpoint (*Neither Agree nor Disagree*).

Analytic Plan

Given our adequate sample size (200+) and number of items (5) that captured each of our Traditional Collective Action and Small Acts concepts (Brown, 2006), we employed the 2-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). We began by examining our measurement model to establish distinctive latent factors for traditional collective action and small acts. Afterward, we specified a structural model that allowed us to test our research hypothesis regarding differences in the antecedents of each latent variable. Specifically, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)—followed by structural equation modelling (SEM)—to test the hypothesized conceptual distinctiveness of the two types of collective action on behalf of women among college women.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

No participant data was excluded from the analyses. There were no significant differences between participants who completed the questionnaire online versus paper-and-pencil format on engagement in traditional collective action or small acts (both $F_s < 1.61$, $p_s > .20$), nor on the antecedent variables (all $F_s < 2.95$, $p_s > .08$). As expected, college women engaged in traditional collective action ($M = 1.26$, $SD = .54$; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .71$) less frequently than small acts ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.46$; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .83$), $t(266) = -.22.53$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = $[-1.981; -1.662]$. Table 3 displays the frequency of each small act and traditional collection action behavior. Descriptive statistics and correlations for all study variables appear in Table 4.

Table 3 Frequencies of Traditional Collective Action Behaviors and Small Acts

	1 = Didn't do that activity	2 = Once in 12 months	3 = Once in 6 months	4 = Once in 3 months	5 = Once a month	6 = Once a week	7 = Once a week or more
Traditional Collective Action							
1. Signed a petition supporting a women's issue	82.8%	10.5%	4.1%	1.5%	1.1%	0%	0%
2. Spent time working on a women's campaign (fundraising)	84.3%	12%	2.2%	0.4%	0.7%	0%	0.4%
3. Attended demonstrations, protests, or rallies about women's issues	74.9%	14.6%	5.6%	3.4%	1.5%	0%	0%
4. Voted for a woman candidate in a political office*	74.2%	19.1%	4.9%	0.7%	0.7%	0%	0.4%
5. Donated money to women candidates for Congress	97.8%	1.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0%	0%	0%
Small Acts							
6. Challenged a sexist remark that was said to a woman	30.3%	19.1%	14.2%	13.9%	13.5%	7.1%	1.9%
7. Supported a woman's post on social media about women's issues ("a like on Facebook" or retweeting)	23.3%	13.2%	16.2%	13.2%	14.3%	8.6%	11.3%
8. Actively sought out knowledge about women's issues	39.5%	18.4%	13.5%	9.8%	9.8%	4.9%	4.1%
9. Convinced others that supporting women's issues is a good thing	22.9%	13.5%	11.3%	15%	14.3%	8.6%	14.3%
10. Advocated for equality for women and men in discussions with peers	37.8%	16.5%	13.5%	13.5%	10.5%	4.9%	3.4%

N = 267

*The Wisconsin statewide general election took place on April 2, 2019, and numerous primaries and local elections occurred during the study time period

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for All Study Variables

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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1. Traditional Collective Action	267	1.26	0.45	—							
2. Small Acts	267	3.09	1.46	.44**	—						
3. Gender Identification	266	5.72	1.47	.04	.22**	—					
4. Feminist Identification	261	4.27	1.73	.25**	.46**	.24**	—				
5. Activist Identification	265	3.02	1.43	.33**	.40**	.20**	.47**	—			
6. Perceived Group Efficacy	266	5.40	1.19	.15*	.43**	.32**	.43**	.34**	—		
7. Injustice Standards	265	3.75	1.86	-.03	-.19**	-.05	-.09	.01	-.15*	—	
8. Inequality Appraisals	265	5.29	1.39	.19**	.52**	.25**	.49**	.29**	.52**	-.13*	—

Total sample size was 267. All information presented here corresponds to observed indicators

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Structural Equation Modeling

CFA and structural equation modeling (SEM) were conducted using the *lavaan* package (version 0.6–10; Rosseel, 2012) in *R* (version 4.1.2; R Core Team, 2021). Missing data were negligible (missingness was < 2.3% across variables); we used full information maximum likelihood to handle the sparse missing data (Brown, 2006). We set the scale for latent factors in all analyses by fixing the variance of each latent factor to one.

Measurement Model

We specified an initial measurement model with two latent factors—*Traditional Collective Action* and *Small Acts*—with 5 items per latent factor. Items uniquely loaded on each latent factor; there were no cross-loadings or correlated residuals. Table 5 contains standardized factor loadings for the measurement model. The measurement model showed good fit, $\chi^2(34) = 55.334$, $p = .012$, $TLI = .962$, $RMSEA = .048$, $SRMR = .053$, indicating a reasonable match between the model and the data (Brown, 2006).

