

## Gender Equality in the Public Mind

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**ABSTRACT.** Most conceptual research on equality revolves around theoretical texts or legal theory and decisions, thus reflecting the thought of legal, political, or cultural elites. But in a democratic polity, we must attend to the political thought not just of politicians and academics, but ordinary citizens as well. In terms of its political significance, "What does equality mean" requires answering the question: what does equality mean *to the mass public*? We thus probe the meanings of "gender equality" in the public mind, using a unique set of questions included in the National Election Studies 1991 Pilot Study, and contextualized within the literatures of feminist and legal theory and political psychology and public opinion. Most importantly, we distinguish among "empirical" and "normative" equality and discontent and among the domains of the polity, economy, and family; feature the problem of "equality" versus "sameness"; and consider the relationship of these orientations to people's own structural circumstances and their other policy and political attitudes. Among the key findings, empirical and normative equality and discontent are functionally different and grounded differently in people's everyday experiences; they distinguish among different domains of life and, especially, between public and private; and there are generational differences in the relationship of "equality" to "sameness." We discuss substantive and methodological implications. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>>]

Equality has posed a persistent dilemma in the history of feminist theory. As historian Nancy Cott (1987) has explained: if we argue that women and men are equal, do we imply they are also the same? If their social and economic situations differ, can we treat women and men differently but equally—or even equitably—under the law? In explicating a theory of gender equality, what are and should be the interrelationships of equality across different domains of life such as the family, economy, and politics? To what degree, for example, is inequality within the family causally related to inequality in either the economy or politics? Or can gender equality exist in politics if it is absent in other realms? What, after all, do we mean by “equality?”

The meaning of *equality*, and the practices that concept implies, have posed conceptual, theoretical, and policy problems throughout the course of the liberal democratic tradition, including its feminist strands. Certainly, we now recognize that the claim of equality embodied in the Declaration of Independence has served as a rhetorical leitmotif for a political system that justified slavery, attempted genocide against American Indians, and long perpetuated racial, ethnic, and gender exclusions through its public policies. History makes clear that many of these seeming contradictions were neither accidents nor mistakes, nor even the result of cynically ignoring the contradictions between theory and practice. Rather, *equality*, like other core political concepts, has many meanings no depending on the legal and theoretical context. Indeed, Douglas Rae and his colleagues (Rae et al. 1981) have identified over one hundred distinct and often, at least partly, mutually exclusive interpretations of equality.

Most conceptual research on equality revolves around theoretical texts or legal theory and decisions, reflecting the thought and analysis of legal, political, or cultural elites. But in a democratic polity, in order to understand what equality means in a practical sense, we must attend to the political thought not just of judges, legal scholars, and political theorists, but ordinary citizens as well. In terms of its actual political significance, “What does equality mean” requires an answer to the question, what does equality mean *to the mass public*?

A long program of public opinion research suggests that only a limited portion of the mass public is attentive enough to have clear, stable views, let alone consistent, workable definitions of gender equality (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992). Indeed, debates about “symbolic racism” demonstrate that the mass public is far from certain and

straightforward in its thinking about some of the thornier and most discussed equality issues (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears 1988; Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Sniderman and Carmines 1997). But inconsistent or unstable attitudes regarding gender equality are not necessarily symptoms of a lack of ideas. People often experience ambivalence because of conflicts among their important values, and citizens with opposing views of politics use concepts and values differently in ways that can be affected by context and issue framing (Alvarez and Brehm 1995; Feldman and Zaller 1992; Hochschild 1981; Zaller and Feldman 1992). Thus, equality is such an important valence term, so tied to pressing issues hotly debated in the media and face-to-face in places such as parent-teacher organizations, that there is substantial reason to probe its meaning in the mass public, however messy those meanings might be.

Accordingly, we use survey data to investigate public ideas about gender equality in light of debates within the literature on feminist and legal theories of gender equality and related public policy debates. We begin with a summary of some views of legal and feminist theorists, groups who have tended to frame the debate, then turn to an analysis of views of the public based on analysis of data from the 1991 NES Pilot Study. The point there is not to "explain" attitudes toward equality in the conventional sense of accounting for variance. This is an important, but different, problem. Rather, we use these data to probe the meaning of gender equality in the "public mind"; by contextualizing it in a discussion of the views of theorists and jurists, we can see the degree to which public thinking reflects arguments made by these cultural elites. We conclude with a discussion of implications for public policy and social change.

### ***EQUALITY AND DIFFERENCE IN LEGAL AND FEMINIST THEORY***

In the United States, the legal response to gender inequalities, like the response to race inequalities, has historically turned on issues of sameness and difference (Goldstein 1992; Mezey 1992; Rhode 1989). The law has generally followed the "difference approach" in which equality means treating likes alike and unlikes unlike. Unacceptable inequalities occur, from this legal point of view, when differences in

treatment do not clearly spring from differences in situation that justify the treatment.

Translated from the abstract into law, the "difference approach" has meant that the interpretation of sex discrimination, and thus gender equality, has hinged on how gender differences are understood. That understanding has changed dramatically over the course of our history. Throughout most of U.S. history, courts assumed that women and men were different and, therefore, could be treated differently (usually to the detriment of women) regardless of the effects. The Supreme Court case *Muller v. Oregon* (1908) initiated a period in which courts also accepted special "protections" for women under certain circumstances. Such protective labor legislation was hotly debated within the women's movement, largely because of disagreements over concepts of applications of equality and difference.

These disagreements were reflected most famously in the rift between the National Woman's Party (NWP) and the National League of Women Voters (NLWV) (Cott 1987). The NWP fought for an "equal rights" amendment to the U.S. Constitution and against protective labor legislation on the grounds that the latter would enshrine in law the idea of gender inequality. The NLWV, in contrast, originally advocated protective labor legislation (and long opposed an equal rights amendment) because its leaders believed that given the current reality of gender inequality, only *different* treatment could create equality. Treating men and women the same, they thought, would perpetuate and even magnify gender inequality given their original unequal positions. This was only one of the earlier incarnations of a long stream of feminist debates on the theory and practice of difference (including "special benefits" questions) and equality (Cott 1987; Gatens 1992; Gordon 1991; Phelan 1991; Phillips 1993; Rhode 1991; Sarvasy 1992; Young 1990).

The 1970s ushered in a new era in Supreme Court decision making and feminism. Specifically, gender neutrality became the Court's preferred path to equality beginning in approximately 1971, when both the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Title VII) and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment were first interpreted by the Supreme Court to fight gender discrimination.<sup>1</sup> Since then, the contemporary legal context has stressed abstract or procedural equality (e.g., equality of opportunity): women are equal to men in the sense that they are treated the same in the face of the law. American feminists simulta-

neously coalesced around the struggle for the Equal Rights Amendment and the idea of equality before the law embodied within it. Thus for a moment, the Supreme Court and feminists seemed attuned to one another. While feminists campaigned for gender-blind equal rights, the Supreme Court kept pace by moving toward a stricter standard of scrutiny in sex discrimination cases, a change some legal experts suggested would have much the same effect as the proposed amendment. The moment of harmony was to be short-lived.

