Individual Orientation Toward Engagement in Social Action

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The issue of how an activist identity develops is one of the core issues in social psychology and social movement research. Because of problems in the measurement of individuals’ propensities to engage in social action, however, findings in this area are often equivocal, and cross-study comparisons and conclusions are difficult to draw. Hence, the aim of these studies was to develop a measure to assess individuals’ propensities to engage in social action. This measure, the Activism Orientation Scale (AOS), demonstrates strong psychometric properties and allows assessment of activist propensity across a wide continuum of social action behaviors, ideological positions, and movement issues. Additionally, the broad applicability of the AOS allows for its use by researchers, activists, and policymakers.

**KEY WORDS**: activism, social action, measurement

How an activist identity develops remains one of the basic questions in social psychology and social movement research today. Much of the work in this area that has assessed influences on or consequences of engaging in social action, however, has used instrumentation that often has been either weak or unsubstantiated. This in turn hinders the interpretability of studies in this area, hampering the formation of a cohesive literature base. To produce a more understandable and coherent body of research, empirical work on activist identity derived from a sound measurement base is necessary.

Researchers attempting to measure a specific type of activist engagement, but lacking standard instrumentation, frequently devise ad hoc scales or make ad hoc modifications to other researchers’ scales (e.g., Dendinger, 1978; Wall, 1995). Several difficulties with this approach are apparent. First, these efforts often are
not informed by empirical findings in the area of social activism. Second, researchers often create these scales from an issue-specific perspective that precludes their use by other researchers studying other types of social action (e.g., Kelly & Kelly, 1994). Third, these measurement attempts sometimes conflate identity or orientation with past activity (Marsh, 1977). Finally, these scales often are lacking in psychometric quality or their psychometric properties have not been investigated (Marsh, 1977; Marsh & Kaase, 1979). This paper presents a measure of activist orientation, the Activism Orientation Scale (AOS), that addresses these difficulties.

There has been considerable debate in the collective behavior literature about what constitutes activism. Discussions have centered on such issues as whether behavior must be extra-institutional to be considered activist, what amount of coordination must exist between individuals invested in a social-political goal, and whether overt actions or merely favorable attitudes gain one membership in a movement (for overviews of these debates, see McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1988; Snow & Oliver, 1995). In this article, activist orientation is defined as an individual’s developed, relatively stable, yet changeable orientation to engage in various collective, social-political, problem-solving behaviors spanning a range from low-risk, passive, and institutionalized acts to high-risk, active, and unconventional behaviors. This definition of activist orientation is intended to broadly encompass the many more specific definitions of activism that have been offered by social movement and collective behavior scholars (Lofland, 1981; McPhail, 1991; Oliver, 1989; Turner & Killian, 1987; Wilson, 1973).

Such a definition of activism invokes a number of lines of social action and social psychology research, and these lines are incorporated in the development of the measure. First, social movement scholars have long recognized that behavior traditionally thought of as “activism” is not completely distinct from more conventional political action-taking. Early work on crowd and mob behavior depicted participants as criminals at worst and as temporarily insane at best (see review by McPhail, 1991), but modern scholars have conceptualized protest behavior as merely an extension of institutional political behavior (e.g., Gamson, 1975; Tilly, 1978). As such, activist orientation ranges from the quite conventional (e.g., participating in the electoral process) to the highly unconventional, risky, or both (e.g., physical confrontations with police officers, damaging public property, risking serious injury). An activist measure that includes only relatively extreme behaviors may underestimate the activist orientation of a highly committed individual who consistently engages in low-risk political behaviors and may overestimate the activist orientation of an individual who engages infrequently in highly disruptive, high-cost behaviors.

Second, an important purpose of an activism orientation scale is to predict an individual’s future engagement in activist behaviors. Because one sustained finding has been that interpersonal and organizational ties are critical to propelling activism (e.g., Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; McAdam, 1986; Morris, 1984; Quarantelli & Dynes, 1968; Rochford, 1982), the extent of such ties should be
represented in an activism scale. These ties provide recruits not only with information about activist causes and opportunities to act, but also with social networks that encourage and support the sometimes difficult decision to engage in costly or risky behavior. A measure of activist orientation that overlooks behaviors that increase integration in activist networks (e.g., membership in organizations, involvement in group political activities, engaging in political activities with friends) neglects this important aspect of social activism (Fernandez & McAdam, 1989; Gould, 1991; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Snow, Zurcher, & Ekland-Olson, 1980).

Third, one of the dominant perspectives on social movements and activism throughout the past three decades has been resource mobilization theory (Jenkins, 1983; McCarthy & Zald, 1973, 1977; Oberschall, 1973; Tilly, 1978). Resource mobilization theorists eschewed earlier theories of involvement in collective action that were based on notions of grievances, deprivation, and intra-psychological processes (e.g., Davies, 1969; Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939; Geschwender, 1964; Gurr, 1970; Morrison, 1973). Reasoning that grievances and deprivation always exist and therefore cannot explain the ups and downs of protest cycles, resource mobilization theorists instead focused on the processes of resource accumulation required of social movement organizations to produce action and achieve their goals. Participation in resource accumulation activities, then, is a key element of activism. Resource procurement and maintenance activities such as fund-raising, recruiting new members, and meeting the administrative demands of organizations, then, should be included in an assessment of activist orientation. These activities are as central to activist identity as are more dramatic acts of civil disobedience and dangerous confrontation (Oliver, 1984a).

Fourth, on the basis of prior research, it appears that an individual’s propensity to engage in activism is a developed, relatively stable, yet changeable, orientation toward political action-taking (McAdam, 1988, 1989). Past research on activism and activist attitudes over time suggests that an activist orientation is a developed stance that has complex roots in the socialization experiences of individuals (Klandermans, 1997; Snow & Oliver, 1995). Once developed, activists’ attitudes toward political action-taking tend to persist for long periods of time—even for decades, as demonstrated by a series of follow-up studies of activists from the 1960s (e.g., Demerath, Marwell, & Aiken, 1971; Fendrich, 1974, 1977; Fendrich & Krauss, 1978; Fendrich & Lovoy, 1988; McAdam, 1988, 1989, 1992; Whalen & Flacks, 1980). At the same time, these and other studies have suggested that orientation toward activism is affected by life experiences and ongoing socialization processes producing change in activist orientation over time.