Table 5 Summary of Estimated Parameters in Structural Model

				95% CI		
Antecedent Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	<i>p</i>
Traditional Collective Action						
Gender Identification	-.055	-.074	.046	-.195	.047	.231
Feminist Identification	.057	.090	.053	-.074	.253	.284
Activist Identification	.264	.346	.067	.194	.497	< .001
Perceived Group Efficacy	-.031	-.033	.064	-.172	.105	.637
Injustice Standards	-.025	-.043	.040	-.175	.088	.519
Inequality Appraisals	.048	.061	.064	-.098	.220	.453
Small Acts						
Gender Identification	.032	.035	.056	-.083	.153	.562
Feminist Identification	.117	.146	.059	.003	.289	.045
Activist Identification	.226	.235	.065	.107	.363	< .001
Perceived Group Efficacy	.146	.126	.078	-.003	.256	.056
Injustice Standards	-.090	-.122	.042	-.232	-.012	.029
Inequality Appraisals	.339	.343	.073	.211	.476	< .001

Results of structural regression using 2,000 bootstrap draws to obtain standard errors. *SE* = standard error; *CI* = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit. Model fit indices: $\chi^2(82) = 103.443$, $p = .055$; $TLI = .968$; $RMSEA = .032$; $SRMR = .050$

Structural Model

We specified a structural model in which both latent factors were regressed on six observed predictors. We ran 2,000 bootstrap samples to estimate the final structural model. Table 5 contains standardized and unstandardized parameter estimates of all structural regression analyses. As expected, there was a significant correlation between the latent factors, $r = .493$, $p < .001$. Women's activist identification was the only statistically significant predictor of Traditional Collective Action ($\beta = .346$, $p < .001$), with all other betas not different from zero (all β s < .09). In contrast, there were four statistically significant predictors of Small Acts, including women's activist identification ($\beta = .235$, $p < .001$), feminist identification ($\beta = .146$, $p = .045$), greater gender inequality appraisals ($\beta = .343$, $p < .001$), and lower injustice standards regarding gender wage discrepancy ($\beta = -.122$, $p = .029$). Perceived group efficacy did not significantly predict Small Acts ($\beta = .126$, $p = .056$), and gender identification did not predict Traditional Collective Action or Small Acts (β s = $-.074$ and $.035$, respectively).

Discussion

A CFA supported our conceptualization of two distinct forms of action among U.S. college women aimed at improving or protecting the welfare of women—traditional collective action and small acts. Traditional forms of collective action (e.g., political participation) have been previously documented across different social groups (Curtin et al., 2010; Stürmer & Simon, 2004; Verba et al., 2005). Indeed, some of the existing political participation scales include almost the same items/behaviors as our traditional collective action construct (i.e., voting, protest, fundraising, signing petitions, and donating money to political candidates), supporting both the content and conceptual validity of our scale (Ohme et al., 2018; Theocharis & van Deth, 2018).

Whereas these traditional forms of action have been closely examined, small acts have received less attention. These smaller acts, such as standing up to sexism directed at other women, represent forms of action that prior work has traditionally classified as allyship (Louis, 2009). Here, we argue that these acts should be conceptualized as small acts of collective action whereby helping other women supports the goal of improving or protecting their welfare (Fieck et al., 2020; Stroebe et al., 2019). Moreover, these support-giving acts may occur online in addition to face-to-face and thus reflect the transformative effects of new media such as online social networks (Bond et al., 2012; Jost et al., 2018) that college women use (Fieck et al., 2020). Whereas recent research has begun examining activities that resemble the acts included in our small acts construct (e.g., see Ohme et al.'s (2018) measure of engagement in non-political activities), these scales lack a conceptual analysis of types of goals driving individuals to engage in these small activities. As such, our work provides a novel motivational conceptualization of these small acts and a strong theoretical grounding for understanding this form of participation.

An examination of the zero-order correlations indicates that traditional collective action was significantly associated with all the predictor variables, except gender identification and injustice standards, whereas small acts correlated with all six of the predictor variables. Importantly, the zero-order correlations between traditional collective action and activist identification and between small acts and activist identification, respectively, were comparable, $r_s = .33$ vs. $.40$. Nevertheless, the model analyses indicated that whereas traditional collective action was predicted only by women's activist identification, small acts were predicted by all predictors except perceived group efficacy and gender identification. As expected, the strongest (and only) predictor of traditional collective action was women's activist identification. This finding is in line with a large body of work pointing to the role of activist identification as both a proximal and distal antecedent of collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2008, 2018). The fact that women's activist identification predicted both political and interpersonal forms of participation (traditional collective action and small acts) gives credence to the assumption that "the personal is the political"—college women's everyday interactions are permeated by feminist group consciousness. Indeed, gendered political issues cannot be addressed separately from the personal (Steinem, 2012).

