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## *Complexities of the Gender Gap*

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Gender differences in political attitudes among whites arise from a variety of sources that may vary from issue to issue. Explanations based on gender-based social roles, basic value differences, socioeconomic status, and women's autonomy are tested in this study through an examination of both compositional and conditional effects. Compositional effects occur when men and women differ on an explanatory variable. Conditional effects occur when a variable has differential effects on the policy preferences of women and men. Using data from the 1996 National Election Study, OLS regression and logit results demonstrate the complex sources of gender gaps across issue areas. Some factors such as education have more of a liberalizing effect on women, while such factors as religiosity have more of a conservatizing effect on men. Overall, issue gender gaps arise both from women's cultural role and from women's increasing autonomy from men.

Nearly 20 years after feminists and political observers first called attention to the "gender gap" in voting behavior, the existence and significance of gender differences in political attitudes and behavior remain controversial. Most acknowledge, however, that women today are somewhat more likely than men to identify with the Democratic party and to vote Democratic. There is, in addition, widespread agreement that issue attitudes are among the important variables explaining gender differences in voting behavior, especially attitudes on "compassion" issues like social welfare and redistribution and issues involving the use of force such as capital punishment and military intervention (Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999; Mueller 1991; Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997).

But what is the source of the gender differences on these and other issues? The most provocative question about the gender gap is: What aspects of the socialization of women and their role in society lie behind these issue differences? This is the subject of this analysis. We attempt to explain the gender gap on some of the issue areas that underlie the well established gender differences in partisan and electoral choice. These issues include social welfare, the role of government, use of force, feminism, racial attitudes, and liberalism/conservatism.

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This research is based on two premises. First, the source of the gender gap on one issue may not be the same as the source of the gender gap on another issue. Second, the gender gap can be produced by compositional effects or by conditional effects. Compositional effects are illustrated by women being more liberal because they differ on some relevant characteristic, for example, income or occupational status. Conditional effects occur when a variable has differential effects on the issue positions of men and women. For example, previous research indicates that the gender gap may be greater among the highly educated and professionally employed (Ladd 1996; Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997), among younger adults (Cook 1989; Fite, Genest, and Wilcox 1990), and among baby boomers—that is, those who came of age early in the current women's movement (Rosenthal 1995). These conditional effects need to be tested in a more rigorous multivariate model.

In the following section, we first outline the major theoretical explanations for gender differences in political attitudes and behavior. We then use these explanations to guide an examination of how compositional effects and conditional effects produce the gender gap on political issues.

### Explanations for the Gender Gap in Policy Preferences and Ideology

The complexity of the gender gap is supported by decades of gender-based analysis of political attitudes which has supported various explanations for female/male differences. No single explanation has been generally accepted, possibly because they all contribute a piece of the puzzle (cf. Clark and Clark 1999) and possibly because conditional effects have not been fully explored.

One explanation for the gender gap involves inherent value differences between men and women, whether based on biological differences or gender socialization. The contention is that female morality tends to be more cooperative, caring, and nurturing, while male morality emphasizes justice, fairness, impersonal rules, and individual rights (Chodorow 1978; Gilligan 1982). A related view attributes some gender differences in attitudes to the fact that the vast majority of parents with primary responsibility for their children are women; thus, women's pacifist orientation and concern for the preservation of life are linked to "maternal thinking" (Ruddick 1980). These theories may help to explain significant gender differences that remain even after controlling for other sociodemographic, political, and contextual variables. These differences range from women's stronger support for social welfare expenditures, consumer safety, and environmental regulations, to their greater opposition to the use of force and violence in both domestic law enforcement and in foreign policy (e.g., Conover and Sapiro 1993; Deitch 1988; Fite, Genest, and Wilcox 1990; Shapiro and Mahajan 1986; Smith 1984; Wilcox, Ferrara, and Alsop 1993; Wirls 1986). An appealing aspect of this explanation is that these attitudinal differences precede the women's movement by years or even decades (Shapiro and Mahajan 1986;

Smith 1984) and indeed are likely to be based in early childhood socialization. This explanation is tested in the analysis to follow using indicators of both basic values and gender-based social roles.