Some external influences on activist orientation increase the propensity to take action. For example, a number of studies have revealed intergenerational effects showing that children of politically active parents are more likely to be active themselves. These findings suggest relatively long-term socialization processes that provide information about how to act politically, produce political efficacy, and legitimate more extreme political tactics (Bengston, 1970; DeMartini, 1983;
Flacks, 1967; Park, 1993; Sherkat & Blocker, 1994; Wood & Hughes, 1984; Wood & Ng, 1980). More acute events may also influence activist orientation. For example, individuals may enter new social environments (e.g., universities) where they may encounter activists who recruit them and provide models of activist behavior (Snow et al., 1980). Indeed, experience with activism itself usually increases the chances that an individual will engage in protest in the future (Gamson, Fireman, & Rytina, 1980; Lofland, 1977; McAdam, 1986). As such, it is likely that action-taking itself increases activist orientation by facilitating know-how, solidarity, and efficacy (McAdam et al., 1988). At other times, action-taking can reduce individuals’ commitments to activism (Klandermans, 1997; Oliver, 1984a). Direct physical repression or the failure to achieve goals can lead individuals to abandon political action and focus their efforts elsewhere. One of the most consistent findings in the activism literature is that biographical availability plays heavily into activism. When individuals are more available for activism, they are more likely to act (McAdam, 1986; Snow & Rochford, 1983). Likewise, changes in life circumstances can change an individual’s attitude toward acting. Some research, for example, has found that having children reduces the chances of activism (Walls, 1995). Some of this change occurs because raising children reduces the time available for other activities. Additionally, some activists have reported that having children causes them to select activist tactics that are less contentious because of conflict with their parental roles.

Fifth, individuals have varying orientations to behave as political activists, and we posit that this orientation will have a probabilistic effect on their future behaviors. Given our concern with behavior, debates over the attitude-behavior link (e.g., LaPiere, 1934; Thurstone, 1931/1967; Wicker, 1969) are germane to our efforts. Findings investigating this link suggest crucial elements for a scale measuring activist attitudes, one of which is specificity. Difficulties early scholars faced in tying attitudes to behaviors often arose from a lack of specificity about the attitudes expected to predict particular behaviors. For example, a person holding a generally negative attitude toward African Americans will not necessarily engage in any single, specific behavior such as discriminatory hiring practices. The answer to this problem seemed, then, to be to increase attitude measurement specificity (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This approach has been helpful in some instances (e.g., Kelly & Mirer, 1974), but as Schuman (1995) pointed out, the level of specificity required in terms of behavior, time, and context often creates an overly circumscribed, and thus often uninteresting, outcome.

A more useful approach, also forwarded by Fishbein and Ajzen (1974), matches the valence of an attitude with the preponderant valence in a set of behaviors. In this approach, it is recognized that although general attitudes may be poor predictors of any single behavior, the net valence of a set of related behaviors should be predicted by the valence of the attitude. Weigel and Newman (1976) demonstrated this logic by showing that a general, pro-environmental attitude measure was strongly correlated with a multi-item measure of environmental
behavior, but that the average of the correlations to individual items was much lower. This same reasoning drives any multi-item index: Increasing the scope of the scale by tapping a set of related behaviors increases both the reliability and validity of the scale. Recognizing these elements in the measurement of attitudes substantially increases the likelihood of successful behavior prediction.

In summary, the intent of the present studies was to develop and validate a measure of an individual’s willingness to engage in social action that would (a) be informed by the research base on social activism and the measurement of social attitudes; (b) be applicable across activist causes, social movements, and political ideologies; and (c) show evidence of its psychometric quality via its reliability within various samples, relationship to variables hypothesized to be related as well as unrelated to activist orientation, and ability to discriminate among groups more and less inclined to engage in activism.

Study 1

The purpose of this study was to develop a measure of activist orientation that would incorporate contemporary notions of social activism, be informed by social-psychological research on activism, and be behavior-based as well as general (rather than issue-specific) in its content so that it could be applied across areas of activist study.

Method

Item pool generation. In developing the measure, we took classical steps to construct-based test development (e.g., Walsh & Betz, 1995). Our first step was to develop a definition of activist orientation. Activist orientation was defined as an individual’s developed, relatively stable, yet changeable propensity to engage in various collective, social-political, problem-solving behaviors spanning a range from low-risk, passive, and institutionalized acts to high-risk, active, and unconventional behaviors. This definition accommodates core elements that cut across several prior definitions of activism (see review by Snow & Oliver, 1995): (a) An activist behavior must pursue collective, as opposed to individual, interests; (b) the behavior must intend to address some perceived problem, injustice, or disadvantage affecting the collective; (c) the behaviors must be oriented toward change—either producing change or preventing change that is advocated by a different collective.

In determining the scope of behavior addressed by this definition of activism, three important issues (presented earlier) informed the contents of the scale. First, because research in social activism indicates that the universe of activist behaviors includes not only risky or unconventional behaviors but also low-risk and conventional acts (McAdam, 1986; Wiltfang & McAdam, 1991), items depicting behaviors ranging from conventional and low-risk to unconventional and high-risk were included (e.g., “vote in a non-presidential federal, state, or local election” and...
“block access to a building or public area with your body”). Second, because interpersonal and organizational ties are critical determinants of activism (Bolton, 1972; McAdam, 1986; Orum, 1972; Snow et al., 1980; Walsh & Warland, 1983), items believed to tap increased integration in activist networks were included (e.g., “attend an informational meeting of a political group,” “serve as an officer in a political organization”). Third, because participation in resource accumulation activities is a key element of activism (McCarthy & Zald, 1973; Oberschall, 1973), items aimed at assessing resource procurement and maintenance were developed (e.g., “encourage a friend to join a political organization”). Finally, because a main intention in developing the AOS was that it be broadly applicable across individuals and activist issues, item generation was focused on activist behaviors rather than particular activist issues. The political orientation of the respondent toward a specific movement or cause was similarly regarded as unimportant, thus allowing an assessment of activist orientation across movements and across the political continuum. Engaging in a protest march (for example, either for or against abortion restrictions) would indicate activism regardless of the political stance toward the issue.

In the next step, a pool of items believed to represent the construct domain was generated by two social-action researchers. Preceding the items was the question, “How likely is it that you will engage in this activity in the future?”; the response continuum for each item ranged from 0 (extremely unlikely) to 3 (extremely likely). The pool, containing 40 items, was subjected to the review of four expert judges (two women and two men who engage in social action and/or conduct research on social action) who provided quantitative ratings of the scale as well as qualitative feedback about each of the items. Quantitative ratings were provided regarding each item’s degree of relationship to the construct and its comprehensibility/clarity of wording. As a result, several items underwent modification to clarify their meaning (e.g., elimination of extraneous clauses, provision of examples).