By the 1980s, equality before the law was becoming a reality, and the reality was a bitter disappointment to many feminists. The limitations of gender-neutral law and policy were increasingly clear: women's legal rights could not ensure equal access, as hoped, because of extant social and economic differences and inequalities. Women and men are not similarly situated with respect to pregnancy and cultural patterns of child rearing, divisions of labor within and outside the family, or the cultural value assigned to their work. Gender differences in "private" life spillover into "public life," deeply influencing the possibility of equality in the economy and polity. On the policy front, a battle reminiscent of the 1920's debates revolved around *California Federal S. & L. Assn. v. Guerra* (1987), a case in which feminists disagreed over whether equality was best pursued by guaranteeing women the distinct benefit of maternity leave. Parallel arguments emerged over proposals for gender-blind military conscription. Difference still exists and still matters.

Since the 1980s, in a contested move, some theorists have refashioned feminist theory to valorize difference and to justify a politics of difference that abandons gender neutrality as the path to equality (Young 1990; for a brief review, see Okin 1991). Some argue that the basic opposition of equality and difference is fundamentally flawed: equality is not secured by eliminating difference, and difference does not preclude the possibility of equality. Instead, the real problem for equality is not difference, but domination and hierarchy. The solution, therefore, is not the elimination of difference, but the elimination of domination (see Kymlicka 1990; MacKinnon 1989, 1991). According to this "dominance approach," then, procedural equality is not nearly enough. The goal must be substantive equality; women and men must have equal power in determining the course of their lives.

But the goal is a difficult one. Domination is mediated by the control of social goods, which varies between domains of life (Walzer

1983). Ideally, different domains would be autonomous in their distribution of goods thus preventing domination in one domain from "contaminating" others, but this is seldom the case in reality (Walzer 1983). Feminist theorists note that this fact often is overlooked in other theories of equality, justice and rights, in that they focus narrowly on the public domains of life, ignoring the private world, thus effectively tolerating continuing domination of women by men. Patricia Williams (1991) makes this point in her writing on gender, race, and law by underscoring the significance of legal fictions and the difference between what happens inside and outside the "four corners" of a legal contract. Susan Okin (1989), among others, has argued persuasively that ubiquitous gender inequality in the family precludes the possibility of gender equality in the labor market and politics, especially because the institutions of politics and the market have been designed by and in the image of men who traditionally leave the day-to-day responsibility for private life and the family to others. Virginia Sapiro (1993) charges that this decoupling of the public and private allows democratic theory to tolerate substantial gender-based violence against women.

Most members of the public, of course, are not attentive to the nuances of these debates. Indeed, mass-market journalists periodically point out how distant many people feel from the world of social movements—including the women's movement—that claim to represent them.<sup>2</sup> But social movement leaders frame public debate, providing key terms and simplifying complicated issues for the public. As political leaders and theorists debate gender equality, they create an *ambiguous context* offering alternative plausible directions to the American public who might be attentive and sympathetic to the demand for gender equality in the first place. Even apart from the oft-repeated conclusion in public opinion research that the mass public, as a whole, has an often vague, uninformed, and elementary grasp on key political issues, if it takes its cues at all from these intellectual, media, and political elites, it should not be unitary and clear in its view of "what goes with what" in the domain of equality. This state of affairs creates the potential for genuine democratic debate, but it also leaves us wondering what the public really thinks about gender equality.

#### ***PUBLIC IDEA OF EQUALITY***

Survey researchers typically analyze public opinion on gender equality, especially related policy issues, as though the meaning of

equality were unproblematic. In contrast, the National Election Studies (NES) 1991 Pilot Study, administered to a subset of 1990 National Election Study respondents, contains a wealth of new instrumentation designed to measure various gender-relevant concepts (Conover and Sapiro 1992).<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the gender questions were asked of only a third of Pilot Study respondents, making available only 476 respondents for analysis. Despite the relatively small sample size, these data afford an unparalleled opportunity to explore how Americans think about gender equality.

### *Measuring Gender Equality*

At least three dimensions of gender equality must be distinguished in order to devise theoretically adequate and contextually sensitive measures. First, equality can be conceptualized both in *normative* and *empirical* terms: that is, respectively, as a value or prescriptive principle and as perceptions of whether and to what degree equality actually exists.<sup>4</sup> Second, gender equality can be conceived of at either a *general* or *domain-specific* level. People can respond to a global concept of equality (Are men and women equal?) or they can make practical sense of the concept within specific domains such as the family or politics. And finally, as theorists and jurists have suggested, gender equality can be thought of in either *procedural* or *substantive* terms, often referred to as equality of opportunity and results. Let us discuss the measures and analytical strategy in light of these conceptual distinctions.

The normative-empirical distinction generally receives virtually no attention in survey research. Whether individuals "favor" gender equality (a normative principle or value) does not tell us whether they believe that equality now exists (a perception) or even whether they endorse specific programs for achieving equality (policy preferences). The relationships among normative principles, perceptions, and policy preferences is complicated. The long train of public opinion research suggests considerable slippage between normative principles and behavior, a slippage that might be explained in part by differences in perceptions of the state of the world. We cannot accurately infer people's policy preferences, or especially behavior, from their statements of principles. The nature of the relationship between normative principles and perceptions of the world is an empirical question. Therefore, we need measures of both normative and empirical equality.

The second distinction, between general and domain-specific measures of gender equality, is also critical. Conventional practice has focused on general measures, best exemplified by the standard NES "equal roles" question, asking whether women should have an equal role in "business, industry, and government" or whether they think a "woman's place is in the home," a question that presumably covers the gamut of life domains. But theory suggests that we should expect gender equality to differ from one domain to another: people may desire greater gender equality in one domain than another, and the relationships between gender equality in different domains might vary. Therefore, our measures should allow exploring gender equality in domain specific terms.

A third critical distinction in assessing gender equality is between equality of opportunity and equality of results. The former, procedural equality, is generally regarded as a more central and widely held—even consensual—tenet of liberal democracy within the American legal and political culture (Ellis 1992; Verba and Orren 1985), one embodied in the "difference approach" discussed above. But substantive equality poses the more difficult and controversial test for American democracy, and it may be essential to alter fundamentally the status of women in society. For these reasons, we focus on substantive, rather than procedural, equality.

The Pilot Study included a battery of six questions tapping normative and empirical gender equality in the three life domains that are arguably the most relevant to achieving gender equality in the United States today and that correspond to the major foci of domestic policy proposals: government and politics, business and industry, and the family. Together, these domains can be used to delineate a conceptual continuum ranging from the "most public" to the "most private," an important point given the centrality of discussions of public and private in theoretical discussions of gender-based dominance. These questions are unique in that they are not framed in terms of roles, so often the case in gender studies, but are couched, instead, in terms of power and influence. The difference is significant; it is, in fact, difficult to know exactly what people mean when they say women and men do or do not have *equal roles* in one or another domain.<sup>5</sup> Do they mean equally valued? Or equally powerful? Or do they really mean the *same* roles? These understandings are theoretically quite different. The advantage of referring to power and influence rather than roles as



the substantive frame is that it allows us to explore empirically the "dominance approach" to gender equality. Moreover, it enables us to focus on understanding public "political theories" of gender and gender equality.

Thus, three variables measure *normative equality*:<sup>6</sup> the degree to which respondents feel strongly that the power and influence of women and men in the domains of government and politics, business and industry, and the family *should* be equal. Specifically, the questions were framed in the following fashion and repeated for the other two domains:

People also differ about how much power and influence they think women *ought* to have compared to men. Thinking about how you would like things to be in [government and politics] today, do you think men should have more power and influence, *OR* that men and women should have equal power and influence, *OR* that women should have more power and influence."