A second explanation for gender differences in political attitudes is based on socioeconomic status. Women tend to earn less than men and are more likely to live in poverty. Women are the primary providers (as well as recipients) of social welfare services (Erie and Rein 1988). Thus, their relative liberalism could stem from rational self-interest. However, gender often remains statistically significant even when controlling for such major socioeconomic variables as income, education, occupation, race, and age (Cook and Wilcox 1991; Fite, Genest, and Wilcox 1990; Gilens 1988; Stoper 1989; Wilcox 1990). Thus, class stratification does not tell the whole story of the gender gap.

A third explanation, the women's autonomy thesis, combines socioeconomic and gender-based variables and posits that women who are the most autonomous from men tend to differ the most from men in their political attitudes and behavior. Carroll (1988) found that women who were the most economically independent from men—those with higher status occupations and education, as well as unmarried women at all socioeconomic levels—diverged the most from men in their voting behavior and presidential approval ratings. Women's growing economic independence, coupled with increased psychological independence, help explain the electoral gender gap that emerged in the early 1980s (see Rosenthal 1995).

The fourth explanation offered for the gender gap is feminism. According to the feminist interpretation of the gender gap, growing numbers of women since the 1960s have become both aware of the disadvantages and inequalities imposed on women and inspired to collective action to address those grievances (see Fulenwider 1980; Klein 1984; Sapiro 1983). Feminist consciousness increased to such a degree that by 1980, there was a noticeable and persistent gap, with women relatively more liberal and Democratic and men relatively more conservative and Republican. The political parties themselves reinforced this trend by becoming increasingly polarized around social and cultural issues, particularly abortion (Freeman 1993). However, it is difficult to argue that feminism explains political issue differences because the causal direction between the two is not clear. There is no compelling reason to place feminism causally prior to issue opinions. It is not a value learned in childhood (except for the very youngest of voters); and it is not a long-standing political issue. Thus, in our analysis the gender gap on feminism is a dependent variable to be explained along with the other issue domains.

In sum, the explanations for gender differences in political attitudes are complex and interrelated. However, it seems that they are all rooted in the contrasting social roles of men and women, roles that are reflected in different economic positions and different basic values. Our approach to "explaining" the gender gap on six issue domains is twofold. First, we test for compositional effects by applying various explanations to the basic bivariate relationship between gen-

der and the political issue in an attempt to reduce the independent impact of gender. Second, by examining interactions between gender and other variables, we identify the segments of the population where the gender gap is most pronounced and where it does not exist at all.

## Methodology

The data for this study are from the 1996 American National Election Study (ANES).<sup>1</sup> Our dependent variables are six political issues in which previous researchers have demonstrated gender gaps and that have been linked to differences in partisanship and voting behavior. The six issues and their operationalizations, four of which are standardized scales, are as follows:

- **Social Welfare Scale:** comprised of 11 items measuring attitudes toward government providing more services; government guarantee of jobs and a decent standard of living; government health insurance; and government spending on social services, food stamps, student aid, social security, the homeless, public schools, child care, and poor people. Cronbach's alpha = .80.
- **Opposition to Strong Government Scale:** comprised of three items asking whether the government should do more or less; whether strong government or the free market is better able to handle problems; and whether government has grown because we face bigger problems or because it is involved in things people should do for themselves. Cronbach's alpha = .75.
- **Opposition to Handgun Control:** single dichotomous item, favor or oppose.<sup>2</sup>
- **Conservative Ideology:** the traditional seven-point scale.
- **Feminism Scale:** comprised of two items, the "feeling thermometer" toward the women's movement and attitude toward women's equality.<sup>3</sup> Cronbach's alpha = .47.
- **Racial Attitudes Scale:** comprised of six items measuring support for aid to blacks, fair treatment in jobs, preferential hiring and promotion, and perceptions that blacks are hardworking, intelligent and trustworthy. Cronbach's alpha = .66.

Three variables represent the *socioeconomic explanation* for the gender gap: *family income, education, and occupational status*. *Occupational status* is measured as a dummy variable of professional/managerial/technical occupations.

<sup>1</sup>The 1996 American National Election Study was conducted by the Center for Political Studies at the University of Michigan and made available through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. Neither the collectors nor the distributors of the data are responsible for the analyses or interpretations presented here.