**Sample and procedure.** Participants were 296 undergraduates from introductory psychology courses at a Midwestern university, of whom 43% were women. The majority identified as European American (85.86%), with small proportions identifying as Latino (4.83%), African American (3.79%), Asian or Asian American (2.41%), or other (e.g., combinations of races) (3.09%). More than half (61.64%) were first-year students, 13.36% were sophomores, and 25% were juniors or seniors. Participants were administered a demographic questionnaire and a measure containing the 40 items of the AOS as described above.

**Results**

**Item analysis.** After the modification of items through the feedback of expert raters (described above) and subsequent administration of the items to the sample, we conducted an item analysis of the item pool. Items were eliminated if their
item-total correlations were less than .30 (Betz, 1996). Using this criterion, we eliminated two items, resulting in a preliminary 38-item scale (Table 1).

Table 1. Items and Factor Loadings of the Activism Orientation Scale (AOS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Display a poster or bumper sticker with a political message?</td>
<td>.67a</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Invite a friend to attend a meeting of a political organization or event?</td>
<td>.84a</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Purchase a poster, t-shirt, etc. that endorses a political point of view?</td>
<td>.74a</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Serve as an officer in a political organization?</td>
<td>.69a</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Engage in a political activity in which you knew you would be arrested?</td>
<td>-.09a</td>
<td>.81b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Be involved in a verbal argument at a political rally or protest march?</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Attend an informational meeting of a political group?</td>
<td>.74a</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Organize a political event (e.g., talk, support group, march)?</td>
<td>.64b</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Give a lecture or talk about a social or political issue?</td>
<td>.64b</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Go out of your way to collect information on a social or political issue?</td>
<td>.72b</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Campaign door-to-door for a political candidate?</td>
<td>.68b</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Be a member of a political organization other than the Democratic or Republican party?</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Present facts to contest another person’s social or political statement?</td>
<td>.65a</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Donate money to a political candidate?</td>
<td>.82a</td>
<td>-.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Vote in a non-presidential federal, state, or local election?</td>
<td>.51b</td>
<td>-.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Engage in a physical confrontation at a political rally?</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.67b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Send a letter or e-mail expressing a political opinion to the editor of a periodical or television show?</td>
<td>.60a</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Engage in a political activity in which you feared that some of your possessions would be damaged?</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.67b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Engage in an illegal act as part of a political protest?</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.86b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Confront jokes, statements, or innuendoes that opposed a particular group’s cause?</td>
<td>.47a</td>
<td>-.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Boycott a product for political reasons?</td>
<td>.50a</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Distribute information representing a particular social or political group’s cause?</td>
<td>.71a</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Participate in a protest march or demonstration?</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Engage in a political activity in which you suspect there would be a confrontation with the police or possible arrest?</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.78b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Send a letter or e-mail about a political issue to a public official?</td>
<td>.78a</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Attend a talk on a particular group’s social or political concerns?</td>
<td>.78a</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Attend a political organization’s regular planning meeting?</td>
<td>.82a</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Sign a petition for a political cause?</td>
<td>.72a</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Encourage a friend to join a political organization?</td>
<td>.84a</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Try to change a friend’s or acquaintance’s mind about a social or political issue?</td>
<td>.66a</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Block access to a building or public area with your body?</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.83b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Donate money to a political organization?</td>
<td>.81b</td>
<td>-.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Try to change a relative’s mind about a social or political issue?</td>
<td>.70b</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Wear a t-shirt or button with a political message?</td>
<td>.72a</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Keep track of the views of members of Congress regarding an issue important to you?</td>
<td>.68b</td>
<td>-.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Participate in discussion groups designed to discuss issues or solutions of a particular social or political group?</td>
<td>.74a</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Campaign by phone for a political candidate?</td>
<td>.63a</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Engage in a political activity in which you feared for your personal safety?</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.82b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. On the basis of their factor loadings, items 6, 12, and 23 were eliminated, resulting in the final 35-item scale.

*aFactor 1 = Conventional Activism, bFactor 2 = High-Risk Activism.*
Factor structure. We used principal axis factoring with iterations and oblique rotation to explore the factor structure of the resulting 38-item scale. Squared multiple correlations were used as prior communality estimates, serving as estimated lower bounds for the final communality estimates. Retention of two factors was based on the results of a scree test (Cattell, 1966) in combination with examination of an alternative factor solution (see recommendations by Floyd & Widaman, 1995). The factor loading matrix is presented with the item content in Table 1. The eigenvalues of the reduced correlation matrix as well as the percentages of variance accounted for in the measured variables by the factors are shown in Table 2. The use of an oblique (vs. orthogonal) rotation method was supported by the post hoc correlation of .54 found between factors 1 and 2.

In examining the factor loading pattern, a common practice is to use the criterion of “greater than or equal to .30” as a means of categorizing ambiguous, moderately loading items as “high” and all others as “low.” Alone, however, this non–empirically based method may lead to arbitrary under- or overattribution of items to factors. A helpful adjunct to this rule suggests examination of the loading pattern of an item across each of the factors: Items that have moderately lower loadings but clearly load more substantially on one factor than on the others may be considered as loading on the given factor (Gorsuch, 1983). Given these guidelines, it was determined that 35 of the 38 items had clearly indicated high loadings and that three items (i.e., 6, 12, and 23 in Table 1) loaded ambiguously and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Eigenvalue</th>
<th>Percentage of variance</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Eigenvalue</th>
<th>Percentage of variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.06</td>
<td>83.41</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>16.59</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>-0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>-0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>-0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>-0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>-1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>-1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>-1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>-1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>-1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>-1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>-1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td>-1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
<td>-1.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
<td>-1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
<td>-1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>-0.46</td>
<td>-2.41</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
low-to-moderately on both factors, resulting in their elimination. Factor 1 accounted for 83.41% of the variance in the measured variables and factor 2 accounted for 16.59%. On the basis of item content, factor 1 was labeled Conventional Activism and factor 2 was labeled High-Risk Activism.

**Descriptive statistics and reliability.** The possible score range for the overall 35-item scale is 0 to 105. Scores in this sample ranged from 0 to 89, with a mean of 37.81 (SD = 19.05). Scores on the 28-item Conventional subscale may range from 0 to 84; in this sample, scores ranged from 0 to 80, and the mean for this subscale was 34.89 (SD = 17.13). The 7-item High-Risk subscale has a possible range of 0 to 21; scores in this sample ranged from 0 to 17, and the mean for this subscale was 2.92 (SD = 3.48). The internal consistency of the overall scale was calculated at .96 (Cronbach’s $\alpha$), and internal consistency estimates for the Conventional and High-Risk subscales were .96 and .91, respectively.