Similarly, three variables tap *empirical equality*: assessments of whether respondents see these three domains as male dominated, equal, or female dominated. The empirical equality questions were framed as follows and repeated for the two other domains:

People have different opinions about how much power and influence women have in society compared to men. Thinking about the actual situation of men and women in [government and politics] today, do you think men have more power and influence, or that men and women have equal power and influence, or that women have more power and influence?

Finally, three variables indicate the individual-level disparity between normative and empirical equality, here labeled DISCONTENT. These three measures gauge indirectly whether respondents thought women had too much power, men and women had relatively equal power, or men had too much power in each of the three domains.<sup>7</sup> High scores on the discontent measures indicate greater degrees of excessive male dominance.

### *Basic Distributions*

Our overall strategy is to explore the distinctions and relationships among empirical and normative equality and the disparity between the

two as applied to the three domains of government and politics, business and industry, and the family. We begin our examination of the public's attitudes towards gender equality by focusing on their perceptions of reality.

The vast majority of citizens continue to believe that men are more powerful than women in the public arenas of government and the economy; indeed, only 21% perceive gender equality in politics, and a mere 16% find it in the realm of business and industry (see Table 1). Perceptions about the distribution of power in the family, traditionally considered the women's sphere of influence, are different and much more divided. Almost half perceive gender equality in the family; the rest are divided three to two over whether men or women hold the balance of power. Given that less than a third of the public sees the family as a male-dominated arena, the public appears much more positive in its appraisal of gender equality within the family than are most feminist theorists.

Feminist theorists might be disappointed by the extent to which the public perceives gender equality in these three domains as distinct. There is only a moderate relationship between perceptions of equality in government and the economy ( $r = .28, p < .00$ ), often incorrectly lumped together indistinguishably as part of the "public realm," and no link between assessments of equality in the family and those of equality in the economy and government ( $r = .05$  for both, *n.s.*). Thus while theorists decry the sharp distinctions often made between the "public" and the "private," in the public mind the world is marked by a "public-private" distinction: the presence or absence of gender inequality in the family is unrelated to their overwhelming perception of gender inequality in the other domains.

Turning from perceptions to preferences, while Americans tend to be supportive of equality of opportunity, they are more skeptical about pursuing equality of results (see Verba and Orren 1985; also see Ellis 1992). Despite this, most Americans claim a commitment to substantive gender equality in all three domains, at least as expressed in these relatively abstract terms (see Table 1). Among those citizens who do not support the ideal of equality, however, virtually all would prefer a world in which men have more power and influence. Moreover, vestiges of a "separate spheres" philosophy emerge in the greater support for gender equality in the family than in the more public and traditionally male realms of the economy and government.

TABLE 1. Gender Equality: Distribution of Empirical and Normative Judgments

	DOMAIN		
	GOVERNMENT	ECONOMY	FAMILY
EMPIRICAL: Dominated by:			
Women	2.6	0.9	21.6
Equal	20.7	15.6	46.7
Men	76.7	83.5	31.8
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.1
(N)	(464)	(461)	(450)
NORMATIVE: Should be dominated by:			
Women	2.4	1.1	1.7
Equal	77.6	78.3	85.5
Men	20.0	20.7	12.7
Total%	100.0	100.0	99.9
(N)	(459)	(460)	(463)
DISCONTENT: Who has too much power:			
-2 Women	0.4	0.0	3.1
-1	7.0	3.1	20.8
0 Neither	30.1	31.8	50.7
1	60.7	64.3	25.0
2 Men	1.7	0.9	0.4
Total %	99.9	100.1	100.0
(N)	(458)	(456)	(448)

Source: Here and in subsequent tables, all data are from the 1991 NES Pilot Study.

We noted above that *perceptions* of gender equality are distinct across domains. In contrast, *preferences* are somewhat more connected from one domain to another. Attitudes toward equality in government and business are more strongly correlated with one another ( $r = .43$ ) than they are with preferences for gender equality in the family ( $r = .32$  and  $.29$

respectively). It is clear that while preference for equality are related across domains, these measures are not substitutes for each other.

We cannot infer from either perceptions or principles alone whether individuals would like to see change in the current distribution of power and influence.<sup>8</sup> One person wants equality and believes we have it now, another wants equality and thinks we have a long way to go. Because we have measures of both perceptions and preferences, we can determine how well people think their normative preferences are matched by reality. This disparity between people's "real" and "ideal" indicates their degree of dissatisfaction or discontent.

The pattern of responses for discontent varies across domains, once again suggesting the prevalence of the "public-private" split in the minds of the public (see Table 1). For politics and the economy, only about 30% of citizens report that their perceptions of empirical reality match their normative preferences; virtually all of the rest believe that men have too much power and influence in those arenas. Moreover, the discontent measures regarding politics and the economy are closely correlated ( $r = .47$ ).

Once again, attitudes toward the domain of the family are different: the public is both more satisfied with the distribution of power in the family and more divided about it. About half the population is content with the distribution of familial power and the rest are fairly evenly divided between those who think women have too much power and those who think men have too much power. Thus public policies that could alter the distribution of power within the family would present lawmakers with a quandary: half of the public is satisfied with the status quo and the remainder is split in terms of the direction in which change should be sought. Moreover, if people saw power within the family as being connected to the distribution of power in other domains—as many feminists argue it surely is—this could provide a rationale for change within the family. But, in fact, the discontent measure for the family is only modestly correlated with comparable measures in government ( $r = .19$ ) and the economy ( $r = .15$ ).

### *LIFE STRUCTURE AND GENDER EQUALITY*

People's perceptions of the degree of gender equality in society should be related to their own life situation. Although there is no reason to believe that people's perceptions are strongly bound by their

current specific experiences, it is reasonable to expect that whether one is male or female, older or younger, employed or in the work force, or has young children might have an impact on the degree to which one perceives one's society as gender egalitarian. Moreover, we hypothesize that the structural bases of perceptions of equality should vary across domains. For example, it seems plausible that perceptions of gender equality in the family—or at least women's perceptions of gender equality in the family—should depend more on whether one has little children, thus placing one clearly in the midst of a world of gender divisions of labor, than should perceptions of equality in politics.

Our purpose here is *not* to develop a theoretical and empirical model explaining perceptions of or attitudes toward gender equality. That is a much more involved question than we can handle here, requiring attention to earlier political socialization and a wider range of predictors than we have available. What follows, then, is analysis that is limited to answering these questions: To what degree does knowing people's position in the social structure alone help us predict their views of gender equality? Are the structural foundations of perceptions of gender equality in different domains the same or different? If they are different, these results have implications for the choices of measures of public opinion on gender and gender equality scholars make.

### *Measuring Life Situations*

We consider three sets of predictor variables tapping, respectively, social position, family situation, and interaction with major socio-cultural institutions. Gender, race, education, and generation are each important variables indicating people's positions in the social structure. Although past evidence is mixed with respect to uncovering a relationship between gender and race on the one hand and gender attitudes and orientations on the other, there is reason to expect that women, African Americans, younger people, and more educated people should be especially sensitive and antipathetic to gender inequality.