<sup>2</sup>Attempts were made to scale several "use of force" items, but the scales failed to achieve adequate reliability levels. Gun control was ultimately chosen because it is a salient current policy issue.

<sup>3</sup>Several researchers have combined the same two items into measures of feminism; together they represent the respondent's attitude toward women's equality as well as whether collective action is needed to achieve feminist goals (see Cook 1989; Cook and Wilcox 1991; Sapiro 1983).

Two variables represent the *social role explanation*: the *number of children* under 18 living at home and a relatively new concept we are calling *redistributive occupation*. A *redistributive occupation* is one that is highly affected by redistributive government policies; these include occupations in education, health care, welfare, and social work. White women are almost three times more likely than white men to be in these occupations (19% of white females vs. 7% of white males in the 1996 ANES), and people in these occupations are more likely to see the benefits of liberal, redistributive government policies.

Three values represent the *basic values explanation* for the gender gap. All three are values that we have reason to expect are learned early in life. First, a six-item *Egalitarian Scale* measures one's commitment to equality, including equality of opportunity and equal rights (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .72$ ). Second, a four-item *Help Others Scale* taps respondents' compassion and commitment to helping the less fortunate (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .60$ ). A third value is *Religiosity*, operationalized as frequency of church attendance. Women traditionally have been responsible for the religious area of family life and are more likely than men to be regular churchgoers (Conover 1988, 995; Flammang 1997, 129, 270–71; Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997, 21–22; Wuthnow and Lehrman 1990, 302–3), behaviors that may reflect their more “caring” values. At the same time, religiosity can have a conservatizing effect on attitudes toward the government role in matters of morality and social change; thus, its effect on the gender gap may be ambiguous (Conover 1988, 1002).

The *womens' autonomy explanation* is theoretically distinct from the above two explanations because it involves conditional effects. That is, it predicts that the gender gap will be greatest in certain categories of the population, such as the most educated, professional, and affluent, the unmarried, and those who came of age during or after the women's movement. Therefore, these variables will be used in interactions with gender to examine the women's autonomy explanation.

The data include only white respondents because the gender gap is overwhelmingly produced by white voters. Although there is evidence of a black gender gap in voting behavior, the issues underlying it are not as well researched as those underlying the white gender gap (Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997). White males' increasing movement toward the Republican party has resulted in a widening gender gap in partisanship and voting behavior among whites, while black women and men have remained overwhelmingly Democratic (Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999, 870).

### Compositional Effects and the Gender Gap

Is the gender gap primarily produced by socioeconomic differences, social role differences, or basic value differences between men and women? In Table 1, we first report simple correlation coefficients between gender and each of the issues. Then, to test the power of these explanations, we begin with a simple bivariate regression between the six political issues and gender that yields a

TABLE 1  
**Attempts to Reduce the Bivariate Effects of Gender on Five Political Attitudes (Whites Only)**

	Support for Social Welfare			Opposition to Strong Government			Conservative Ideology		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Correlation with Gender ( $r$ )		.172***			-.193***			-.134***	
Bivariate Regression Coefficient with Gender (b)		.281***			-.377***			-.258***	
<b>Female</b>	<b>.224***</b>	<b>.188**</b>	<b>.136**</b>	<b>-.326***</b>	<b>-.313***</b>	<b>-.275***</b>	<b>-.257***</b>	<b>-.242***</b>	<b>-.199***</b>
Education	-.060**	-.068**	-.073***	.063**	.065**	.058**	-.042*	-.036 <sup>a</sup>	-.048*
Income	-.068***	-.063***	-.037**	.020	.018	.002	.048**	.048**	.029*
Occupational Status	-.001	-.070	-.095	.128 <sup>a</sup>	.148*	.182**	-.069	-.042	-.003
Redist. Occ.	— <sup>b</sup>	.275**	.200*	—	-.086	-.043	—	-.103	-.077
Children	— <sup>b</sup>	.031	.039 <sup>a</sup>	—	-.026	-.034	—	.096***	.059*
Married	-.082	-.102	-.011	.139*	.155*	.092	.092	.049	-.068
Boomer	-.031	-.069	-.163**	-.024	.004	.053	-.087	-.180**	-.072
Age	-.074***	-.071***	-.041**	.024	.021	.092	.048**	.060**	-.068
Religiosity	—	—	-.032*	—	—	.024	—	—	.145***
Help Others	—	—	.006	—	—	.055*	—	—	.002
Egalitarianism	—	—	.529***	—	—	-.368***	—	—	-.433***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.081	.087	.367	.067	.067	.194	.035	.044	.292
N	(1166)	(1166)	(1166)	(1200)	(1200)	(1200)	(1218)	(1218)	(1218)