**Study 2**

The purpose of this study was to further investigate the psychometric properties of the AOS. Hypotheses concerning the measure’s theorized relationship to several other variables were tested, as was its ability to predict membership in groups presumed to vary in their levels of activist orientation.

**Hypotheses**

**Relative deprivation.** Before the rise of resource mobilization theory, one of the most popular explanations for engagement in collective behavior was relative deprivation (RD) theory (Davies, 1969; Gurr, 1970). RD theory asserts that individuals are impelled to act collectively when their subjective perceptions of what they believe their situation is pale in comparison to what they believe their situation ought to be. The theory, however, fared poorly when tested empirically (e.g., Myers, 1997; Portes, 1971; Rule, 1988; Spilerman, 1970, 1976), and in fact, reviews of studies that attempted to link RD to activism (e.g., Gurney & Tierney, 1982) led to almost complete dismissal of RD as an effective construct for the prediction of activism.

Examination, however, of the assessment of RD in the vast majority of these studies reveals that conceptualizations of RD relied on structural (objective) characteristics (e.g., ratio of black income to white income as an indicator of black relative deprivation; Spilerman, 1970) rather than individuals’ subjective perceptions of their conditions. Operationalizing RD using objective indicators (such as a group’s economic state) violates the central tenets of the theory by assuming an unqualified connection between objective conditions and psychological states. RD theory is concerned with an individual’s subjective psychological assessment of her or his deprivation conditions, irrespective of objective indicators (for a critique
of the premature dismissal of RD theory in social movement research, see Snow & Oliver, 1995).

More recent attempts to measure RD have represented the subjective components of the construct (e.g., Corning, 2000). Empirical findings based on more accurate operationalizations have indicated a relationship between RD and activism. Foster and Matheson (1995), for example, found significant correlations between both personally based and group-based RD and activism, and found that the latter subsumed the former in subsequent multivariate analyses. It was hypothesized, then, that scores on the AOS would be positively related to personally-based relative deprivation and even more strongly related to group-based relative deprivation.

Locus of control. The relationship of locus of control to social activism has a long and varied history. Rotter (1954; Rotter, Seeman, & Liverant, 1962) proposed several notions of social action-taking and locus of control that were tested using civil rights activism. In its simplest form, Rotter posited that individuals with an internal (vs. external) locus of control would be more likely to take action because, presumably, people with internal loci would be more apt to believe their own behaviors were pivotal in producing their life circumstances and thus would act to better their life situations; externals, on the other hand, would view such attempts as futile and leave outcomes up to forces outside themselves (1954).

Gore and Rotter’s (1963) initial empirical demonstration of this relationship set off a long string of derivative studies, many of which refuted Rotter’s initial claims (see review by Klandermans, 1983). A persistent problem plaguing locus of control research was the distinction between political efficacy and personal efficacy. Speculation that this dimension of efficacy was critical to understanding political activism was heightened when Mirels (1970) demonstrated that Rotter’s I-E scale comprised two underlying factors, one representing the belief that one has control over one’s own life and the other representing the belief that one could influence political and social institutions.

A series of studies based on Mirels’ insight found support for a strong, positive relationship between political action-taking and efficacy when political efficacy was specified, and a much weaker relationship when personal efficacy was specified (see review by Klandermans, 1983). The most recent studies examining this issue have used primarily cross-sectional designs to compare activist and non-activist populations. These studies too support prior results indicating a strong, positive relationship between political efficacy and activism. Watanabe and Milburn (1988), for example, found that political efficacy predicted activism on nuclear disarmament issues. Indeed, whenever political locus of control or political efficacy has been specified, the researchers have found a significant positive relationship between this construct and activism (e.g., Fox & Schofield, 1989; Locatelli & Holt, 1986; Nemiroff & McKenzie-Mohr, 1992; Paulsen, 1991; Peterson & Lawson, 1989; Stone & Levine, 1985; Tyler & McGraw, 1983; Zimmerman, 1989). Attempts to link any form of locus of control to conventional political
activity (such as voting), on the other hand, have been less successful (e.g., Burn & Konrad, 1987; Majete, 1987; Wollman & Stouder, 1991).

On the basis of this series of findings, four hypotheses were proposed. First, it was expected that AOS scores would be positively related to an internal sociopolitical locus of control. Second, it was expected that the High-Risk subscale of the AOS would be strongly positively related to internal sociopolitical locus of control. Third, it was hypothesized that there would be little to no relationship between personal efficacy and activist orientation. Finally, Paulhus (1983; Paulhus & Christie, 1981) has identified a third dimension of efficacy, termed interpersonal control, which refers to perceived control over social interactions. As with personal efficacy, interpersonal control has not predicted political action-taking (Lefcourt, 1991); thus, it was hypothesized that little to no relationship would be found between it and AOS scores.

Specific issue–related activism. A general measure of activist orientation should be related to scales that tap social action orientation toward specific social issues (e.g., women’s issues). Because issue-specific activism is a type of general activism, an increase in specific activism should be accompanied by an increase in general activism scores. It was expected, then, that orientation toward collective behavior on behalf of women, which is a specific instance of general activist orientation, would be substantially positively related to scores on the AOS.

It was further hypothesized that women and men would exhibit significant differences in their willingness to engage in collective behavior on behalf of women, but not exhibit differences on a measure of general activist orientation if the measure indeed assesses general (non–issue-specific) orientation toward activism. If individuals are rational, utility-seeking actors, as is assumed by dominant strains of theorizing and empirical research about activist behavior (Freidman & Hechter, 1988; Klandermans, 1984; Marwell & Oliver, 1993; Oliver, 1984a; Olson, 1965; Walsh & Warland, 1983; Wilson, 1973), then women should participate in women’s movements more than men, but underlying orientation toward activism should not differ.

Although we hypothesized that a strong issue-specific orientation toward activism is predictive of a strong general orientation toward activism, it does not follow that a strong general activist orientation necessarily predicts a strong activist orientation toward any particular social issue. In fact, activists often seem inconsistent in their willingness to participate in movements that may be viewed as closely aligned. McAdam (1988), for example, noted the frustration civil rights activists experienced with their parents who had been active in economic equality issues but were less supportive of their children’s efforts to address racial issues. Similarly, Myers (1994) found that a generation of activists rebelled at their parents’ seemingly inconsistent stance toward the civil rights concerns of African Americans and those of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual movement. It was hypothesized, then, that the power of the AOS for predicting collective behavior on behalf of women would differ by sex. In other words, general activism reflects issue-
specific collective action for some activists (in this case, women), but not for others (in this case men) because their general activist orientation is likely linked to other social concerns.

