WHO ARE FEMINISTS AND WHAT DO THEY BELIEVE? THE ROLE OF GENERATIONS

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Using the 1996 General Social Survey, the antecedents of feminist self-identification and their link to gender-related social attitudes are explored. Although most socio-demographic variables show either no relationship or a weak relationship with feminist self-identification, there are strong differences across cohorts. Males and females who were young adults during the "second wave" of feminism (birth years 1936 to 1955) are more likely to identify as feminists than are those younger or older. In addition, the link between feminist self-identification and some social attitudes is cohort specific: Seemingly profeminist positions distinguish self-identified feminists from nonfeminists only among members of the "second-wave" generation. These results reinforce the importance of political generation and suggest increasing heterogeneity in public conceptions of feminism.

C URRENT HISTORIES of the feminist movement both celebrate its accomplishments and chronicle its setbacks (Armstrong 2002; Ferree and Hess 2000; Hammer 2002). Among its setbacks is the fate of the term "feminist" itself. Despite increasing support for many feminist ideals, negative sentiments toward the label "feminist" remain strong (Burn, Aboud, and Moyles 2000; Buschman and Lenart 1996), and many individuals who embrace seemingly feminist positions nonetheless deny that they are feminists. Misciagno (1997) considers this disjuncture a central "paradox" of contemporary feminism, recounting as a familiar experience that "women will

begin statements in support of a feminist position with the phrase 'I'm not a feminist, but . . .'" (p. *xvii*). Indeed, this statement has been so compelling that there are three separate papers titled "I'm Not a Feminist, but . . ." (Buschman and Lenart 1996; Hausbeck 1992; Williams and Wittig 1997), another titled "I Would Say That I'm a Feminist, but . . ." (Ashcraft 1998), and an older paper titled "I'm Not a Women's Libber, but . . ." (Griffin 1989).

In addition to troubling those interested in the promotion of feminism, the widespread reluctance to identify as feminist—as well as the separation of attitudes from identity implied by the "I'm not a feminist, but . . ." statement—intrigues sociologists interested in the public adoption of social identities. Although treatments of identity vary generally, there is little disagreement among sociologists that identity matters: Identity, as self-categorization, is a precursor, consequence, or, at the very least, a correlate of attitudes and behavior (Gecas and Burke 1995). Social movement scholars and political sociologists have increasingly become

attracted to the concept of identity, largely because of its presumed link to attitudes and behavior and because identity-based theories provide alternatives to purely structural perspectives (Polletta and Jasper 2001; Snow and McAdam 2000). A central task in the field has long been to pinpoint factors that facilitate or inhibit the endorsement of particular identities (Stryker, Owens, and White 2000).

It is in this context that feminist identity is especially interesting. The "feminist" label is commonly regarded as implying an ideological orientation such that many scholars have operationalized "feminist" in terms of holding feminist attitudes (e.g., Henley et al. 1988; Plutzer 1988). Yet, unlike many other value-based or collective identities that have been characterized as possessing "a clarity and forcefulness that is lacking in most other aspects of modern society" (Gecas 2000:14), the ideological components of a feminist identity remain a matter of debate, and the meaning of "feminist" itself is unsettled, even among avowed feminists (Lorber 2001). Because "feminist" is premised on heterogeneous understandings of what "feminism" is, the identity can be connected to manifold political agendas, serving potentially opposing political ends. For that matter, pejorative uses of "feminist" often have been invoked to undermine support for the identity and to discredit specific agendas. Public understandings of the identity may vary widely, which raises questions about differences in rates of feminist self-identification and its connection to ideological beliefs.

Unfortunately, scholarly and public discourse on feminist identity often has been accompanied by little direct empirical analysis of identification, its antecedents, or its associations with attitudes. The work that has been done is based on limited, largely college-aged samples (Buschman and Lenart 1996), typically including only women (but see Rhodebeck 1996). Thus we know little about how social characteristics, feminist self-identification, and feminist ideology are related among the general population and whether these patterns differ for men and women.

Previous scholarship suggests a number of social cleavages that might affect the likeli-

hood that one would consider "feminist" as part of one's identity. Prominent among these is the role of political generation. Ever since Mannheim ([1928] 1952), sociologists have recognized the lifelong influence that historical events shared by cohorts can have on beliefs about the world and self. In the case of feminism, a recurrent proposal has been that the contentious course of political debates about the meaning and substance of feminism has had different aggregate effects on identification for those whose political coming-of-age has occurred at different times. Yet, scholars differ considerably in their speculation about the character of these differences, and little research has directly examined the issue.

We use the Gender Module of the 1996 General Social Survey (GSS) to pursue the following questions: (1) What sociodemographic variables predict feminist self-identification? (2) How does self-identification relate to gender-related social attitudes? (3) Does the strength of the association between self-identification and attitudes vary systematically across cohorts? Although our results generally suggest weaker relationships between most sociodemographic variables and feminist self-identification than what others have anticipated, we do find some significant differences across different cohorts. Together, our results suggest what might be one consequence of the long public contest over the meaning of the "feminist" identity.

BACKGROUND

FEMINIST SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND POLITICAL GENERATION

The demonstration that attitude change is much more pronounced during early adulthood than later in life (e.g., Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Firebaugh 1989) supports the contention of Mannheim and others that early adulthood serves as a vital time in the formation of political views. Accordingly, the frame of reference provided by the character of political debates on issues during a cohort's early adulthood has observable consequences for their political socialization. If one considers a cohort to consist of individuals born at about the same time, a generation can be said to exist when the historical ex-

periences corresponding to the coming-of-age of some cohorts are strong enough to distinguish them, at least somewhat discretely, from cohorts before and after (Erikson and Tedin 1995: 138).