(continued)

TABLE 1 (continued)

	Conservative Racial Attitudes			Opposition Handgun Control (logistic regression)			Support for Feminism		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Correlation with Gender (r)		-.073**			-.265***			.093***	
Bivariate Regression Coefficient with Gender (b)		-.147*			-.105*** <sup>c</sup>			.187**	
<b>Female</b>									
Education	-.159**	-.150*	-.068	-1.079***	-1.120***	-1.101***	.200***	.195**	.166**
Income	-.088***	-.089***	-.076***	-.072	-.076	-.069	-.000	-.005	.006
Occupational Status	-.048**	.046**	.018	-.002	.004	-.014	.004	.003	.017
Redist. Occ.	-.060	-.053	-.014	-.181	-.240	-.230	.143*	.132 <sup>a</sup>	.095
Children	—	-.056	-.039	—	.241	—	—	.046	.026
Married	—	-.071*	-.058*	—	.128*	—	—	-.092***	-.064*
Boomer	.020	.051	.020	.354*	.288*	.255	-.209**	-.163*	-.067
Age	-.162*	-.089	-.022	.014	-.118	-.101	.037	.127 <sup>a</sup>	.040
Religiosity	.020	.002	-.018	-.118**	-.103**	-.118**	-.089***	-.100***	-.064***
Help Others	—	—	-.024	—	—	-.057	—	—	-.109***
Egalitarianism	—	—	-.080**	—	—	.013	—	—	-.029
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.026	.030	.278	62% <sup>d</sup>	62%	64%	—	—	.362***
N	(1050)	(1050)	(1050)	(1224)	(1224)	(1224)	(1190)	(1190)	(1190)

\*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001.

<sup>a</sup>p < .10

<sup>b</sup>Variables not included in model.

<sup>c</sup>Coefficients in the Handgun model are logistic regression coefficients. Handgun Control is a dichotomy.

<sup>d</sup>Percent correctly classified by logit model.



regression coefficient representing the baseline gender gap (see Table 1).<sup>4</sup> Consistent with the literature, all of these coefficients are significant and in the predicted direction. Our strategy is to add groups of the explanatory variables in stages in order to reduce the coefficient associated with gender. *Thus, the purpose is not to explain variation in the political issue, but to lower the unstandardized gender coefficient.*

Table 1 presents three models of each of the six political issues. Model 1 contains the socioeconomic and demographic variables, Model 2 adds the social role variables, and Model 3 adds the three basic values.

Three conclusions emerge from Table 1. First, the socioeconomic and social role models are weaker than we expected given the prominence of these explanations in the literature. While higher levels of *income* and *education* reduce the gender gap on *Social Welfare*,<sup>5</sup> and *education* and *occupational status* reduce the gap on *Opposition to Strong Government*, the reduction in both cases is only 20% or less of the original gender coefficient. In the other four models of political issues, the impact of gender either remains essentially the same or actually increases with the inclusion of the socioeconomic variables. The social role explanation reduces the gender gap only on the *Social Welfare* issues. The new variable, *redistributive occupation*, accounts for the social role explanation. Women are more liberal on social welfare issues partly because they are more likely to be in social welfare-related occupations.