*Group differences criterion-related validity.* Samples selected on the basis of hypothesized differences in activist orientation should reflect these differences in their mean AOS scores. In the present study, samples drawn from populations of current activists or of those otherwise invested in social-political issues should exhibit higher scores than those drawn from a more general population. Samples were drawn from a student labor union whose members were currently engaged in social activism, two women’s studies courses that are presumed to attract and/or encourage individuals with a social activist perspective, and two general undergraduate classes (a sociology course and a communication skills course) in which students enroll to fulfill liberal arts requirements.

Specifically, it was hypothesized that respondents from a student labor union would score the highest on the AOS given their current involvement in social movement action. Second, it was hypothesized that students in women’s studies courses, because they tend to be interested in social change issues, would too produce high scores, but not as high as those found in the student labor union group (whose members all are actively participating in action toward a cause). Although a heterogeneity in activist orientation is expected among women’s studies students, these classes generally include more women with strong feminist stances than are found in the general student body. Unlike the student labor union group, however, students in women’s studies have not necessarily demonstrated their commitment to activism by participation. Therefore, it was expected that they would exhibit lower AOS scores than the student labor union group. Third, it was hypothesized that the sociology students would score lower than the women’s studies students because, like women’s studies courses, sociology classes tend to attract students who are more concerned about social and political issues than the average undergraduate, but unlike the women’s studies courses, students in introductory courses may be more mixed because such courses function mainly as liberal arts requirements that draw a quite heterogeneous group of students. Finally, it was hypothesized that the sociology students would score higher on the AOS than would students in a communication skills course because the latter attracts students from a variety of majors across the university and its content does not emphasize social or political issues.

**Method**

*Participants.* Four discrete samples of students were drawn from two universities. The Student Labor Union, Women’s Studies, and Communication Skills samples were drawn from a large Midwestern state university; the Sociology sample was obtained from a mid-size Midwestern Catholic university.
The Student Labor Union sample consisted of 52 graduate students attending a planning meeting of a labor union active on behalf of graduate teaching assistants on campus. Just over half of the group was female ($n = 27$) and all were graduate students ranging in age from 22 to 33 ($M = 25.5$). The majority of the participants identified themselves as European American (82%); 2% defined themselves as African American, 6% as Asian or Asian American, 2% as Latino/Latina, 2% as Native American, and 6% as some other race or ethnicity. Most of the sample was enrolled in letters and science graduate programs (92.3%); 7.6% were enrolled in business, biology, or education.

The Women’s Studies sample consisted of 20 women and four men from two advanced women’s studies courses. They ranged in age from 19 to 25 ($M = 21.4$) and were of sophomore standing or above; 12.5% were sophomores, 16.7% were juniors, 58.3% were seniors, and 12.5% were graduate students. About 71% identified as European American, and there were equal percentages of African Americans, Asians or Asian Americans, and Latinos/Latinas (8.3%). Most of the students were enrolled in letters and science fields of study (70.8%); 12.5% were enrolled in education and 16.7% in some other academic field.

The Sociology sample consisted of 59 first-year undergraduate students solicited from a large sociology course. More than half were men (57.6%) and ages ranged from 18 to 20 years; all but one were 18 or 19. The sample was composed primarily of students identifying as European American (76.3%), with small numbers of Latinos/Latinas (10.2%), African Americans (3.4%), Asians and Asian Americans (1.7%), and others, including combinations of races (8.5%).

The Communication Skills sample consisted of 89 students from a large undergraduate communication skills course. They ranged in age from 19 to over 28 in a few cases; the mean age was 21.75 ($SD = 1.45$) and the greatest concentration of age was from 20 to 22 (85.9%). All participants were of junior standing or above; 93.2% were juniors or seniors, and the remainder (6.8%) were of some other status (e.g., graduate or medical student or non-matriculated). The sample consisted primarily of European American students (93.2%), with small proportions of Asians and Asian Americans (4.5%) and African Americans and Latinos/Latinas (1.1% each). Students’ majors spanned the fields of agricultural and life sciences, letters and science, business, education, family resources, and medicine.

**Measures**

**Activist orientation.** Orientation toward activist engagement was measured using the AOS, developed as described in Study 1. The 35-item AOS assesses an individual’s orientation toward engaging in a variety of activist behaviors, with item content ranging from passive observational to active physical participation, legal to illegal, and symbolic to instrumental. In response to the question, “How likely is it that you will engage in this activity in the future?”, participants respond to each item by selecting either 0 (extremely unlikely), 1 (unlikely), 2 (likely), or
Relative deprivation. A relative deprivation scale (Inglis, 1990) that assesses two types of relative deprivation among women was administered only to female participants because its content applies only to women. Egoistic relative deprivation (ERD) is the cognitive perception that one is personally deprived in relation to others (e.g., “I have less power than most men”). Collective relative deprivation (CRD) refers to perceived group-based deprivation in relation to other groups (e.g., “Women have to work harder than men to reach their goals”). The 18-item measure comprises the 10-item ERD scale and the eight-item CRD scale, and respondents indicate the extent of their endorsement of each item on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate a greater sense of relative deprivation. Both scales showed sound internal consistency in the present study (α = .88 and .85, respectively, for ERD and CRD), consistent with past research that reported internal consistency estimates of .86 and .89, respectively (Foster & Matheson, 1995).

Locus of control. Locus of control was assessed using the Spheres of Control Scale (Paulhus, 1983), which comprises three subscales: Personal Efficacy, Interpersonal Control, and Sociopolitical Control. Each subscale contains 10 items using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (disagree) to 7 (agree), with higher scores indicating greater internality. The Personal Efficacy subscale assesses perceived competency with things (e.g., “When I make plans I am almost certain to make them work”); the Interpersonal Control subscale assesses social control (e.g., “I have no trouble making and keeping friends”); and the Sociopolitical Control subscale assesses perceived competence at affecting social systems (e.g., “With enough effort, we can wipe out political corruption”).