Some authors have emphasized the lasting effects of generation for gender-role attitudes specifically (Davis and Robinson 1991). For feminist self-identification, this research suggests the importance of taking into account which stages or "waves" of the feminist movement coincide with an individual's political coming-of-age (Armstrong 2002; Farganis 1994; Ferree and Hess 2000; Hammer 2002). Along these lines, we can distinguish among at least three cohorts based on whether their coming-of-age (1) preceded the renascence of the women's movement in the mid-1960s, (2) occurred during the second wave of feminism of the mid-1960s through the early 1970s, or (3) followed the second wave. Given this scheme, however, the existing literature offers differing propositions for the patterns one might expect to observe in these generations.

Some believe that women from the post–second-wave generation, as beneficiaries of the feminist movement, are not only more accepting of feminist ideas than are women from earlier generations, but also are more accepting of "even the label itself" (Misciagno 1997:69). Alternatively, insofar as second-wave feminism already had realized many important gains, the younger generation may not have seen endorsing a feminist identity as relevant to some ideals of gender equality, and their political coming-of-age may also have been marked by the increasing salience of pejorative public connotations to the identity. As a result, rates of feminist identification may have decreased. Given the suggestions by others that the "impressionable years" for women—at least regarding the women's movement—occurs during or extends into middle age (Schneider 1988; Steinem 1983), still another possibility is that increased feminist self-identification would also be observed among women who were middle-aged during the rise of second-wave feminism. If so, we might expect lower self-identification by the currently youngest generation relative to older generations.

If there are generational or other sociodemographic influences on feminist self-iden-

tification among women, it is unclear whether these patterns should also hold for men. To whatever extent that a proposed explanation of a cleavage cites that a dynamic operates exclusively for women (as in the third possibility above), then the cleavage should exist only, or more strongly, among women. Although some scholars have speculated about differences in how feminist identity is formed in men and women (Plutzer 1991; Reingold and Faust 1988; Rhodebeck 1996), studies have revealed surprisingly little evidence of sex differences in the antecedents of a feminist orientation (Reingold and Faust 1988), despite the higher overall rates of feminist identification among women.

FEMINIST SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND FEMINIST IDEOLOGY

When one considers how feminist self-identification might be related to political attitudes, the available literature again provides varying expectations regarding the role of political generation. Some studies propose "stage theories" in which feminist self-identification is preceded by both the formation of a "gender consciousness" and the endorsement of feminist attitudes, ideologies, and policy preferences (Reingold and Faust 1998; Rhodebeck 1996). If correct, we might not only expect that holding attitudes consistent with standard interpretations of feminism will be closely related to the likelihood of identifying as a feminist, but also that this relationship will vary little across generations. Although the association between feminist identity and ideology has received surprisingly sparse direct examination, the idea of a strong association between the two is contravened by a study on college-aged samples that reports weaker relationships than expected (Buschman and Lenart 1996). Additionally, two other scenarios suggested by the literature do give us reason to expect generational variation in the magnitude of the association.

A plausible case can be made that the younger generation should be the most consistent in linking attitudes to feminism, as some propose that there is more consensus now than before about the ideological positions of feminism. Ferree and Hess (2000)

write, "For both feminists and antifeminists, positions on a range of issues have tended toward internal coherence, so that a distinct set of attitudes characterizes each constituency, making it easier for people to choose sides consistently" (p. 90). They also argue that the issues of feminism have become increasingly identified with political party preference, with feminists supporting Democratic candidates and antifeminists favoring Republicans (Ferree and Hess [2000] citing Freeman [1993]). Such an argument would imply that the younger generation reached adulthood during a period when ideological differences between feminists and nonfeminists were more crystallized than before. If it is correct that the "issue packages" of feminism have tended toward greater coherence, *we might expect the relationship between feminist self-identification and ideologies to be strongest among the younger generation.*

On the other hand, recent decades have witnessed a proliferation of "feminisms," each promoting a different conception of what feminism is. For some, this proliferation represents one sign of success (Farganis 1994; Ferree and Hess 2000). Yet opponents of feminism have promoted a variety of negative conceptions of feminism during the same period of time. To be sure, those who reached adulthood during the rise of second-wave feminism were not exposed to a uniform representation of feminism, and feminism had many detractors then as well. Nevertheless, those reaching adulthood after the second wave seem likely to have encountered more versions of what it means to be a feminist (Armstrong 2002). Furthermore, they may be more likely to encounter feminisms with more diverse and even conflicting agendas. *We might, therefore, expect the association between some social attitudes and feminist self-identification to be stronger among members of the second-wave generation than among younger respondents.* In this case, the "paradox" of feminist self-identification may be a two-sided phenomenon: Not only might those who hold seemingly feminist attitudes fail to identify as feminists, but those who hold seemingly nonfeminist attitudes might identify as feminists as well. This pattern also might be expected as more recent cohorts have grown up

in times when nontraditional gender roles and opportunities are more commonplace and when these opportunities are less associated with the efforts of feminism.[1]

OTHER SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND FEMINIST SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Although we focus on political generation, the existing literature has also suggested a number of other social cleavages that might affect the likelihood of adopting the feminist label. We consider these alternatives because their consequences will also be evaluated given the specification of our models below. Commentators, for example, have regularly speculated that working-class, nonwhite, and less educated women are less inclined to identify with feminism, in part because they perceive feminism to be a "white middle-class women's movement" (Jackson 1998). Some have conjectured that a feminist identification is inhibited among black women by a feeling that one is "betraying" either their racial/ethnic identity (Fujino and King 1994; Myakovsky and Wittig 1997) or their commitments to family (Misciagno 1997). Others, however, propose that the experience of racial inequality for blacks may lead to a heightened sensitivity to gender equality that disposes them more favorably to feminism (Hunter and Sellers 1998; Kane 2000).