The second conclusion from Table 1 is that the basic value of egalitarianism explains an additional portion of the gender gap and increases the models' explanatory power on five of the six political issues. The effects of the *Egalitarianism* scale and the *Help Others* scale are most evident in the case of *Racial Attitudes*, where the gender regression coefficient is reduced to insignificance. *Egalitarianism* alone reduces the gender coefficient in the case of *Social Welfare*, *Strong Government*, *Ideology*, and *Feminism*. Women are more likely to have egalitarian values; therefore, they have more liberal political attitudes. The *Help Others* scale only explains the more liberal attitudes of women on *Racial Attitudes*,<sup>6</sup> and *Religiosity* has a conservatizing effect, so it cannot explain the more liberal attitudes of women.

The most striking conclusion from Table 1 is the persistence of a significant gender gap on five of the six political issues; the *Racial Attitudes* scale is the

<sup>4</sup> Although we use OLS regression to estimate five of the six models, logit is used for the dependent variable, *Opposition to Handgun Control*. The latter is a dichotomous variable (favor or oppose handgun control), thus, logit is a more appropriate technique than OLS regression.

<sup>5</sup> Age does not contribute to lowering the gender coefficient in three of the four models in Table 1, even though age itself is significant. In the fourth model, *Social Welfare*, where age is significant and the gender coefficient is lowered, age does not contribute to the decline in the gender coefficient. When the model was run without the age variable, the gender coefficient was essentially the same,  $-.219$ , certainly not higher.

<sup>6</sup> The *Help Others* scale reaches significance in the model of *Opposition to Strong Government*, but because it has a conservatizing effect it cannot explain the gender gap.

TABLE 2

**Change from Bivariate Gender Regression Coefficient  
after Removing Compositional Effects**

Racial Attitudes	Reduced to Insignificance
Social Welfare	52% Decrease, Remained Sig.
Government Role	27% Decrease, Remained Sig.
Ideology	23% Decrease, Remained Sig.
Feminism	11% Decrease, Remained Sig.
Handgun Control	5% Increase <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Represents an increase in a logistic coefficient.

only issue area where the gender gap is reduced to insignificance. On three of the issues, compositional effects account for less than half of the original gender gap (Table 2), and in the case of *Handgun Control*, the addition of the other variables actually increases the impact of gender.

### Conditional Effects and the Gender Gap

Interaction, or conditional, effects produce a gender gap when a particular variable has more impact on women than on men, or vice versa. For example, having a larger number of children at home may have a greater impact on women's attitudes than on men's attitudes because women are more likely to have greater child care responsibilities. Conditional effects address the question, among what types of people is the gender gap larger and among what types is it smaller?

A new set of analyses was run including interactions between gender and all other independent variables. Table 3 presents models for five of the six political issues including only the significant interaction terms.<sup>7</sup> Conditional effects clearly help explain the gender gap and, as was the case with compositional effects, the relevant conditions differ from one political issue to the next. Four gender-interactive terms are significant in the *Social Welfare* attitudes model; two are significant in the *Ideology* model and in the support for *Feminism* model; and one is significant in the *Opposition to Strong Government* model and the *Racial Attitudes* model (see Table 3).

Interpreting conditional effects substantively based on the regression coefficients can be difficult, so in Table 4 we have presented the magnitude of the gender gap in various categories of the conditioning variable. We begin with the regression coefficient associated with gender from Table 1, which represents the gender gap remaining after taking into account the socioeconomic,

<sup>7</sup>*Opposition to Handgun Control* was omitted from Table 3 because none of the conditional effects were statistically significant.

TABLE 3  
 Conditional Effects and the Gender Gap (Whites Only)

	Support for Social Welfare	Opposition to Strong Government	Conservative Ideology	Conservative Racial Attitudes	Support for Feminism
Female*Religion	— <sup>b</sup>	-.079*	—	—	—
Female*Help	.082 <sup>a</sup>	—	-.100*	—	—
Female*Redist. Occ.	-.316*	—	.300 <sup>a</sup>	—	-.531**
Female*Children	.082*	—	—	—	—
Female*Education	.050 <sup>a</sup>	—	—	—	.121***
Female*Age	—	—	—	.083*	—
Education	-.146**	.058**	-.048*	-.074***	-.174**
Income	-.038**	.002	-.030*	.016	.018
Occup. Status	-.094	.177*	.000	-.001	.101
Redist. Occ.	.734*	-.035	-.606*	-.047	.916**
Children	-.074	-.039	.057*	-.054*	-.057*
Married	-.025	.087	-.061	.060	-.089
Boomer	-.164	.054	-.081	-.030	.038
Age	-.036*	-.003	.014	-.145**	-.059***
Female	-.117	-.131 <sup>a</sup>	-.229***	-.357**	-.301*
Religiosity	-.030*	.145**	.144***	-.026	-.109***
Help Others	-.113	.056*	.155*	-.085**	-.029
Egalitarianism	.526***	-.371***	-.431***	-.484***	.360***
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.373	.198	.295	.282	.218
N	(1166)	(1200)	(1218)	(1050)	(1190)