GENDER and RACE are measured as dummy variables, coded with "1" equaling, respectively, women and African Americans.<sup>9</sup> EDUCATION is coded so that high scores equal higher levels of education. GENERATION recodes age to place respondents into the different historical eras in which they received their basic socialization

and enculturation.<sup>10</sup> It distinguishes between people who reached age 16, or mid-adolescence, before 1966 when the contemporary women's movement began (coded "0"), and those who did so after 1966, and thus, during the era of the new women's movement (coded "1").

People's family situations may be both partly the *result* of their gender ideology and may, in turn, structure how they perceive and react to the gender structure of society.<sup>11</sup> Two variables deal with the composition and structure of the respondents' immediate family situation. **TRAD. FAMILY** concerns marriage and roughly taps the gender division of labor within marriage. It details whether respondents (1) are not married, (2) are in a marriage in which the wife is in the labor market, or (3) are in a marriage in which the wife is a homemaker; thus high scores on the measure indicate more traditional family structures. **AGE CHILD** indicates whether the respondent (1) has no children under the age of 18, (2) has at least one child, but only of school age (6-17), or (3) has at least one child, at least one of which is less than the age of 6. High scores indicate the presence of younger children, and thus a potentially greater child care burden.

The final set of structural variables taps interaction with major social institutions that shape socio-cultural knowledge and values. Religion serves as one of the primary socio-cultural institutions that inculcates gender norms; many denominations have very specific rules governing the performance or "doing" of gender (West and Zimmerman 1987) in many domains of life. **RELIGIOSITY** measures how actively involved respondents are in religion, based on how often they prayed, read the Bible, and attended religious services; high scores indicate greater religious involvement.<sup>12</sup> Finally, **MEDIA** measures the frequency with which respondents watched television and read newspaper, with high scores indicating greater media usage.

The empirical analysis is designed to reflect our question of the degree to which contemporary analysis by feminist theorists and activists is echoed in the mass public. Feminist theorists and activists continue to argue that the polity, economy, and family are still male dominated, thus **EMPIRICAL EQUALITY** is scored to indicate whether respondents believe each domain is male dominated ("1") or not ("0"). **NORMATIVE EQUALITY** indicates whether respondents have a strong preference for equality ("3"), have a weak preference for equality ("2"), have a weak preference for inequality ("1"), or

strongly prefer the domain to be either male- or female-dominated ("0").

Because the dependent variables have limited outcomes, ordinary least squares is not an appropriate model for analysis. For the dichotomous dependent variable (EMPIRICAL EQUALITY), we use a probit model; for the other dependent variables we use an ordered probit model. Neither the probit nor the ordered probit model imposes linear effects as does the OLS model. Instead, the magnitude of the effect of any independent variable on the outcome depends on the level of all other independent variables. The coefficients from these models, thus, cannot be interpreted as the size of change in the dependent variables, given a unit change in the independent variable. Still, the coefficients are interpreted identically to OLS estimates as to direction and significance. The sign of the coefficient indicates whether an increase in the independent variable produces an increase or decrease in the outcome. A significant coefficient indicates that it would be unlikely to find an estimate this far from zero if there was no real effect (Long 1997).

### *The Structural Foundations of Gender Equality*

What are the structural foundations of *perceptions* of gender equality? Gender itself is correlated only with perceptions of male domination in business and industry, and only slightly at that ( $r = -.10$ ,  $p < .04$ ). It makes no difference for perceptions of male domination in government or the family. In order to assess the structural conditions for perceptions of male dominance further, we used ordered probit analysis, controlling for gender, allowing us to compare the impact of structural conditions across domains and across gender, as indicated in Table 2.

The results offer three conclusions. First, an individual's current position in the social structure does little, overall, to distinguish his or her perceptions of gender equality in any domain. Second, the similarity between women and men is greater by far than the differences. The only apparent gender difference in the structural basis of equality perceptions is with regard to the impact of generational differences in the perception of familial gender equality. Two of the three statistically significant gender differences in the structural bases of equality perceptions have to do with parental status: Mothers, but not fathers of small children see more male dominance in government and the family than do those without dependent small children.

TABLE 2. Structural Conditions for Perceptions of Male Dominance		
	Men Coeff. (SE)	Women Coeff. (SE)
<b>GOVERNMENT</b>		
Race	.748 (.404)**	-.479 (.298)
Education	.330 (.102)*	.326 (.097)*
Trad. Family	-.435 (.149)*	-.265 (.138)**
Generation	-.005 (.216)	-.170 (.246)
Age Child	.144 (.140)	.511 (.178)*
Religion	-.067 (.121)	.040 (.131)
Media	.036 (.023)	-.001 (.023)
	(N = 220)	(N = 238)
<b>ECONOMY</b>		
Race	.722 (.499)	.124 (.315)
Education	.394 (.124)*	.496 (.112)*
Trad. Family	.084 (.171)	-.043 (.142)
Generation	.179 (.261)	.422 (.258)
Age Child	.097 (.165)	.079 (.161)
Religion	.121 (.146)	-.310 (.141)
Media	.014 (.027)	-.038 (.024)
	(N = 219)	(N = 239)
<b>FAMILY</b>		
Race	-.247 (.281)	-.174 (.236)
Education	.067 (.080)	.056 (.074)
Trad. Family	.114 (.126)	.109 (.108)
Generation	-.438 (.176)*	.094 (.181)
Age Child	-.165 (.113)	.231 (.119)*
Religion	-.206 (.101)*	-.051 (.099)
Media	.016 (.019)	.002 (.017)
	(N = 217)	(N = 238)
Notes: *: $p < .05$ **: $p < .07$		
Here and in subsequent tables, the "directions" of each of the variables listed is Race (Afro-American), Education (high), Trad. Family (traditional), Generation (post-women's movement), Age Child (preschool), Religion (active), Media (high).		



The third general conclusion found in Table 2 is that the structural basis of perceptions of gender equality varies across domains, although, given the overall weakness of the structural predictors, only to a modest degree. The most notable difference is the fact that while more educated people are more likely to see male dominance in the public domains of government and the economy, education has no bearing on perceptions of gender equality in the family. For another example, men of the post-women's movement era are less likely to see male dominance in the family than are older men, while generation has no such impact on men's perceptions of the economy (where there is a statistically non-significant positive relationship between generation and perceptions of male dominance) or government.

Turning to the structural bases of *normative preferences* regarding equality, we find a somewhat different pattern of relationships in Table 3. Once again, individuals' current locations in the social structure have only a modest impact on their equality orientations. Although gender itself is not correlated with normative preferences in any domain, gender distinguishes the structural bases of equality orientations, albeit to a slight degree. Most notably, education boosts women's but not men's preferences for gender equality in all domains. This contrasts with the similar impact of education on men's and women's *perceptions* of equality in all three domains. Finally, we again see some differences among men and women in the structural bases of equality orientations across different domains. For example, religious involvement is inversely related to preference for equality among men in all domains and among women in government and the family, but religious involvement has no bearing on women's equality preferences in business and industry. Among men, generational location has a strong impact on attitudes toward equality in the family, but none in the more public domains.