In addition, some scholars have proposed that family circumstances shape differences in attitudes regarding gender, at least with respect to women (Gerson 1987). Plutzer (1988) posits that women who are married, with many children, or not employed are less likely to subscribe to a feminist ideology (which he equates with feminist identity) than are those who are unmarried, without children, or employed. Although Plutzer reports only weak evidence for these hypotheses, he finds reason enough to believe that

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[1] A greater disconnect between ideology and identity among the young could also reflect less crystallized attitudes for these respondents (an age effect rather than a cohort effect). This explanation, however, would not predict any differences in the strength of the identity-ideology link between the second-wave generation and older generations.

family and work life "may become important lines of political cleavage in the future" (p. 640).

DATA AND MEASURES

We explore our research questions using data from a national survey. We first estimate a model of sociodemographic predictors of feminist self-identification, focusing on the cohort differences discussed above. Then, to explore these cohort differences further, we estimate a series of models in which various ideological measures are considered along with cohort as predictors of feminist self-identification. We do this to determine whether the strength of the association between attitudes and self-identification varies across cohorts, which we test using a series of interaction terms.

DATA

We use the 1996 General Social Survey (GSS), conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (Davis and Smith 1996). Widely used in sociology, the GSS's high quality data collection methods and extensive battery of sociodemographic and attitudinal measures are well known. In 1996, additional questions regarding gender were administered to a randomly selected half of GSS's respondents (N = 1,460). As 1996 is the only time the survey has directly asked respondents about feminist self-identification, these data provide a special opportunity to study the variable's sociodemographic and attitudinal correlates. Moreover, unlike most other existing empirical data on feminist self-identification, these data allow us to analyze identification among both men and women.

Although large-scale survey data provide no match for the "thickness" of in-depth interviews, the GSS data enable us to examine whether various proposed dynamics have led to cleavages in self-identification that are sizable enough to be visible in a reasonably sized population sample. Thus, this survey data may help distinguish the major public trends in feminist self-identification from lesser trends and shed light on broader discussions that have rarely used nationally representative data.

FEMINIST SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Respondents were asked "Do you think of yourself as a feminist or not?" As a measure of self-identification, this item might be seen as self-validating because an affirmative response is one instance of the very act in which we are interested (identifying oneself as a feminist). However, we caution against inferring other dimensions of identity (e.g., salience, orientation toward political action) from the measure (Rhodebeck 1996).

In the 1996 survey, 27 percent of women and 12 percent of men answered the item affirmatively. Additionally, 5 percent of male and 5 percent of female respondents answered "don't know" to the item; ancillary multinomial analyses including the "don't know" responses do not alter the substantive conclusions we present below.[2]

POLITICAL GENERATION

Operationalizing the "political generation" of respondents requires provisional definitions of (1) early adulthood, as pertaining to political coming-of-age and (2) the period when second-wave feminism developed and flourished. There seems to be general agreement that early adulthood begins at around age 18, but there is less agreement about when it ends: Ages 24, 25, 27, and 30 are commonly suggested (e.g., Krosnick and Alwin 1989). We use an approximate midpoint, age 27, to represent the end of early adulthood.

Scholars often trace the reemergence of feminism to the publication of Friedan's (1963) *The Feminine Mystique* (Farganis 1994; Ferree and Hess 2000; Rosen 2000). The next few years witnessed some important legislative successes, including the Equal Pay Act (1963), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Executive Order

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[2] Almost all coefficients predicting "don't know" are nonsignificant. Where we find statistically significant results, they are substantively consistent with the logistic regression results we present below: Relative to positively identifying as a feminist, those of the second-wave generation are significantly less likely to say that they don't know if they are a feminist than are those born between 1966 and 1978.

11245 of 1965. Regarding the end of this crucial period, Farganis (1994) identifies 1963 to 1973 as the pivotal "antidiscrimination phase and the liberalism of equity" period of feminism, after which she sees greater disagreement and difficulties. Ferree and Hess (2000) similarly portray the decade following 1963 as a period of great vitality and relatively low factionalism within the feminist movement. Some events—the enactment of Title IX in 1972, Congressional approval of the Equal Rights Amendment, and subsequent ratification by 30 states in 1972 and 1973, and *Roe v. Wade* in 1973—together can be seen not only as a capstone of the feminist movement but also as prompting a considerably intensified antifeminist counterresponse.

Accordingly, we operationalize members of the second-wave generation as those individuals whose coming-of-age (ages 18 to 27) occurred between 1963 and 1973—that is, anyone born between 1936 and 1955. For somewhat more fine-tuned analyses, we also split the "second-wave" generation and the "youngest" generation into decade-long groups, which correspond to ages 18–30, 31–40, 41–50, 51–60, and 61 and over in 1996.

Because one can reasonably disagree with the above definitions, we ran numerous sensitivity analyses that used alternative specifications of generation. Some alternatives offered slightly better fits and others worse, but all corresponded substantively with the patterns of generational differences that we discuss below (analyses available on request). Additionally, we recognize that age and cohort cannot be distinguished in cross-sectional data, and analysts must rely on "side information" from theory or other data sources in trying to make sense of these effects (Converse 1976). We believe that the literature provides more reason to think of differences among these groups as cohort effects rather than as age effects, although we urge further research on this point.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PREDICTORS

In addition to examining the influence of respondent's generation on self-identification, we examine the effects of race/ethnicity (white, black, or nonwhite/nonblack,

where white is the omitted category), educational attainment (dummy variables for high school diploma, college diploma, and graduate or professional degree, where no high school diploma is the omitted category), logged family income, marital status (dummy variables for married, divorced/separated, and widowed, where never married is the omitted category), and whether the respondent is employed or has children.