In contrast, and as we predicted, small acts were predicted by multiple social identities, including feminist identification and women's activist identification. Importantly, the strongest predictor of small acts was appraisals of unfairness of gender inequality. This finding is consistent with prior work that found appraisals of injustice or illegitimacy of inequality are critical for mobilizing women into action (Iyer & Ryan, 2009; Jetten et al., 2013; Van Stekelenburg et al., 2009), further validating this construct. Interestingly, past research that examined the effects of activist identification, perceived group efficacy, and appraisals of unfairness of inequality on collection action or willingness to engage in action operationalized collective action similarly to our measure of traditional forms of action (e.g., willingness to protest, sign petitions, etc.). We note that, in the current study, traditional collective action and small acts were strongly associated with each other, and both were significantly associated with these classic three predictors (based on zero-order correlations), but when all variables were included in a model, only activist identification predicted collective action, whereas feminist

identification, activist identification, appraisals, and injustice standards predicted small acts. This pattern of findings suggests that future research on collective action should include both types of action in their empirical tests to capture the full repertoire and extent of disadvantaged groups' behaviors and antecedents for action.

Low injustice standards—requiring less evidence of gender inequality to conclude that existing gender wage inequality is unfair to women—predicted only small acts. It is possible that having low injustice thresholds regarding what constitutes gender wage inequality facilitates moral vigilance for keeping track of everyday gender inequality. We note that the injustice standards scale we used focuses on gender wage inequality rather than on gender inequality across life domains. We used such a specific scale for two reasons: 1) it is easier to assess *quantitative* thresholds regarding the gender wage gap and thus quantitative thresholds regarding morality of distributive injustice; and 2) past work has validated this scale across several studies, pointing to its usefulness in predicting intergroup affect and appraisals (Miron et al., 2010, 2011, 2020). Nevertheless, future work could examine the role of injustice standards across different domains of gender inequality and moral vigilance in motivating women to engage in small acts on behalf of other women. More work is also needed to assess whether perceived *violations* of women's moral beliefs and values (e.g., about fairness of gender-based outcomes) also predict women's small acts (see van Zomeren et al., 2018).

Unexpectedly, gender identification did not predict either traditional collective action or small acts as we had expected. It is possible that, in this study, gender identification assessed social categorization within a gender group category rather than social identification with women as a group coupled with endorsement of gender group ideology. Prior work has found that, in the case of women, gender identification and other types of identities do not always load on the same factor as observed with men, suggesting different dimensions of identity formation and identity-driven motives for men and women (Louis et al., 2016). Thus, it is important to differentiate between strength of gender identification (gender categorization) and content of gender identity (endorsement of progressive gender ideology as part of politicized gender identification) for a better understanding of women's action engagement (see Becker & Wagner, 2009). Similarly, even though there was a small effect of perceived group efficacy on small acts, this effect was not significantly different from zero. It is possible that the interpersonal nature of the small acts may make perceived efficacy of women as a group to enact change less relevant for individual engagement in these smaller actions.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

One limitation of this study is that we did not test the convergent/divergent and predictive validity of the Small Acts and Traditional Collective Action constructs. Nevertheless, our study is the first to conceptualize and test the distinction between small acts and more traditional forms of collective action and make a case for the usefulness of this conceptual distinction. Future work should systematically test the validity and reliability of the two scales. Moreover, we used several one-item group identification measures that were used in past research to measure gender, feminist, and activist identification (Burn et al., 2000; Duncan, 1999; Kelly & Breilinger, 1995; Postmes et al., 2013). Future work should test the role of these identity variables in motivating small acts by employing multi-item measures to assess these multi-faceted constructs. Finally, our sample was not diverse and, thus, the findings are limited to primarily first- and second-year white unmarried college women.