We are impressed with two differences between the structural bases of perceptions of and preferences for equality. First is the contrast in the impact of education among men. Higher education increases men's perceptions of male dominance in all three domains, but has no significant impact on their preferences for equality. Among women, in contrast, education both increases their perceptions of male dominance and their preferences for gender equality in all three domains. Second, involvement in religion is, by and large, unrelated to perceptions of male dominance (except among men with respect to the fami-

TABLE 3. Structural Conditions for Preference for Equality		
	Men Coeff. (SE)	Women Coeff. (SE)
<b>GOVERNMENT</b>		
Race	-.139 (.299)	.076 (.262)
Education	.009 (.086)	.378 (.083)*
Trad. Family	-.143 (.135)	.046 (.117)
Generation	.193 (.187)	.032 (.203)
Age Child	.005 (.122)	.041 (.131)
Religion	-.261 (.109)*	-.361 (.110)*
Media	-.007 (.020)	-.005 (.019)
	(N = 216)	(N = 236)
<b>ECONOMY</b>		
Race	.226 (.289)	-.162 (.261)
Education	.109 (.084)	.352 (.085)*
Trad. Family	-.128 (.129)	-.029 (.116)
Generation	.108 (.178)	-.137 (.204)
Age Child	.100 (.116)	.160 (.134)
Religion	-.324 (.105)*	-.191 (.111)
Media	.006 (.019)	-.012 (.019)
	(N = 218)	(N = 234)
<b>FAMILY</b>		
Race	.497 (.353)	-.219 (.279)
Education	.104 (.095)	.392 (.102)*
Trad. Family	-.071 (.145)	-.025 (.133)
Generation	.680 (.207)*	.309 (.241)
Age Child	.138 (.130)	.118 (.158)
Religion	-.475 (.122)*	-.499 (.135)*
Media	.012 (.021)	-.017 (.022)
	(N = 218)	(N = 216)
Notes: *: p < .05 **: p < .07		

ly), while it is linked to preferences for equality (except among women with respect to the economy).

We are also struck by two patterns found in analysis of both perceptions and preferences: the relative lack of effects of either generation or media attention. We would have expected more difference between people socialized in the eras before and after the rise of the new women's movement. Instead, we found effects only among men, and

only in the domain of the family. Men who came of age since the rise of the new women's movement see less male dominance in the family than do other men (perhaps reflecting actual changes in family structure), and they are more likely to prefer gender equality in the family. It is also interesting to see that media attention has no significant effect on either perceptions or preferences.

Finally, we turn to the structural bases of discontent. Although this measure is built from the two just analyzed, the differences between empirical and normative gender equality do not make the results for the disparity between the two a foregone conclusion. The difference between empirical and normative gender equality—the disparity between them—indicates people's degree of satisfaction with the current situation in way that is not captured by the two measures on which it is built, as illustrated in Table 4.

Gender makes no difference in people's reported discontent with current gender differences in power and influence, and it only slightly distinguishes the structural bases of equality orientations. Religious involvement inhibits men's discontent with the current power structure of gender relations in the family, but has no impact on women's. Education boosts both men's and women's discontent with the gender structure of power in government, but the effect is significantly greater for women. This analysis once again reveals evidence that people distinguish among the different domains in their equality orientations. Education boosts men's and women's discontent with the current structure of power in government and the economy, but has no effect on their dissatisfaction with the balance of power in the family. Among men, living in a traditional family situation inhibits discontent with the structure of power in government and the economy, but not in the family. Among women, it also inhibits discontent in the domain of government, but not in the economy or the family.<sup>13</sup> From the point of view of comparisons of mass opinion with the views of feminist theory, it is interesting to see this distinction between public (government) and private institutions (family) in terms of the basis of discontent. At the same time, we are intrigued that women's and men's *family* situations, in particular, shape their degree of discontent with the balance of power in government, but not the family. Clearly, there is more work to be done tracing these types of linkages.

Finally, let us underscore the differences between our equality *preferences* and *discontent*. Both are attitudes, but the former, conceptual-

TABLE 4. Structural Conditions for Preference for Equality		
	Men Coeff. (SE)	Women Coeff. (SE)
<b>GOVERNMENT</b>		
Race	.145 (.289)	-.158 (.258)
Education	.239 (.087)*	.444 (.085)*
Trad. Family	-.505 (.136)*	-.292 (.116)*
Generation	.096 (.186)	-.161 (.205)
Age Child	.165 (.120)	.279 (.134)*
Religion	-.256 (.106)*	-.335 (.112)*
Media	.035 (.020)	-.008 (.019)
	(N = 216)	(N = 235)
<b>ECONOMY</b>		
Race	.361 (.305)	-.140 (.258)
Education	.345 (.094)*	.470 (.090)*
Trad. Family	-.057 (.138)	-.163 (.120)
Generation	.071 (.196)	.052 (.206)
Age Child	.250 (.129)*	.073 (.133)
Religion	-.236 (.114)*	-.275 (.115)*
Media	.020 (.021)	-.030 (.020)
	(N = 218)	(N = 234)
<b>FAMILY</b>		
Race	-.274 (.280)	-.374 (.229)
Education	.136 (.080)	.109 (.071)
Trad. Family	-.009 (.125)	.048 (.104)
Generation	-.224 (.173)	.100 (.176)
Age Child	-.059 (.111)	.217 (.115)**
Religion	-.352 (.101)*	-.142 (.096)
Media	.021 (.109)	.007 (.017)
	(N = 216)	(N = 237)
Notes: *: $p < .05$ **: $p < .07$		

ly, implies no empirical content while the latter is a measure of disparity between perceptions and preferences. Because current structural conditions do not tend to have a great impact on either form of equality attitude, the similarities in the structural bases for these two measures are much greater than the differences. Nevertheless, there are some differences. Consider the impact of education. Among men, higher education does not seem to increase stated preferences for

gender equality in government or the economy, but it does increase their discontent with how male-dominated the public domain is. In contrast, both women's preferences for equality in these domains and their level of discontent are boosted by education. However, while level of education increases women's stated preferences for equality in the family, it does not increase their discontent in that domain. For both men and women, the structure of their own families has no bearing on their preferences for equality in government, but those living in traditional male breadwinner/female homemaker families are less likely than other people to see excessive male dominance in government. Men in the post-women's movement generation express more preference for equality than other men, but they are no more discontent with the power structure of the family than other men are. Women who are very involved with religion are less supportive of gender equality in the family than other women are, but they are not significantly less likely than other women to express discontent with the degree of gender inequality they find in the family.

Let us emphasize that, given the nature of these data, the important point is not the specific relationships between each of the structural variables and each of the equality variables. Rather, it is to underscore that these are three different variables tapping different aspects of equality orientations; that they are differently related to people's day-to-day life experiences; that people do distinguish among the different domains; and that the formulations are somewhat different for women and men.

#### *EQUALITY AND DIFFERENCE, VALUES, AND PUBLIC POLICY*

As we have seen, the vast majority of Americans, women and men alike, say that they want gender equality in the home, business and industry, and in government. A majority wants change in the distribution of power and influence in government and the economy, and about half wants change in the family, although there is considerable disagreement about the direction of change. But what does this mean in practical terms? As feminist theorists point out repeatedly, there is a special difficulty with linking the concepts of equality and inequality on the one hand, with similarity and difference on the other. But further, we have seen persistent debates about what types of policies might enhance or detract from the degree and quality of gender equali-

ty in society. To pursue this problem, in terms of the public mind, further, we focus on three key questions. First, how do public views of gender equality relate to similarity and difference in gender roles? Second, what are the causal links between public views of gender equality and a range of potentially related political values and identities? Finally, how are people's views of gender equality in each of the domains tied to their preferences on specific social policies?