MEASURES OF IDEOLOGY

Although feminism encompasses numerous ideological elements, the limited set we consider here includes those most commonly used in large-scale survey analyses of feminist attitudes, especially those that have employed the GSS (Davis and Robinson 1991; Plutzer 1988). We examine (1) support for gender equality in employment roles, (2) support for gender equality in family roles, (3) support for affirmative action for women, (4) support for abortion rights, and (5) Democratic political identification. A more detailed description of these items is given in Appendix A.

RESULTS

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PREDICTORS OF FEMINIST SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Table 1 presents results from our sociodemographic model of feminist self-identification. We present results for men and women separately and combined. In addition, we present separate results in which cohort is specified by decades or by generations.

Table 1 indicates that even when other variables are controlled, women are still more likely to think of themselves as feminists than are men. Otherwise, with the important exception of cohort, the effects of other sociodemographic characteristics are weak or not significant. Blacks are neither significantly less nor significantly more likely than whites to identify themselves as feminists.[3] The effects of marital status, parental status, employment status, and in-

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[3] In supplementary analyses of the combined sample, the interaction term between female and black also was not significant.

Table 1. Unstandardized Logistic Coefficients from the Regression of Feminist Identification on Selected Independent Variables: 1996 General Social Survey

Independent Variable	Cohort by Decades			Cohort by Generations		
	Combined	Males	Females	Combined	Males	Females
Decade Cohort Spline						
Late youngest, born 1956–1965 (age 31– 40)	−.023 (.228)	.323 (.460)	−.130 (.268)	—	—	—
Early second wave, born 1946–1955 (age 41– 50)	.648** (.233)	1.217** (.471)	.440 (.274)	—	—	—
Late second wave, born 1936–1945 (age 51– 60)	.596* (.262)	1.119* (.490)	.423 (.321)	—	—	—
Oldest, born before 1936 (age > 60)	.100 (.274)	.609 (.542)	−.061 (.326)	—	—	—
Generation Cohort Spline						
Second wave, born 1936–1955 (age 41–60)	—	—	—	.643** (.170)	.971** (.328)	.511* (.202)
Oldest, born before 1936 (age > 60)	—	—	—	.117 (.242)	.421 (.463)	.012 (.291)
Female	.992** (.155)	—	—	.995** (.155)	—	—
Race/Ethnicity						
Black	.066 (.207)	−.242 (.468)	.131 (.239)	.064 (.207)	−.209 (.465)	.127 (.238)
Other nonwhite	.431 (.304)	−.232 (.634)	.732 (.378)	.437 (.303)	−.259 (.632)	.743* (.376)
Education						
High school graduate	.212 (.224)	.361 (.428)	.168 (.268)	.216 (.224)	.350 (.427)	.171 (.267)
College diploma	.545 (.278)	.003 (.552)	.709* (.335)	.549 (.277)	.009 (.551)	.711* (.333)
Graduate education	.818* (.327)	.955 (.547)	.718 (.416)	.820* (.326)	.989 (.544)	.709 (.414)
Family income (ln)	−.162 (.093)	−.142 (.172)	−.151 (.114)	−.162 (.092)	−.130 (.171)	−.157 (.113)
Currently working	−.131 (.174)	−.009 (.354)	−.153 (.205)	−.131 (.174)	−.003 (.353)	−.154 (.205)
Marital Status						
Married	−.263 (.235)	−.112 (.446)	−.335 (.289)	−.268 (.231)	−.041 (.433)	−.354 (.286)
Divorced	−.222 (.248)	.025 (.502)	−.315 (.290)	−.227 (.242)	.131 (.482)	−.345 (.283)
Widowed	.426 (.305)	.064 (.700)	.496 (.355)	.418 (.301)	.141 (.691)	.471 (.350)
Has children	−.291 (.191)	−.557 (.370)	−.276 (.228)	−.295 (.190)	−.560 (.368)	−.289 (.226)
Constant	−.434	−1.018	0.587	−.442	−1.031	.610
Number of cases	1,368	602	766	1,368	602	766