Internal consistency of the subscales has been reported at .75, .77, and .81, respectively, and test-retest reliability at 4- and 6-week intervals is above .90 and .70, respectively, for each subscale (Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1991). Additionally, the structure of the scale is supported by a series of factor analyses. Evidence of convergent and construct validity is given by significant relationships found between all three subscales and Rotter’s I-E scale; the Interpersonal and Sociopolitical subscales and a measure of Machiavellianism; and the Sociopolitical subscale and voting behavior. Internal consistency estimates (Cronbach’s α) in the present study for the Personal, Interpersonal, and Sociopolitical subscales were .41, .71, and .81, respectively (for more detail, see Paulhus, 1983; Paulhus & Christie, 1981).

Collective behavior on behalf of women. Engagement in collective behavior on behalf of women was assessed using a scale developed by Lalonde and Cameron (1993) and modified by Foster and Matheson (1995). The 25-item Collective Behavior for Women (CBW) Scale asks the respondent to indicate whether she or
he has engaged in any of 25 behaviors on behalf of women over the past 6 months. Item responses (0, no; 1, yes) are summed to derive a total that can range from 0 to 25. Example items are “I make a conscious attempt to use non-sexist language” and “I have lobbied a member of Congress regarding women’s issues.” Internal consistency (Kuder-Richardson-20) in the present study was estimated at .89, and support for the scale’s construct validity is given by its correlation with both collective (group-based) relative deprivation ($r = .57$) and egoistic (personal) relative deprivation ($r = .45$) (Foster & Matheson, 1995). Consistent with the Foster and Matheson study, in which a similar sample of participants engaged in an average of 6.1 collective actions (SD = 4.4), participants in this study engaged in an average of 6.26 collective actions (SD = 5.11).

Procedure for Each Sample

Data were collected over a 1-year period by sampling four distinct student groups from two universities. Samples were selected on the basis of a theorized range of engagement in and attitudes toward various activism activities. It was preferred that all samples be administered the same set of measures, but because of external constraints, the samples were administered different subgroups of measures.

All samples were administered a set of scales that included a background questionnaire and the 35-item AOS. Additionally, with the exception of the Student Labor Union sample, each sample was administered the CBW Scale. In addition to these scales, the female Communication Skills students were administered the ERD and CRD scales (which are oriented to the experiences of women only) and the Sociology students were administered the Spheres of Control Scale. Depending on the sample, participants received either course extra-credit or chances to win university bookstore gift certificates.

Results

Sample characteristics. In the overall, combined sample, 63.39% of the participants were women ($n = 142$) and 36.61% were men ($n = 82$); the average age was 21.53 (SD = 2.49). The majority identified as European American (83.7%), with small proportions identifying as Asian/Asian American or Latino/Latina (4.5% each), African American (2.7%), Native American (0.5%), or other (e.g., combinations of races) (4.1%). More than one-quarter (26.5%) were first-year students, 1.3% were sophomores, 44.9% were juniors or seniors, and 26% were graduate students. Just under half of the participants (48%) were students in letters and science fields; 14.8% were business students, 8.5% were education students, and the remainder were distributed fairly evenly throughout programs such as the physical sciences, engineering, architecture, humanities, medical fields, and the arts.
Reliability and validity of the Activism Orientation Scale. For the combined sample (n = 224), scores on the AOS ranged from 0 to 104, with a mean of 49.73 (SD = 23.65). Support for the reliability and validity of the scale is provided by evidence of (a) its internal consistency in the combined sample and within each of the individual samples; (b) its significant relationships with a number of variables we hypothesized to be related to activist orientation; (c) its lack of relationship with variables we hypothesized to be unrelated to activist orientation; and (d) its ability to differentiate among groups believed to vary in their levels of willingness to engage in social activism.

Internal consistency. Internal reliability estimates revealed strong internal consistency of both the overall scale and its two subscales in the combined sample as well as in each of the subsamples. Coefficient αs (Cronbach’s α) for the overall AOS, Conventional subscale, and High-Risk subscale, respectively, in the Student Labor Union sample were .93, .91, and .92; in the Women’s Studies sample, .96, .95, and .87; in the Sociology sample, .96, .95, and .89; and in the Communication Skills sample, .95, .95, and .88. In the combined sample, the internal consistency of the AOS was estimated at .97, and the Conventional and High-Risk subscales exhibited respective αs of .96 and .93.

Construct validity. With regard to the construct validity of the AOS, several predicted relationships emerged (Table 3). First, scores on the AOS were significantly related to CRD scores. AOS scores were less strongly related to ERD scores; this relationship approached, but did not achieve, conventional statistical significance (p < .09). Second, the results also demonstrate a strong, positive relationship between activism orientation scores and political locus of control. Third, the results indicate a strong relationship between AOS scores and the CBW Scale in the overall sample. As discussed above, however, the relationship between the AOS and the CBW Scale was expected to differ for women and men. The AOS was expected to be a sound predictor, for women, of engagement in women’s issues, given that these issues are of greater concern for women than for men. But for men, because their activism is less likely to target women’s issues, the relationship between the AOS and the CBW Scale was expected to be considerably weaker. The results bear

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Overall AOS</th>
<th>High-Risk Subscale of AOS</th>
<th>Conventional Subscale of AOS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collective relative deprivation*</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.34**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egoistic relative deprivation*</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political controlb</td>
<td>.46***</td>
<td>.43***</td>
<td>.44***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal efficacyb</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal controlb</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective behavior for womenabc</td>
<td>.57***</td>
<td>.42***</td>
<td>.56***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Women’s Studies. bSociology. cCommunication Skills.

**p < .01, ***p < .001.
out this hypothesis: The correlation between the AOS and the CBW Scale is .69 ($p < .001$) for women and only .28 ($p < .05$) for men.

**Discriminant validity.** Discriminant validity is indicated by a lack of correspondence between a measure and variables that theoretically should be unrelated (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). One key aim of the AOS development effort was to produce a measure that would be equally applicable to women and men. The results of this study support the AOS in this regard, thereby providing evidence of the discriminant validity of the scale. That is, in the combined sample, there was no significant difference between average AOS scores for women and men [46.64 (SD = 23.63) and 43.09 (SD = 21.39), respectively; $t(168) = .95, p > .30$], and individual subsample $t$ test results were consistent with these results. Second, as expected, neither the Personal Efficacy nor the Interpersonal Control subscale of the locus of control scale was significantly related to AOS scores.1

**Group differences criterion-related validity.** An examination of the criterion validity of the AOS was conducted via an analysis of group differences across the four samples. Given the source populations of each sample, differences in their average overall AOS scores were expected. Specifically, it was hypothesized that respondents from the Student Labor Union sample would score the highest on the AOS, followed by the Women’s Studies sample, the Sociology sample, and the Communication Skills sample. Detailed reasons for the hypothesized ordering of the groups are given above.