### *Equality and Difference*

We have already discussed the debates among theorists and practitioners about the problem of concepts of sameness and difference in historical debates about gender equality in theory, law, and policy. Now we ask: How does the *public* relate concepts of sameness/difference and equality? Do they believe that women and men can, indeed, have different but equal roles?

To explore the link between equality of power and similarity of roles, the Pilot Study asked respondents the following question about the relationship between role differentiation and equality:

Some people say that the only way for men and women to be equal in society is if they play the same kinds of roles in government, business, and the family. Others say that equality can exist even if men and women play very different kinds of roles. Which would you say . . .

The U.S. public is in strong agreement on this question: they reject the notion of sameness. Eighty-five percent of the respondents believe that women and men can be equal while playing different roles, including about 25% who said they feel strongly about this. Moreover, women and men do not differ in their responses to this question. Nor, with one exception, do we find any significant zero-order correlations between empirical equality, normative equality, or discontent on the one hand and sameness-difference definitions of equality on the other.<sup>14</sup> In effect, whether people believe that gender equality requires sameness bears little, if any, relationship to whether they favor equality or think that it now exists. Clearly, much of the public can envision gender equality in a world of gendered roles. But further probing reveals an even more complicated story, one in which this favored definition of gender equality is culturally malleable.

Scholars are widely agreed that political beliefs, values, and attitudes change over historical time, even if, as the debates around "post-materialism" vividly show, they disagree over exactly what might be changing and for what reasons (Inglehart 1990). Even the basic terms of our political vocabulary are historically shaped: they are grounded in the actual life experiences and cultures of their time as well as in the struggles contending political forces wage over their meanings and use (Ball, Farr, and Hanson 1989). Journalists, political leaders, and social movements all help shape these terms of public debate.

Thus, it is plausible that the meanings of gender equality might differ across generations, reflecting the impact on political socialization of the women's movement and intensive public discussion of gender issues (Sapiro 1990). This is indeed the case. We partitioned the sample by gender and by generation, separating respondents who came of age before the growth of the new women's movement from those whose pre-adult political development was marked by living in the era of that movement, and looked at the relationship between *definitions* of equality in terms of sameness and difference and empirical and normative equality *orientations*. Even with these generational controls, no relationship between definitions of equality on the one hand and their empirical and normative orientations toward equality on the other emerge among men. Whether men define equality as requiring sameness or not has no bearing on their views about gender equality, regardless of their generation's historical position with respect to the women's movement.

The picture is different for women. Most notably, among the *older generations* of women, those who believe that sameness is a defining condition of equality are also more likely to see the economy as egalitarian ( $r = .23$ ), less likely to favor economic equality ( $r = -.28$ ), and less likely to believe that the economy was too male-dominated according to the discontent measure ( $r = -.34$ ). In contrast, among women who grew up in the era of the women's movement, those defining sameness as a condition of equality see the economy as less egalitarian ( $r = -.19$ ) than those who do not require sameness for equality, and they are more likely to see the economy as too male dominated on the discontent measure ( $r = .21$ ).<sup>15</sup> The sameness-difference criterion made no difference in the domains of government or the family. But in the case of the economy, believing that equality requires sameness—a view held by a minority of people overall in any case—is more objectionable among the older women and inhibits feminist

perspectives on equality. This is not at all the case among younger women. Thus, there is an important generational difference among women in the relationship between their understanding of the *conditions* for equality and their attitudes toward it.

This generation difference is especially interesting given that there are no significant generation differences in the *proportion* of women believing that equality must be linked to sameness. Moreover, the composition of the group of women who accept and reject the sameness criterion is not very different across the two generations except for their relationship to feminism and the women's movement. Among older women, those who took different sides on the sameness-difference question did not differ in the degree to which they identified themselves as feminists, or liked "feminists" or "the women's movement." Similarly, among younger women, those who disagree over the sameness-difference question do not differ with respect to identifying themselves as feminists. But younger women who think that women must have the same roles as men to be treated equally do feel more warmly toward "feminists" and "the women's movement" (for both  $r = .20$ ). While the generational differences are not stark, women who grew up in the era of the women's movement associate feminism more with the sameness position, and associate the sameness position more with a rejection of male domination in business and industry. Thus, in the minds of perhaps the most attentive and sympathetic public-young women who favor feminism and the women's movement—the lines are blurred between the "difference" and "dominance" approaches to gender equality.

#### *Equality, Values, and Political Identity*

We now broaden our view to look at the connections between both normative equality (i.e. the degree to which respondents preferred equality over either male- or female-dominance) and our discontent measures and other political values and identities that are linked in public debate and scholarly discussion with gender equality, as illustrated in Table 5. Long traditions of public opinion research stemming back to the earliest belief systems work probe the linkages among attitudes to explore the *meaning* of those attitudes in the public mind.<sup>16</sup> How are the two normatively-based gender equality measures related to other political values and identities? These potential correlates include basic political identities and values—self-identified liberalism/conservatism and party identification, egalitarianism and tradi-



TABLE 5. Political Values, Identities and Normative Equality						
NORMATIVE EQUALITY						
	GOVERNMENT		ECONOMY		FAMILY	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
GENERAL POLITICAL						
Lib/Con	.20*	.07	.19*	.06	.17*	.19*
Party ID	.13	.00	.07	-.01	.05	-.03
Egalitarianism	.22*	.27*	.20*	.27*	.14*	.20*
Moralism	-.23*	-.16*	-.22*	-.13*	-.19*	-.11
GENDER POLITICAL						
Feminist ID	.17*	-.01	.18*	.07	.12	.10
FT-Wom Mov	.26*	.26*	.29*	.29*	.16*	.22*
FT-Feminists	.21*	.22*	.22*	.20*	.13*	.09
Emot. Bond	--	.15*	--	.15*	--	.04
Ind./Collect	-.02	-.10	-.02	-.09	-.07	-.03
DISCONTENT						
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	GENERAL POLITICAL					
Lib/Con	.07	.06	.09	.03	.02	.11
Party ID	.03	.03	.08	-.01	.13	.04
Egalitarianism	.22*	.17*	.26*	.13*	.09	.11
Moralism	-.13	-.23*	-.10	.00	-.26*	-.02
GENDER POLITICAL						
Feminist ID	.07	-.03	.17*	.00	.10	.11
FT-Wom Mov	.28*	.22*	.31*	.18*	.20*	.10
FT-Feminists	.22*	.29*	.25*	.19*	.04	.10
Emot. Bond	--	.13*	--	.13*	--	.02
Ind./Collect	-.08	-.09	-.19*	-.18*	-.01	-.02

Note: Entries are correlation coefficients. \*:  $p < .05$

tional morality—and a set of measures relating specifically to gender politics:<sup>17</sup> self-identity as a feminist, feeling thermometer ratings of “feminists” and “the women’s movement,” and, for women, emotional bonding with women as a group, constructed from questions on whether they felt “anger at how women are treated” and “pride at women’s accomplishments.”