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Omitted category for decade cohort spline is "early youngest, born 1966–1978"; for generation cohort spline it is "youngest birth year, born 1956–1978"; for race/ethnicity it is "white"; for education it is "less than high school"; for marital status it is "never-married." Regression-based imputation was used for missing values on family income. After imputation for income, the sample size reflects the listwise deletion of a small number of missing cases (6 percent) from the total sample.
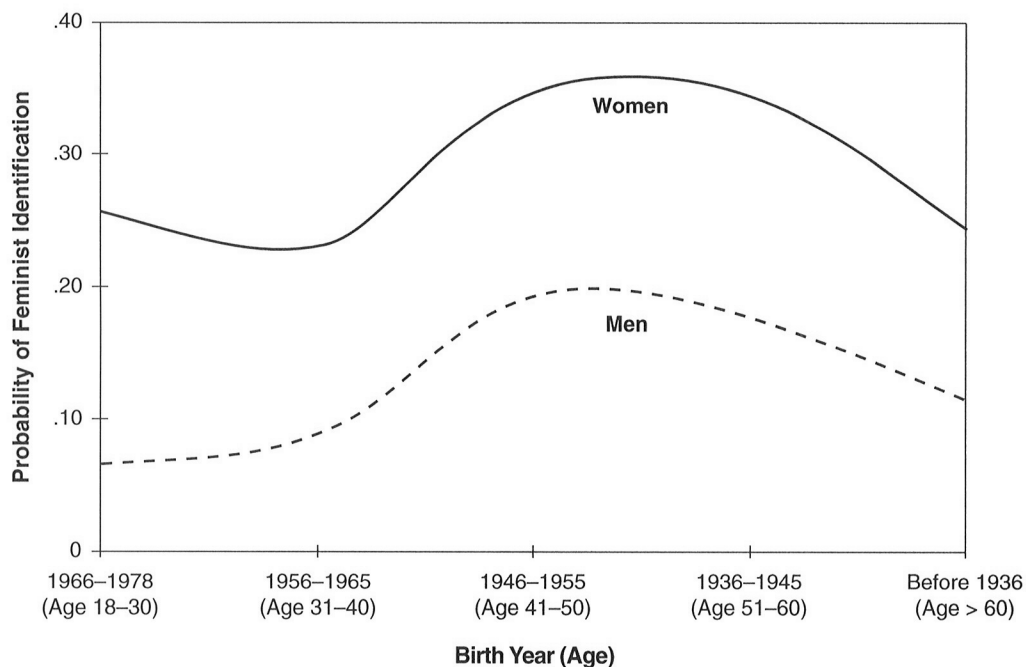
*p < .05   **p < .01 (two-tailed tests)

Figure 1. Cohort, Gender, and the Probability of Feminist Identification: 1996 General Social Survey

come also are minimal.[4] For education, the effect appears sufficiently marginal that a statistically significant difference is observed only when extreme categories are compared (i.e., those with a graduate education are significantly more likely than those without a high school diploma to identify as a feminist).

In contrast, we find significant and non-linear differences by cohort. In the first three models of Table 1, cohort is specified by a series of four dummy variables, with the respondents born most recently (birth years 1966 to 1978; ages 18 to 30 in 1996) serving as the reference group. In the combined sample, we find that respondents

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[4] While supplemental analyses also produced null effects for number of children and spouse's employment, we did find that widowed respondents are significantly more likely to think of themselves as feminists than are married respondents, holding other variables constant ($\chi^2 = 7.32$, $p < .01$). Little attention has been given to the implications of widowhood for feminist self-identification. Unfortunately, there are not enough widows in the GSS sample for this result to be probed more fully, but we call attention to the result as a possible direction for future research.

from the two decades corresponding to the second-wave generation (birth years 1946–1955 and 1936–1945; ages 41–50 and 51–60) are significantly more likely to identify as feminists than are those born before or after them. When the sample is separated by sex, the cohort difference remains significant for men but not for women. However, in the models in which dummy variables delimit generations, with those born most recently (birth years 1956 to 1978) as the reference groups, the difference between the second-wave respondents and younger respondents is also significant for women. Taken together, these results suggest that both male and female respondents whose political coming-of-age coincides with the development of the feminist movement are more likely to think of themselves as feminists than are their older or younger counterparts.

One might be surprised that the magnitude of the generational difference in the logistic regression coefficients is larger for men than for women, albeit nonsignificantly. This apparent difference can be better understood by plotting the predicted probabilities of identifying as a feminist by cohort. The results in Figure 1 are plotted from the models

Table 2. Bivariate Relationships between Gender-Related Attitudes and Feminist Identification: 1996 General Social Survey

Ideological Measure	Mean		Bivariate Logit Coefficient
	Feminists	Nonfeminists	
Support for gender equality in employment roles[a]	.271 (.058)	−.074 (.030)	.358** (.069)
Support for gender equality in familial roles	.813 (.023)	.670 (.014)	.759** (.163)
Support for affirmative action for women[a]	.322 (.055)	−.089 (.031)	.443** (.072)
Support for abortion rights[a]	.236 (.069)	−.064 (.038)	.312** (.087)
Democratic political identification	.459 (.029)	.312 (.014)	.628** (.134)

Note: Standard deviations of means and logit coefficient standard errors appear in parentheses. All differences between the means for feminists and nonfeminists are significant at $p < .01$. Because of the split-ballot format of the GSS, sample sizes vary from 1,362 to 878.

[a] Standardized values.

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ (two-tailed tests)

that were estimated for males and females; we use the cohort spline by decade to provide a more nuanced view of the patterns. One can see that the lines for men and women are similar in shape: The predicted probabilities for members of the second-wave generation are between .13 and .19 higher than for members of either the younger or older generations. With respect to the cohort group born between 1936 and 1955, the larger coefficients for men reflect their lower baseline probability, but the actual effects in terms of the changes in the predicted probabilities are similar for men and women.

COHORT VARIATION IN THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND FEMINIST SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Before we consider the possibility of generational differences in the strength of association between social attitudes and feminist self-identification, we first consider the simple bivariate relationship between each of the five measures of ideology and feminist self-identification. Table 2 presents means for each ideology measure for those who identified as feminists and those who did not. For purposes of comparison with later mod-

els, we also present coefficients from the bivariate logistic regression of feminist self-identification on each ideological measure. As expected, there is a significant difference between means for each measure, and in several cases these differences are large.

Had we left the analysis here, we would have concluded that gender-related social attitudes discriminate feminists from nonfeminists in precisely the way one would expect. However, we are also interested in whether this association varies across generations. Table 3 presents the estimated coefficients for five logistic regression models, each of which includes one ideology measure as a predictor of feminist self-identification.[5] The potential cohort variation in the association between attitudes and feminist self-identification is estimated using a series of interaction terms. In these models, positive coefficients suggest that the effect of the given ideology variable on feminist self-identification is stronger for those cohorts than for respondents born between 1966 and 1978 (the reference category).