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

<sup>a</sup> $p < .10$

<sup>b</sup>Variables not included in model.

social role and basic values explanations. The subgroup gender gaps will straddle that baseline slope, that is, some will be higher and some will be lower.<sup>8</sup>

On the issue of *Social Welfare*, the gender gap is greatest among those with more *children*, more *education*, higher scores on the *Help Others* scale, and those not in a *redistributive occupation*. The effect of *number of children* is especially striking. Among those without children, the gender gap is not even significant, despite the large number of people in this category. However, when the number of children equals two, the gender gap becomes .241 ( $p < .001$ ) on a standardized scale, and when the number of children equals four, the gender

<sup>8</sup>For the analysis presented in Table 4, the significant interaction terms were entered one at a time. If more than one had been entered, the partial slope for female would have to be interpreted in terms of two conditions instead of one condition, which would unnecessarily complicate the interpretations in Table 4.

TABLE 4

## Illustrative Conditional Effects and the Gender Gap

Support for Social Welfare		Conservative Ideology	
	Slope of Female		Slope of Female
Additive Impact (from Table 1)	.136**	Additive Impact (from Table 1)	-.199***
When number of children = 0	.060	When help scale = -1	-.105
When number of children = 2	.241***	When help scale = 0 (mean)	-.199***
When number of children = 4	.489**	When help scale = +1	-.295***
When help scale = -1	.045	Non-Redistributive Occ.	-.254***
When help scale = 0 (mean)	.139**	Redistributive Occ.	.098
When help scale = +1	.234**		
Non-redist. Occupation	.176**		
Redistributive Occupation	-.043		
When education = 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	.008		
When education = median, >12 years	.141**		
When education = advanced degree	.273**		
		Conservative Racial Attitudes	
			Slope of Female
		Additive Impact (from Table 1)	-.068
		When age = 18-25	-.203 <sup>a</sup>
		When age = 26-35	-.194 <sup>a</sup>
		When age = 36-45 (md.)	-.163*
		When age = 46-55	-.024
		When age = 56-65	.105
Opposition to Strong Government			
	Slope of Female		
Additive Impact (from Table 1)	-.275***		
When never go to church	-.211***		
When go to church 1-2/month	-.369***		
When go to church every week	-.567***		
		Support for Feminism	
			Slope of Female
Additive Impact (from Table 1)			.166**
Non-Redistributive Occ.			.199***
Redistributive Occ.			-.146
When education = 8 <sup>th</sup> grade			-.187
When education = median, >12 years			.108 <sup>a</sup>
When education = advanced degree			.479***

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .<sup>a</sup> $p < .10$

gap doubles. Given the child care responsibilities of women, those who have large numbers of children are more likely to see a need for or to actually rely on social welfare programs. This pattern supports the social role explanation.

The gender gap on *Social Welfare* is also highest among the most educated, those with advanced degrees. The sign of the coefficient in Table 3 indicates that *education* has a greater impact on women than on men, presumably because it increases their awareness of the economic inequities, their feminist attitudes, and their autonomy from men. In addition, those scoring high on the *Help Others* scale contribute disproportionately to the gender gap on *Social Welfare* issues as well because the *Help Others* scale has a greater impact on women's attitudes than on men's attitudes.

Having a *redistributive occupation*, on the other hand, reduces the gender gap on *Social Welfare* attitudes. The sign of the coefficient in Table 3 indicates that having a redistributive occupation has a greater impact on men than on women. That is, men who work in the fields of education, health, or welfare tend to have liberal social welfare attitudes, therefore eliminating the gender gap on *Social Welfare* among people with these occupations.