The conclusions to which the evidence in Table 5 points are these: First, once again, it is clear that general preferences for equality are not the same as content or discontent with the current levels of equality in society; the fact that the latter depends also on how people perceive the world changes the relationships with other values and identities. For men especially, general preferences for gender equality are more linked to other political and gender values in a manner consistent with conventional definitions of “ideology” or “belief systems” in political science than is true for the discontent measure. Second, and related to the first point, once again, the structure of relationships with equality orientations is not the same for men and women. Following up on the point about ideology, it is especially interesting that for men general preferences for gender equality are significantly related to general liberal/conservative ideology, but the discontent measure is not. (For women, only normative equality in the family is linked to liberalism.)

Third, general egalitarianism is related to gender equality orientations (except in the case of discontent in the family), but the relationship is certainly not strong enough to claim that preferences for gender equality are merely a function of general egalitarianism. Fourth, traditional moralism is linked to gender equality measures for both men and women, but the clearest case of a gender difference lies in the fact that while the degree to which men believe that they have too much power in the family is linked to the level of their traditional moralism, women’s views of gender equality in the family are not associated with their degree of moralism.

Finally, people’s own willingness to describe themselves as feminist—especially in the case of women—does not tell us much about their attitudes toward gender equality. The widespread negative attributions of “feminism” could mean that such self-identifications do not turn on basic issues of gender egalitarianism (Berryman-Fink and Verderber 1985; Huddy and Bracciodieta 1992). Rather, their attitudes toward the “women’s movement” and “feminists” more generally are linked

to their gender equality attitudes, and in roughly the same way for general preferences as for discontent.

### *Equality and Public Policy*

A primary reason for exploring the meaning of gender equality is to understand its connections to debates about public policy. Policy and social movement leaders—and some academics—often talk as though the links among political ideas are based on an obvious and natural logic. But, in fact, people package their political ideas many different ways, suggesting that we cannot simply assume what will be the policy implications of supporting gender equality (e.g., Conover and Feldman 1984). Here, therefore, we briefly examine the relationship between normative gender equality and a series of policy issues with important implications for women's roles and status. Three questions concern abortion: the circumstances under which it should be legal, whether public funding should be available, and whether minors should be required to obtain their parents' consent to abort. Two questions relate to domestic social policy: legally mandated maternity leave and government-funded child care. Another one asks whether respondents are in favor of legislation to combat discrimination against women. A final one asks whether, if there is a draft, both women and men or only men should be called up. The correlations of the three normative equality measures with these policy variables are presented in Table 6.

Many feminist theorists argue that reproductive freedom is essential if there is to be gender equality, not only in the family but in the more public domains as well (MacKinnon 1989; Okin 1989; Rhode 1989). Within the public, the lines between feminism and the pro-choice position are fuzzier; some organizations that would restrict abortion call themselves feminist, while not all people taking a pro-choice position call themselves feminists. Nonetheless, for both women and men, normative equality and discontent are consistently related to pro-choice positions on the basic abortion question and the matter of public funding. And positive relationships emerge in the case of parental consent, though less strongly and consistently. Thus, like many feminist theorists, the public clearly links abortion rights to gender equality.

Theorists also argue that gender equality in all domains depends upon restructuring gender roles with respect to the responsibilities of

TABLE 6. Normative Equality, Discontent, and Public Policy						
	NORMATIVE EQUALITY			DISCONTENT		
	GOV'T	ECONOMY	FAMILY	GOV'T	ECONOMY	FAMILY
ABORTION: PRO-CHOICE						
Men	.29*	.22*	.30*	.32*	.20*	.25*
Women	.25*	.21*	.25*	.31*	.31*	.18*
ABORTION: PRO-FUNDING						
Men	.31*	.23*	.22*	.35*	.25*	.20*
Women	.34*	.23*	.20*	.21*	.27*	.16*
ABORTION: ANTI-PARENTAL CONSENT						
Men	.17*	.18*	.12	.09	.21*	.10
Women	.14*	.03	.12	.17*	.15*	.07
MATERNITY LEAVE						
Men	.07	.06	-.03	.02	.11	.04
Women	.07	.11	.10	.12	.15*	.15*
GOV'T PROVIDE CHILD CARE						
Men	.05	.16*	.01	.08	.12	.05
Women	.15*	.13*	.15*	.09	.12	.11
LAWS AGAINST DISCRIM.						
Men	.14*	.22*	.11	.30*	.21*	.08
Women	.27*	.30*	.17*	.15*	.10*	.12
GENDER-NEUTRAL DRAFT						
Men	.28*	.18*	.19*	.21*	.18*	.14*
Women	.11	.15*	.12	.06	.09	.01

Note: Entries are correlation coefficients. \*:  $p < .05$

parenthood and that economic equality requires confronting sex discrimination. In keeping with these arguments, the policy triumvirate of parental leave, child care provision, and anti-discrimination legislation has long been on the women's movement political agenda for addressing gender inequality, especially in the work place. A solid majority of

these respondents support maternity leave, and, more generally, parental leave was popular enough to become the first law enacted by the new Democratic Congress after Bill Clinton won the 1992 election (a year after this survey was administered). Still, for all respondents, attitudes towards maternity leave are unrelated to normative equality and to men's dissatisfaction with the current level of gender equality. For women, on the other hand, support for maternity leave is significantly related to dissatisfaction with male domination of the economy and family. Similarly, women who support government-sponsored child care are more favorable toward gender equality in all domains; men, in contrast, view the benefits of child care more narrowly, seeing it linked only to economic equality. And support for anti-discrimination legislation is linked to normative equality and satisfaction in the public realms of the government and economy for both sexes, as well as women's attitudes toward equality in the family. Finally, men prove "consistent" in the degree to which they relate gender equality to support for a gender-neutral draft; this issue, which was very contentious across women's movement organizations, is linked only to women's attitudes toward economic equality.

### CONCLUSIONS

Our goal was to probe the meanings of gender equality in the mass public and, especially, to look at the significance of the concept in light of and in comparison with elite or activist perspectives on gender equality. In comparison with earlier empirical studies of gender equality, we have tried to engage the subtleties so thoroughly discussed among intellectual and legal elites, distinguishing the different domains of life, trying to probe the disparity between people's preferences and perceptions, and the links between concepts of equality and sameness.

It is important to emphasize that we have not examined the "causes" of gender ideology or preferences on gender-related policy issues; that would require a different analysis. Instead, we have drawn a picture of the meaning and significance of gender equality in very broad strokes. To offer more detail or finely grained nuances would also require a different kind of study, involving more in depth analytical techniques. And, of course, our analysis paints a picture of connections of the American public at a specific historical juncture and within the public

at large rather than in specific social groups. But, contrary to those who have argued that large-scale survey studies do not allow the study of language and meaning, we have uncovered some interesting findings. And these can serve as the starting point for further work, especially because of our unique attention (at least among survey-based empirical researchers) to the distinctions among domains, the emphasis on power and influence rather than "roles," and our specific inquiry into the link between equality and sameness.

Certainly, most people say they want gender equality, no matter which domain we are discussing. But they distinguish among domains, and especially (but not exclusively) between politics and the economy, on the one hand, and the family on the other. Specifically, the public agrees, for the most part, that government, business, and industry are too male dominated. But it is more divided over whether the family is currently structured properly or whether men or women have too much power and influence within it. Thus, although people use the political vocabulary of power and influence to describe private relations, they are much more disagreed over exactly what gender equality means and how it should be applied. Citizens, then, separate the "public" from the "private" domains of life, even while feminist theorists caution that the distinction can be misleading and that inequalities within the family can profoundly effect gender equality in more public arenas.