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[5] Because separate analyses for men and women do not alter the substantive direction of patterns, we present results only for the full sample.

Table 3.   Unstandardized Coefficients from the Logistic Regression of Feminist Self-Identification on Interactions of Gender-Related Attitudes and Cohort: 1996 General Social Survey

	Attitudinal Measure				
Independent Variable	Support for Gender Equality in Employment Roles	Support for Gender Equality in Family Roles	Support for Affirmative Action for Women	Support for Abortion Rights	Democratic Political Identification
Attitudinal measure	−.003	.478	.284	−.067	−.006
	(.178)	(.403)	(.156)	(.174)	(.319)
Cohort Spline					
Late youngest. born 1956–1965 (age 31–40)	−.149 (.249)	−.200 (.528)	−.078 (.241)	−.205 (.286)	−.082 (.271)
Early second wave, born 1946–1955 (age 41–50)	.513* (.251)	.424 (.481)	.628** (.239)	.210 (.296)	.196 (.292)
Late second wave, born 1936–1945 (age 51–60)	.516 (.276)	−.031 (.579)	.589* (.270)	.225 (.337)	.234 (.327)
Oldest, born before 1936 (age > 60)	.057 (.296)	.134 (.476)	.026 (.288)	−.182 (.345)	−.158 (.327)
Interaction of Attitudinal Measure with:					
Late youngest, born 1956–1965 (age 31–40)	.462 (.243)	.252 (.574)	.329 (.237)	.376 (.265)	.195 (.456)
Early second wave, born 1946–1955 (age 41–50)	.593* (.239)	.357 (.527)	.180 (.214)	.679** (.260)	.987* (.423)
Late second wave, born 1936–1945 (age 51–60)	.544* (.263)	.838 (.628)	−.042 (.242)	.833** (.308)	.817 (.479)
Oldest, born before 1936 (age > 60)	.000 (.243)	.024 (.521)	.241 (.248)	.263 (.276)	.473 (.451)
Number of cases	1,364	1,362	1,350	880	1,368

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Models also include controls for sex, education, income, children, marital status, working status, and race (coefficients not shown).

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ (two-tailed tests)

For three of the five measures, the interaction term varies significantly by cohort: The effects are significantly stronger among members of the second-wave generation (i.e., cohorts labeled "early" or "late" second wave) than they are among more recent and earlier cohorts. Regarding support for gender equality in employment roles, we find statistically significant interactions for the early and late second-wave respondents. The association is also stronger for members of these cohorts than for older respondents ($p < .05$ for both difference of coefficients tests).[6]

Precisely the same patterns are observed regarding attitudes on abortion rights.[7] The patterns for Democratic party affiliation are similar, although slightly weaker than are those for employment equality or abortion rights—only one interaction term (for the

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[6] Although our interpretation of the results follows prior research emphasizing cohort over age, these interactions may instead reflect that those

between age 41 and age 60 have had more work experience than those who are younger, and are more likely to have spent most of their adult lives in the labor force than those who are older. Accordingly, for young respondents and those over age 60, beliefs about gender equality in employment may not translate into feminist identification because these beliefs are not sufficiently salient.

[7] The smaller sample for models of abortion rights is a result of the particular split-ballot implementation of the 1996 GSS.

younger members of the second-wave generation) is significant. However, when the model is specified in terms of generational groups, then the difference between the second-wave generation and younger generation is significant ($p < .05$).[8]

As before, the meaning of these differences is made clearer by examining how the predicted probabilities vary by cohort. Figure 2 displays the predicted probabilities of identifying as a feminist for different generations and for different values of the three measures considered so far: (a) support for equal employment opportunities, (b) support for legal abortion, (c) Democratic Party identification. Note that a similar "bubble" pattern is observed in all three instances. For the second-wave generation, responses to these three items distinguish feminists from nonfeminists. In the case of support for gender equality in employment, second-wave respondents two standard deviations above the mean level of support have about a .5 probability of self-identifying as feminists, while those at the sample mean on this ideology measure have only a .25 probability of doing so. Meanwhile, for respondents born between 1966 and 1978 or those born in 1935 or earlier, the difference in the probability of identifying as a feminist associated with minimum and maximum values of the gender equality measure is negligible. Put another way, for these younger or older GSS respondents, *knowing their attitudes about gender equality in employment does virtually nothing to improve one's ability to predict their response to the feminist identification item.*

Similar interpretations can be provided for the "bubble" effects observed for support for abortion rights and Democratic party identification. For the other two attitudinal measures that we examined, we observed no significant differences for the second-wave respondents versus younger or older respondents. For one of these measures, gender