Being opposed to a strong government is only affected by one interaction term, that between gender and *Religiosity*; the gender gap is greater among churchgoers than among non-churchgoers. Interestingly, *Religiosity* is more likely to produce opposition to strong government in men than in women, suggesting that the conservatizing effect of religiosity on political attitudes is more pronounced among males than females.

When the dependent variable is *Conservative Ideology*, two of the conditional effects associated with *Social Welfare* are repeated. The ideological gender gap is greatest among those with high values on the *Help Others* scale and among those not in a *redistributive occupation*. The signs of the interaction coefficients from Table 3 again show that having a *redistributive occupation* affects men's ideology more than women's. However, the *Help Others* scale affects men's ideology more than women's and contributes to the gender gap by having a conservatizing effect on men. The *Help Others* scale may be tapping the same conservatizing effect of religiosity on men's attitudes described above.

The gender gap on support for *Feminism* is conditioned by having a *redistributive occupation* and by education. As was the case with *Social Welfare* and *Conservative Ideology*, the traditional gender gap is greatest among those not in a *redistributive occupation*, primarily because the redistributive occupations have a liberalizing affect on men's support for *Feminism*. In addition, the gender gap on *Feminism* among those with advanced degrees is quadruple the gap among those with only some education beyond high school (.479 vs. .108), which supports the women's autonomy explanation.

The gender gap on *Racial Attitudes* is conditioned only by age; the gap is significant only among the younger age groups. Thus, white women's relative liberalism and egalitarianism on racial issues, compared to white men, is evident only among respondents under the age of 45, suggesting a generational effect.

That is, women who entered adulthood after the social movements of the 1950s and 1960s are more likely to differ from their male peers on racial issues than are women who were born earlier in the century.<sup>9</sup>

Also notable are the variables that do not condition the gender gaps on these issues. Neither being a baby boomer nor being married have significant conditional effects with gender in any of these models. Apparently, other variables capture the supposed conditioning effects of these characteristics on the gender gap.

*Opposition to Handgun Control* was the only issue area where no hypothesized compositional or conditional effects were observed. The large original gender gap ( $b = -1.05$ ) remained through all of the additive models and among all groups of respondents examined. Thus, we are left with two possibilities. One is that gender differences on gun control are rooted in physiological gender differences in the tendency toward physical aggression. The second possibility is that the basic values included in our model do not adequately capture gender socialization differences.

In sum, conditional effects illuminate important explanations for the gender gap. This famous gap is produced partly by differential effects that certain demographics and basic values have on women versus men. This is particularly the case with the *Social Welfare* scale, which captures many of the issues at the heart of partisan divisions in this country. While there is no pattern that applies to all six political issues, having an occupation in health, education, or welfare produces a smaller gender gap on three of the issues by having a liberalizing effect on men. Also, the gender gap on two of the issues is largest among the most educated respondents due to education's greater liberalizing effect on women than on men, and the gender gap on racial attitudes is largest among younger adults. Furthermore, religiosity enhances the gender gap by making men more conservative on the issue of strong government. Finally, the basic value of helpfulness to others contributes to the gender gap by liberalizing women's attitudes on social welfare and by inclining men who are high on the *Help Others* scale toward more conservative ideological identifications.

## Conclusion

The gender gap on political issues is indeed a complex phenomenon, produced by a variety of social, economic, and psychological factors. Prior explanations have drawn artificial boundaries between these factors, but all contribute to the gender gap and even basic biology may play a role. The source of the gender gap differs from issue to issue, at times produced by an explanatory vari-

<sup>9</sup>Davis (1992) and Schuman et al. (1997) both dismiss the aging process as a significant influence on changing racial attitudes. They attribute trends in racial attitudes to cohort replacement (generational effects) and period effects. Schuman et al. especially emphasize generational effects due to the events of the 1950s and 1960s (1997, 197). Neither addresses the differential generational effects on men versus women suggested in this analysis.

able having a liberalizing effect on women, at other times produced by a variable having conservatizing effects on men—all in addition to the contribution of simple economic, value, and social role differences between males and females. Thus, there are many paths to the gender gap on political issues that lie behind the well publicized gender gap in partisanship and voting behavior.