Drawing on political psychology, our analyses also challenge those theoretical treatments of public opinion that suggest, in an overdeterministic fashion, that political thinking is derived cleanly and directly from either people's position in the social structure or their own personal experiences. For example, we discovered that generations of women vary in their understanding of gender equality. The majority of the population believes that women and men can have different roles and still be considered equal. But comparing men and women of different generations reveals that the rise of the new women's movement and prominence of relevant policy debates have substantially affected how women, especially, think about gender equality, reflecting parallel findings about the meaning of *feminism* (Huddy and Bracciodieta 1992). We see hints that men and women's perceptions of gender equality in the real world are connected to their family experiences in a way that is not true of their general attitudes toward equality. Further exploration of gender differences is warranted, especially in light of the often-repeated

suggestion that men's gender attitudes are somewhat more ideologically, as opposed to experientially, driven. Although previous research has compared the impact of "structural" and "attitudinal" variables on gender attitudes and gender consciousness, our analysis suggests that those two categories are, themselves, too broad. When we consider the different types of orientations toward gender equality—empirical, normative, and discontent—we find, for example, that people's own family structure is linked to their perceptions of the world but not necessarily their normative preferences toward equality as such.

Theorists and empirical researchers alike should pay more attention to the distinctions between normative preferences for equality and the satisfaction people have with the state of the world as they see it. It is clear that neither people's perceptions of gender equality in the real world nor their normative views about it can substitute for asking directly about their satisfaction with the state of the world as they see it. Not surprisingly, women's satisfaction with gender equality in the family seems especially difficult to explain through these methods. Moreover, policy attitudes are more likely to be tied to normative preferences about equality than to satisfaction with the degree of equality found in the world now. In some cases, we suspect, we are witnessing the difference between the implications of attachment to a rhetorical symbol (a "belief in equality") and the implications of a more materially-based set of normative judgments about the state of the world. As social scientists have found repeatedly, specific cases and contexts have a way of fading out the clarity of "general principles" in public opinion. We provide another example of how important it is to incorporate empirical analysis of citizen thinking into models of understanding the public mind; public opinion is a more complicated phenomenon than pure logic.

#### NOTES

We would like to thank the Board of Overseers of the National Election Study for giving us the opportunity to pilot a generous set of questions on gender politics and for stimulating critique and discussion. Of course, neither the Board, nor the Principal Investigators of NES, nor the National Science Foundation has any responsibility for the analyses and interpretations in this paper; that responsibility lies solely with the authors. We are grateful to Michele Claibourn for technical advice and assistance.

1. In, respectively, *Phillips v. Martin Marietta* (1971) and *Reed v. Reed* (1971).

2. For example, the stories following the cover headline "Is Feminism Dead," *Time*, June 29, 1998.

3. See Rosenstone, Kinder, Miller (1992), and the National Election Studies, 1992.

4. We are aware that the distinction between empirical and normative is not this simple and that they are interdependent. We believe, however, that for the purposes of this analysis the crude distinction we make is useful.

5. This assessment necessarily includes most research using NES because of the wording of its core item.

6. All variables are listed in the Appendix A; SPSS syntax statements for coding and analysis are available from the authors.

7. For each domain, a measure of disparity was created by recoding the normative and empirical measures in the following fashion: -1 female dominance; 0 equality; 1 male dominance. Then, for each domain, empirical equality was subtracted from normative equality to produce a "disparity" measure ranging from -2 to 2, where negative scores indicate that women have more power than desired, positive scores signify that men have more power than desired, and zero scores indicate that perceptions of real reality correspond perfectly with normative preferences.

8. In fact, the correlation within domains between normative and empirical gender equality is remarkably low. Neither the correlation between normative and empirical equality in government ( $r = -.02$ ) nor in business and industry ( $r = .07$ ) reaches a conventionally acceptable level of statistical significance, and the correlation for the domestic domain is relatively low ( $r = .10$ ,  $p < .05$ ), showing a slight tendency for people to see what they prefer—*or vice versa*.

9. Many observers have suggested that, of the different racial/ethnic groups in the U.S., African Americans stand out as distinctly gender egalitarian in attitudes; thus RACE distinguishes between African Americans and other groups.

10. For discussion of the contrast between generational and life course conceptions and coding of age, including the type used here, see Sapiro 1984.

11. This is one reason why we are not attempting a fully specified explanatory model of orientations toward gender equality.

12. Of course, the gender-related norms of different religions and denominations vary.

13. However, there is a statistically significant difference between the coefficients for government and the family, not for government and the economy.

14. The one exception is a small correlation between rejection of male dominance in the economy and sameness-difference definitions ( $r = .10$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

15. In this younger group of women, there is no relationship between the sameness-difference definition and whether they opposed male economic domination *per se*, although the signs do change across generations, suggesting that among older women, the more they required the sameness criterion, the less they favored economic equality ( $r = -.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while in the younger generation the similarity criterion is associated with greater preference for economic equality ( $r = .12$ ,  $p < .20$ ).

16. This includes both the original "belief systems" research and more recent work on schemas and frames. For a recent discussion of the contrast between survey-based empirical models for interpretation as compared with explanation, see Sapiro and Soss 1999.

17. Moral traditionalism is often defined as critical of gender equality or, at least, gender similarity.



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## APPENDIX A

The following provides variable numbers as they appear in the NES 1991 Pilot Study. These data and the codebooks and documentation are available at <<http://www.umich.edu/~nes>>. Coding procedures are available from the authors.

ABORTION: V479; ABORTION: PARENTAL CONSENT: V481; ABORTION: PUBLIC FUNDING: V483.; CHILD CARE: V488; DISCONTENT: The difference between empirical and normative equality in each domain, resulting in a 5-point measure coded such that those "high" represent those who want to see women have more power than they have.; DRAFT FOR WOMEN: V2709; EGALITARIANISM: Sum of V2703 and V2705; EMOTBOND: Sum of V2713 (pride) and V2714 (anger); EMPIRICAL EQUALITY: V2722 (government), V2730 (business and industry), V2726 (family); FEMINIST IDENTITY: Combines V2706 "Do you think of yourself as a feminist?" with V2707 (If yes to V2706), "Do you consider yourself a strong feminist or not so strong"; FT-WOMEN'S MOVEMENT: V2239 recoded to place "DK" at 50; GENDER: V547; GENERATION: recoded V548 (age); EDUCATION: V557 (recoded to indicate less than high school, high school, some college, or B.A. and higher); LAWS AGAINST DISCRIMINATION: V460; LIBERAL/CONSERVATIVE: V2450.; MATERNITY LEAVE: V2712; MEDIA: V70, V71; MORALISM: Sum of V2702 and V2704; NORMATIVE EQUALITY: V2723 (government), V2731 (business and industry), V2727 (family); PARTY IDENTIFICATION: V2333.; RACE: V549 (recoded to indicate whether black or not); RELIGION: Sum of V513 (pray), V514 (read Bible), V526 (go to religious services); TRADFAM: Recoded from V566 (employment status) and V564 (spouse employment status).