The results presented in Table 4 largely substantiate these hypotheses. The Student Labor Union members scored the highest, and this group was followed, in order, by the Women’s Studies students, the Sociology students, and then the Communication Skills students. Scheffé comparisons based on Model 1 indicate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample group</th>
<th>Mean AOS</th>
<th>Mean High-Risk Conv’l. AOS</th>
<th>Mean Conv’l. AOS</th>
<th>Model 1 (High-Risk AOS)</th>
<th>Model 2 (Conv’l. AOS)</th>
<th>Model 3 (Conv’l. AOS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Labor Union</td>
<td>72.31</td>
<td>9.33</td>
<td>62.98</td>
<td>36.76***</td>
<td>7.03***</td>
<td>29.73***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(3.3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.72)</td>
<td>(2.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Studies</td>
<td>55.04</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>50.33</td>
<td>19.50***</td>
<td>2.41*</td>
<td>17.08***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(4.4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.94)</td>
<td>(3.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>48.81</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>45.41</td>
<td>13.26***</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>12.16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(3.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.69)</td>
<td>(2.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commun. Skills (excluded)</td>
<td>35.54</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>33.25</td>
<td>35.55***</td>
<td>2.30**</td>
<td>33.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(2.0)</td>
<td>(0.44)</td>
<td>(1.75)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2$ .364 .318 .336

1 Although the finding with the Personal Efficacy subscale is consistent with the hypotheses, it is not necessarily robust because of the scale’s low $\alpha$. 

*p < .05, **p < .001 (two-tailed tests). SEs are in parentheses.
that the Student Labor Union mean score was significantly higher than that of all other groups \((p < .001)\) and that the Communication Skills mean score was significantly lower than that of all other groups \((p < .001)\). Although the Women’s Studies students scored higher than the Sociology students, this difference did not achieve statistical significance.

Results with regard to the subscales are what would be expected (Models 2 and 3). On the Conventional subscale, group score differences mirrored that of the overall scale. On the High-Risk subscale, the Student Labor Union scored significantly higher than the other three groups (by Scheffé, \(p < .001\)), but the post hoc comparisons did not detect significant differences across the Women’s Studies, Sociology, and Communication Skills samples, even though the ordering among the groups was consistent with the Conventional subscale and the overall AOS score.

**Study 3**

The purposes of this study were to assess the psychometric utility of the AOS with two non-student, community samples. Tests of group differences criterion-related validity and construct validity in these samples were conducted.

**Hypotheses**

With regard to group differences criterion-related validity, we hypothesized that AOS scores from an organized group whose purpose is activism would be significantly higher than AOS scores from a community group in which activist behavior varies substantially.

With regard to construct validity, we hypothesized that AOS scores would be related to measures of specific issue–related activism. As explained in Study 2, because issue-specific activism is a type of general activism, an increase in specific activism should be accompanied by an increase in general activism scores. It was expected, then, that for a group of activists whose purpose is activism on behalf of the environment, but does not have as its focus collective behavior on behalf of women, AOS scores would be strongly positively related to scores on a measure of environmental activism, but only weakly positively related to a measure of activism on behalf of women. It was also expected that for a community group whose primary emphasis is women’s issues, but which is also active in environmental causes, AOS scores would be strongly positively related to scores on a measure of activism on behalf of women, but less strongly positively related to scores on a measure of environmental activism.
Method

Participants. The two samples were employed activists and a community of religious sisters. The Employed Activists sample consisted of active, paid-employee members of a not-for-profit activist organization in the Midwest that works to promote social, economic, and environmental justice. The group \((n = 16)\) ranged in age from 19 to 54, with an average age of 31.75 (SD = 11.30). Ten were women and six were men; 14 identified as European American and two indicated “other” (e.g., combination of races).

The Community of Religious Sisters sample consisted of a Midwestern community of Catholic nuns devoted to social justice. A member of the community who served as a liaison for the study informed us before data collection that although one emphasis of the community is helping women (e.g., single mothers and their children), the sisters engaged in a variety of other causes as well (e.g., the environment). She also informed us that there was variability within the community with regard to active involvement in activist causes. The participants \((n = 85)\) ranged in age from 37 to 74, with a mean age of 60.25 (SD = 7.69). The majority were European American (93.83%); 4.94% identified as Hispanic/Latina and 1.23% as “other” (e.g., combination of races).

Measures

Activist orientation. The AOS was used to assess orientation toward activist engagement (see Study 1). Cronbach’s \(\alpha\) values for the overall AOS, High-Risk subscale, and Conventional subscale in the present study were, respectively, for the Community of Religious Sisters, .94, .88, and .93, and for the Employed Activists, .87, .87, and .81.

Environmental activism. Engagement in environmentally related activism was assessed using the Environmental Activism Scale (Seguin, Pelletier, & Hunsley, 1998), a 6-item measure that asks respondents to indicate the extent of their current engagement in various environment-related activities (e.g., “circulation of a petition demanding an improvement of government policies regarding the environment”) using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not very often) to 7 (very often). Internal consistency (Cronbach’s \(\alpha\)) based on the large development sample was .80 (Seguin et al., 1998). Cronbach’s \(\alpha\) in the present study was .86 for the Community of Religious Sisters and .79 for the Employed Activists.

Collective behavior on behalf of women. The CBW Scale was used to assess engagement in collective behavior on behalf of women (see Study 2). Cronbach’s \(\alpha\) in the present study was .90 for the Community of Religious Sisters and .81 for the Employed Activists.
Procedure

Both samples were administered the AOS, the CBW Scale, the Environmental Activism Scale, and a background questionnaire. For the Community of Religious Sisters, the background questionnaire included an additional, open-ended item asking “In what types of activism-related activities have you been involved?” Each sample received their choice of either modest financial compensation or university bookstore gifts in return for their participation.

Results

With regard to group differences criterion-related validity, as predicted, the Employed Activists—a homogeneous, career-activist group—produced significantly higher AOS scores than did the Community of Religious Sisters ($p < .001$) (Table 5). Additionally, a comparison of Tables 4 and 5 shows that of all the samples tested, the Employed Activists produced the highest AOS scores [although not significantly higher than the Student Labor Union college sample ($p > .05$)].

With regard to construct validity, as can be seen in Table 5, for the Employed Activists, AOS scores were significantly positively related to scores on the measure of environmental activism, and positively but not significantly related to scores on the CBW Scale. For the Community of Religious Sisters sample, AOS scores were strongly positively related to scores on both of these measures.