Within this complexity four factors stand out in that they affect at least three of the six issues examined. First, the greater tendency of women to hold *egalitarian attitudes* contributes to the gender gap on five of the six issues. Women are more concerned with ensuring equality of opportunity and other equity issues, which predictably inclines them toward more liberal views on political issues. Second, the value of *helping others* contributes to the gender gap on race, social welfare, and ideology. It is likely that these values are learned early in life as part of women's cultural role: noncompetitive, caregiving, and cooperative.

Third, being in *an occupation affected by redistributive government policies* has compositional and conditional effects on the gender gap. Women are more likely to be in redistributive occupations, therefore they are more liberal on the issue of social welfare. Having a redistributive occupation, like having egalitarian attitudes, reflects the cultural role of women. However, redistributive occupations at times detract from the gender gap by having a greater liberalizing effect on men than on women.

Finally, *education* affects the gender gap by highlighting women who least fit the traditional cultural role and who are least dependent on men, those with advanced degrees. The gender gaps on social welfare and feminism are largest among those with the highest level of education, and this effect is produced by the liberalizing effect of education on women. However, education as an economic indicator also affects the gender gap on opposition to strong government. Because women are less likely than men to have advanced degrees,<sup>10</sup> they are less conservative on the issue of strength of government, an attitude associated with higher economic status.

Women have always had more egalitarian and helping values, greater representation in redistributive occupations, and more autonomy from men at higher educational levels. Why did the gender gap emerge only in the 1980s? Of course, the women's movement of the 1970s and the economic advancement of women played a major role. However, previous research may have underestimated the effect of the proliferation of social welfare programs, which created a clientele of employees and beneficiaries who are predominantly female. The Reagan administration's attempt to roll back some of these programs in the 1980s and subsequent attempts by the Republican party to cut social, health, and educational programs in order to reduce taxes have had more appeal to males. Thus, the gender gap is ultimately a result of the cultural role of women expressed through

<sup>10</sup> Although the educational gap is gradually closing, and women now hold nearly as many master's degrees as men do, men still hold more than two-thirds of the nation's professional and doctoral degrees (see U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998).

economics, social roles, and basic values. With such a complex underpinning, the gap is not likely to diminish in the near future.

## Appendix

### Coding of Variables from the 1996 American National Election Study

#### *Dependent Variables*

**Social Welfare Scale:** Comprised of V960450, V960479, V960483, V960496, V960497, V960500, V960501, V960560, V960562, V960564, V960565, standardized.

**Opposition to Strong Government Scale:** Comprised of V961144, V961145, V961146, standardized.

**Opposition to Handgun Control:** V961217

**Conservative Ideology:** V960365

**Feminism Scale:** Comprised of V960543 and V961039 (recoded into seven categories), standardized.

**Racial Attitudes Scale:** Comprised of V960487, V961207 (recoded into 1 to 7), V961209 (recoded into 1 to 7), V961312 V961315, V961318, standardized.

#### *Independent Variables*

**Female:** V960066, dummy variable.

#### *Socioeconomic variables:*

**Family income:** V960701

**Education:** V960610

**Professional/managerial/technical occupation:** V960675, dummy variable.

#### *Social role variables:*

**Number of children:** Comprised of two variables from the 1994 NES (V941429, V941431) and four variables from the 1996 NES (V960048, V960049, V960050, V960051).

**Redistributive occupation:** V960675, dummy variable, coded with the following values as redistributive occupations: 014, 015, 083, 084, 085, 087 through 163, 377, 387, 425, 445, 446, 465, 467, 468.

#### *Basic values:*

**Egalitarian Scale:** Comprised of V961229, V961230, V961231, V961232, V961233, V961234, standardized.

**Help Others Scale:** Comprised of V961235, V961236, V961237, V961238, standardized.



**Religiosity:** V960578, recoded so that low score = 0 (never attend church) and high score = 4 (highest church attendance).

### Control Variables

**Married:** V960606, dummy variable.

**Age:** V960605, collapsed into seven categories.

**Baby boomer:** V960605, dummy variable, 1 = ages 32 thru 50.

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