While the selection of items capturing traditional collective action was informed by prior work that clearly conceptualized signing petitions, voting, fundraising, and mass protesting as more traditional forms of participation (Kelly & Breilinger, 1995; Theocharis & Van Deth, 2018), the selection of items comprising the Small Acts construct was guided by our novel conceptualization of small acts as distinct interpersonal behaviors motivated by one of the three goals proposed by Fieck et al. (2020). Moreover, we wanted enough items to identify each of these three goals (5 items for each construct) without inflating model fit (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Brown, 2006). However, we recognize that other items from our pool of 57 items could

constitute valid operationalizations of small acts and that these different operationalizations may reveal different patterns of results. For instance, actively seeking out knowledge about women's issues is motivated by an information dissemination goal as it involves acquiring information (from other sources/individuals to inform and educate oneself; see Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Fieck et al., 2020; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014); nevertheless, future work could assess parallel behaviors (informing others) that are distinct from acts of dissemination motivated by social influence goals (informing or educating others as a way of changing their views on an issue). Despite these limitations, we believe the current work is novel and constitutes a starting point for operationalizing and quantifying small acts.

As Theocharis and van Deth (2018) pointed out, revised conceptualizations of collective action provide opportunities to broaden this concept and to systematically track these new forms, which are often undertaken by marginalized groups, with the goal of understanding the extent of engagement of these groups. In the case of college women, we argue that, unlike long-time activists, many college women are taking their first steps toward becoming involved in actions that benefit other women. These actions may take the form of behaviors meant to help individual women as opposed to women as a group and these actions (e.g., informally discussing women's issues with a friend or clicking "like" on Facebook to support a woman friend) may be seen as non-political. A recent meta-analysis (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020) has shown that political uses of digital media by youth such as blogging, reading online political discussion, or reading online news have offline consequences for participation, such as contacting officials, talking politics, volunteering, and protesting. Foster (2015) showed that some of these actions (tweeting against sexism) also have positive consequences for the wellbeing of college women. These informal forms of participation in gendered and non-gendered contexts should not be dismissed as 'slacktivism' but rather viewed as legitimate forms of civic and political engagement. Moreover, dissemination of information about the health and wellbeing benefits of engaging in small acts could become part of mobilization messaging. Such messages may provide additional incentive for women to engage in collective action on behalf of other women.

Practice Implications

The current findings entail practice implications for mobilizing college women. Participation in traditional forms of collective action (voting, signing petitions, fundraising, protesting) was predicted by women's activist identification, which is developed over time and involves embracing politicized ideology around women's issues (feminist consciousness) and accepting the label of feminist/activist. In contrast, mobilizing women for small acts allows for more degrees of freedom. First, given the strongest and unique path between appraisals of gender inequality and small acts, making women aware of the unfairness of gender inequality (including the gender wage gap) may mobilize women to engage in small acts (see Jetten et al., 2013). This means that women could be mobilized for action when they embrace feminist consciousness without necessarily accepting the label of feminist/activist (which may be rejected by young women because of stigma; see Zucker, 2004). Moreover, we showed that there are other viable unique pathways from antecedents to small acts and, thus, all these pathways are alternative ways of engaging college women in activism: by facilitating the development of their feminist and activist identities and by decreasing their injustice standards (e.g., teaching them to become more morally vigilant when it comes to gender inequality in their everyday lives).

Second, Stewart and McDermott (2004) found that protest politics is the most preferred form of engagement in late adolescence. However, we found that participation in traditional forms of collective action was less frequent than participation in small acts among the college women in our sample. The low political engagement of college women we documented here aligns with findings that few American adults participate in politics in their adult lives, and women may be less likely than men to do so (Burns et al., 2001). Thus, mobilization efforts should capitalize on the existing participation of college women in small acts, while at the same time investing resources in increasing the frequency of engagement in political acts. At the same time, there needs to be a

reframing of the importance of college women's "small acts" as legitimate and effective forms of civic and political engagement. The current study shows that college women engage more frequently in informal, interpersonal, pro-women behaviors, which could constitute the backdrop for future organized action—spreading information by talking with others and getting oneself informed and educated, supporting others, and influencing others offline and online (Fieck et al., 2020; Jost et al., 2018). Thus, mobilizing pro-women movements must capitalize on these "smaller acts" of engagement (Savaş & Stewart, 2019) as acts of activism in themselves but also as precursors of organized political engagement in college women.

Conclusion

The current study uncovered two distinct forms of action in college women—traditional collective action and small acts. Whereas frequency of participation in traditional forms of collective action was predicted only by women's activist identification, participation in small acts was predicted by feminist identification and activist identification, appraisals of gender inequality, and college women's injustice thresholds. We conclude that future work on small acts of collective action is an important avenue of research for understanding multiple pathways for mobilizing women on behalf of other women.

Availability of Data and Material

The data set and study forms associated with this submission are available upon request from the first author.

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