Because the Community of Religious Sisters was heterogeneous with regard to activist participation, we sought to test whether prior and present activist behavior for this non-college population was significantly related to AOS scores. Responses to the question that asked this sample about activist involvement were dummy-coded (activist behavior = 1; no activism behavior = 0). Results of a $t$ test indicated a significant difference in the AOS scores for activist ($M = 52.5$) and non-activist sisters ($M = 40.41$) ($p < .001$).

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Table 5. Correlation of AOS With Environmental and Women’s Activism Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample group</th>
<th>Mean AOS</th>
<th>AOS &amp; ENV Pearson $r$</th>
<th>AOS &amp; CBW Pearson $r$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community of Religious Sisters</td>
<td>48.00</td>
<td>.58***</td>
<td>.69***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed Activists</td>
<td>79.25</td>
<td>.61*</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. AOS, Activism Orientation Scale; ENV, Environmental Activism Scale; CBW, Collective Behavior for Women Scale.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

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2 Additionally, when activist behavior was coded continuously by summing the number of activist involvements listed by each participant, a significant correlation was found between activist behavior and AOS scores ($r = .47, p < .001$). This result, however, should be interpreted tentatively because of limitations with the method; for example, one event listed by a participant may subsume several activist activities, and the frequency and time involvement of activities listed may differ considerably.
Discussion

The genesis, maintenance, and abandonment of activist activity are complex processes influenced by a wide variety of factors. Substantial theory has been developed to explain many of these processes (for reviews see Klandermans, 1997; Snow & Oliver, 1995), yet much remains to be learned. One reason for the shortcomings of past investigations has been the inadequate assessment of individuals' propensities to engage in activist behaviors, and the result has been a fragmented literature base.

This study takes a step toward integration and extension of research related to activist orientation by forwarding a theoretically-grounded, psychometrically-sound scale that assesses individuals' propensities to engage in activist behaviors. The AOS makes this step, first, by avoiding issue-specific content. Whatever movement the researcher investigates, whether environmental protection, abortion rights, animal rights, or civil rights, the AOS remains applicable. Second, the scale contains a wide range of politically-oriented behaviors, which allows for assessment of substantial gradations in activist orientation rather than the simplistic dichotomies of activist/non-activist and high-risk/low-risk activism used in prior studies (see McAdam, 1986). Finally, the development of the AOS followed classical procedures for test construction and was grounded in theory and empirical work from the social psychology and social action literatures.

The resulting 35-item AOS developed and tested across the three studies reported in this article evidences sound psychometric quality as well as practical utility both within and outside of university settings. Evidence for the reliability of the scale is given by moderately high to high internal consistency estimates found within six samples. Evidence for the construct validity of the scale is given by its significant positive relationships with perceptions of collective relative deprivation, a strong sense of sociopolitical control, and past engagement in specific issue-related activism (in Study 2, collective behavior on behalf of women, and in Study 3, environmental activism and collective behavior on behalf of women). Evidence for group differences criterion-related validity is provided by predicted differences in AOS scores across study samples (ranging from university students in a communication skills class to women's studies students to a sample of employed activists). Finally, evidence for the discriminant validity of the AOS, which is indicated by a lack of correspondence between the AOS and variables to which it theoretically should be unrelated, was supported by the fact that for the combined and individual samples of Study 2 there were no sex differences in activist orientation and no relationship between activist orientation and both apolitical Spheres of Control subscales. The reliability and validity evidence is strongly supportive of the scale, and yet further exploration of its predictive ability is needed—particularly as the time between measurement of activist orientation and measurement of behavior increases.
The assessment of activist orientation is important both as a micro-level indicator of psychological state and as an aid for understanding aggregate distributions of activism and changes in those distributions over time. One proposed micro-level use is as a screening device for experiments in which subjects with high and low propensities for collective action must be identified. Many studies of game theoretical or other experimental constructions of free-riding (e.g., Gamson et al., 1982; Oliver, 1980, 1984b) would benefit from role assignment based on activist orientation. To test these ideas in experimental studies, it is necessary to construct groups with different distributions of activist orientation.

Other studies of activism have been concerned with differentiating active contributors to movements from those who are merely adherents to the cause, or who make only token contributions (e.g., McAdam, 1986; Oliver, 1984a). Beyond the overall scores produced by the AOS, the High-Risk and Conventional subscales may prove useful in identifying those who have the greatest propensity to engage in specific kinds of actions. As an example, movements are often spurred forward by “movement entrepreneurs” (McCarthy & Zald, 1973) who pay high personal costs to get a movement started. The AOS may help identify candidate entrepreneurs and assist in understanding the development of the entrepreneurial commitment.

The AOS can be used as a post-measure in studies of activists or in longitudinal studies to track activism development. For example, McAdam (1986, 1988, 1989) has made much of the impact of activism on commitment to future activism. He demonstrated, for example, that (a) students who applied for the Freedom Summer project were highly active in campus politics and movement organizations, (b) those who were most active were most likely to follow through with their planned participation, and (c) those who participated were more likely to sustain their activism throughout their lives compared to those who applied but did not participate. A cleaner study of this process could be made by administering the AOS before and after intensive participation in an activist campaign or by using the AOS to control for activist orientation between participants and non-participants. Finally, further investigation of the many issues discussed in this paper, such as prediction of activist behaviors from activist attitudes and examination of the biographical and psychological correlates of activist identity, would be better explored through the use of an empirically-validated and substantively grounded activism orientation scale such as the AOS.

Larger scale studies of the rise and fall of social movement campaigns and activism cycles could also be helped by mapping the changing distribution of activist orientation in a target population. For instance, Marwell and Oliver’s (1993) critical mass theory has demonstrated that collective protest can emerge when a small core of heavily committed activists take up the cause. Thus, the theory predicts that a distribution of activist orientation containing a relatively small number of connected individuals with strong activist orientations will be more likely to produce collective action than a variety of other distributions of activist
orientation. To adequately test these ideas, analysts must be able to measure activist orientation accurately and reliably.

Finally, the assessment of activist orientation has practical utility outside of the academic literature. Activists who want to nurture activism among populations of potential recruits and who wish to identify individuals with strong propensities to contribute may have interest in the assessment of activist orientation—both among individuals and across target populations. Additionally, large-scale shifts in activist orientation may reflect fluctuations in satisfaction with the governmental and economic regime, including, for example, relative economic conditions and changing political policies. Thus, policymakers and politicians attempting to react to public opinion or predict public reaction to their initiatives also may be interested in aggregate changes in activist orientation over time.

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Activism Orientation Scale