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[8] Supplementary analyses examining correlations among the five ideology measures indicate greater consistency of attitudes for the second-wave generation. In 9 of the 10 correlations, the relationship is greater for the second-wave generation than for older or younger respondents.
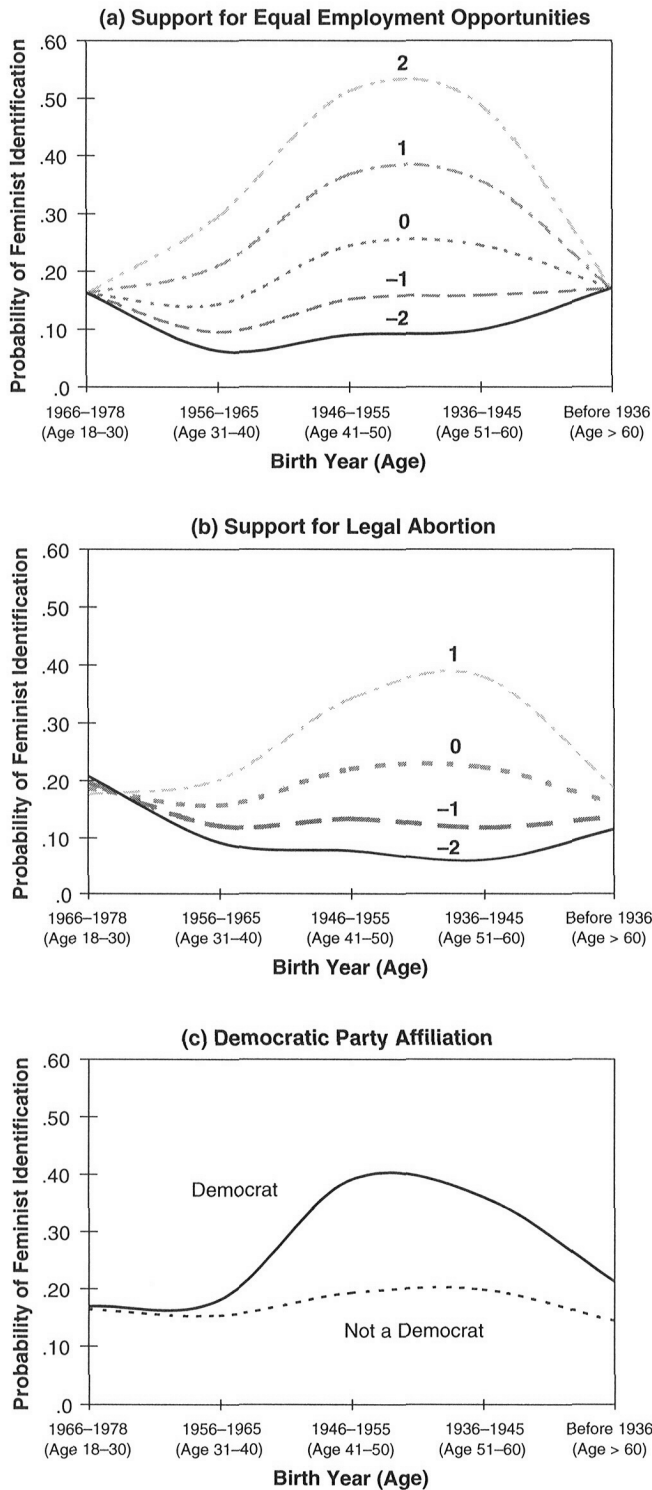
equality in familial roles, the basic pattern among the coefficients is consistent with the above results, although the differences are not significant.

In sum, the data reveal significant generational differences in the association between ideology and feminist self-identification, but the results are not observed across all attitudinal measures we consider. Even so, that a highly similar pattern was observed for three different measures suggests that a satisfying explanation of generational differences in feminist self-identification must account not only for the higher levels of self-identification among second-wave respondents but also for the stronger association between some ideological measures and a feminist identity among these respondents.

DISCUSSION

To date, the study of feminist self-identification and its ideological correlates has been an area in which small-scale and largely qualitative research has outstripped other methodologies. Our use of large-scale and representative survey data provides the potential to distinguish what might be major processes operating in a representative cross-section of the American population from processes that might be weaker and more idiosyncratic.

Although we have focused mainly on political generation, some of the null results we observed warrant mention because they speak directly to issues often raised in the literature on feminist self-identification. Contrary to some authors' speculations, we find nonsignificant or weak relationships between feminist identification and most sociodemographic factors, including marital status, parental status, and employment status, as well as education and race. The absence of a significant difference between black and white respondents suggests either that race has little influence on feminist self-identification or that various influences operate in ways that ultimately cancel each other out. Moreover, for some of the other nonsignificant characteristics (e.g., having children), the direction of the effects is at least in the predicted direction, suggesting

(a) Support for Equal Employment Opportunities

(b) Support for Legal Abortion

(c) Democratic Party Affiliation

Figure 2. Cohort, Attitudes, and Feminist Self-Identification: 1996 General Social Survey

Note: Figures 2a and 2b are indexed by standard deviations (e.g., 1 = one positive standard deviation from the mean; 0 = mean). Each line corresponds to the predicted probabilities for the scale value across cohorts. For all predicted probabilities, values not included in the interaction terms or their lower-order coefficients are set to sample means. All predictions are based on the models presented in Table 3.

perhaps that the present sample is not large enough to produce significant results.

We also find that women are more than twice as likely as men to identify as feminists. This finding is, in itself, not surprising. Importantly, however, our finding that men and women differ little in the predictors of feminist identification—including the pattern of cohort differences we observe—challenges any explanation of trends in feminist self-identification that focuses on dynamics confined mainly or exclusively to women (e.g., Armstrong 2002; Ferree and Hess 2000).

Regarding generation, we find significant differences that are broadly consistent with what some authors have proposed. Members of the second-wave generation were more likely to self-identify as feminists than were either younger or older respondents. We also find that three distinct measures of ideology associated with the feminist movement are significantly predictive of self-identification *only* for members of this generation.

Given that considerations of the infrequency of feminist self-identification have often centered on the negative portrayal of feminism by its opponents, our results might be seen as implying that the negative depictions have "won out" over the more positive images offered by feminism's supporters. However, if negative portrayals of feminism alone were enough to explain trends in feminist self-identification, then what we would expect is not just declining rates of self-identification—we would also expect such identification to be associated with more extreme attitudes. Ideological measures would still differentiate self-identified feminists from others, even as the overall number of feminists declined. Instead, however, the relationship between attitudes and feminist self-identification among members of the younger generation practically disappears for three of our five ideological measures.

What might generate such results? One possibility is that different issues distinguish younger feminists and nonfeminists than those issues examined in the GSS. If one imagines that feminist identity has always included an oppositional component, then perhaps as popular support for some of the traditional equity issues of feminism has increased (Brooks and Bolzendahl 2002), the areas that provide the grounds of political identity formation have shifted away from those issues that provide the most straightforward measures of a feminist ideology. If this is correct, we still would have expected a change in which feminist self-identification was associated with more extreme attitudes on the issues that we did examine, rather than their dramatic attenuation. Nonetheless, examination of attitudes other than those available for our analyses may reveal issues that differentiate feminists and nonfeminists more strongly among younger women.[9]

Instead, we think that the decreased association between holding a feminist ideology and feminist identification among the younger generation might reflect the increased heterogeneity found in public conceptions of feminism among more recent cohorts relative to the more united front once apparent in second-wave feminism (Armstrong 2002; Lorber 2001). Although scholars have debated the dominant public image of feminism (e.g., liberal or radical), our results may be more consistent with the possibility that there is *no* such dominant conception any longer. Rather, the outcome of the various contestations regarding the meaning of feminism may be a *decreasing consensus* among younger cohorts about what identifying as a feminist implies. In other words, one indication of the dissipation of the shared meaning of a social identity would be a cross-generational attenuation of the correlation between the label of "feminist" and the ideological beliefs that have been seen as related to it. Consistent with this, our results indicate that some aspects of ideology that have long been central to feminism's agenda and to the sociological study of the movement—and clearly

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[9] Comments from reviewers led us to reexamine the GSS data more broadly with this possibility in mind. We considered, for example, attitudes toward homosexuality as a potential new and coherent ideological basis for cleavages in self-identification, but neither this nor any other variable we examined evinced the kind of reversal of the bubble pattern that would be consistent with this possibility.

are predictive of identification among the second-wave generation—are not predictive of a feminist self-identification among the younger generation. To be sure, more research using representative samples is needed to test the conjecture that coherence regarding the meaning of "feminist" may be decreasing among cohorts since the second wave, rather than increasing as others have asserted.

From these results, it might be tempting to assume that the feminist identity per se no longer matters for the pursuit of the goals that have been traditionally associated with feminism. In contrast to those commentators who fear for the future of the women's movement because of a waning feminist identification, one might note that many of the ideologies associated with feminism have become relatively commonplace and speak to the success of feminism in attaining much broader acceptance of gender equality. Acceptance of core ideological beliefs is obviously an achievement, even if it is not accompanied by acceptance of the identity that has been associated with those beliefs. That said, a main reason that scholars of social movements have been interested in identity—to the point of arguing that the widespread adoption of a social identity can be understood as a measure of success (e.g., Polletta and Jasper 2001)—is that identities are considered important insofar as they promote a sustained commitment to a movement among actors with occasionally divergent interests (Whittier 1997). The expectation, therefore, would be that those who endorse the identity might be expected to do more to promote organized political behavior consistent with the social movement than would those who adopt the movement's precepts but eschew the identity. In the case of feminism, while feminist consciousness has been shown to be associated with political behavior, a vital question that we raise is whether and how an identity like "feminist" has consequences for behavior net of attitudes (see Conover 1988).

Once again, the questions at hand are of broader consequence than for just feminism. Instead, they speak to the public fates of political identities more generally, especially when these identities become objects of contestation among self-identified members of a social movement and those who would attach pejorative connotations to it. When many different people employ the same identity label in many different ways and for many different purposes, the outcome sometimes might be that one side prevails with a definition that dominates public conceptions, perhaps even one that sullies the identity to a point where only people with relatively extreme attitudes still embrace it. Or perhaps the identity maintains a sufficiently coherent meaning that knowledge of identification or nonidentification has plain and stable implications for predicting other beliefs or affiliations. What the example of the feminist identity introduces, however, is the possibility that sometimes contestations over identities lead to such heterogeneity in public definitions that the relationship between identity and ideology declines in new cohorts.

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APPENDIX A

Definition and Coding for Measures of Gender-Related Attitudes: 1996 General Social Survey

SUPPORT FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN EMPLOYMENT ROLES

This measure was standardized from the sum of responses to items on a four-point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree": (1) "It is more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself;" (2) "A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works;" (3) "It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family;" and (4) "A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work" (reverse coded). (Alpha = .75.)

SUPPORT FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN FAMILIAL ROLES

The respondent was given two choices for the question, "Which type of relationship would you prefer?: A relationship where the man has the main responsibility for providing the household income and the woman has the main responsibility for taking care of the home and family" was coded 0; "A relationship where the man and woman equally share responsibility for providing the household income and taking care of the home and family" was coded 1.

SUPPORT FOR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION FOR WOMEN

Responses to the item, "Because of past discrimination, employers should make special efforts to hire and promote qualified women," were standardized on a five-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

SUPPORT FOR ABORTION RIGHTS

This measure was standardized from the sum of responses to questions regarding whether abortion should be legally permitted in the following circumstances: (1) "if there is a strong chance of a serious defect in the baby"; (2) "if she is married and does not want any more children"; (3) "if the woman's own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy"; (4) "if the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children"; (5) "if she became pregnant as a result of rape"; (6) "if she is not married and does not want to marry the man"; (7) "if the woman wants it for any reason." (Alpha = .88.)

DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL IDENTIFICATION

This variable was coded as 1 if respondents reported that they think of themselves as a Democrat or as leaning toward Democrat; 0 otherwise.

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