

“Examining Feminist Identification and Gender Related Attitudes”

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Introduction

Research examining women's willingness to identify as feminist and the relationship between such identification and the attitudes that they adopt has yielded very mixed findings. On the one hand, structural and situational factors have been shown to relate to willingness to self-identify but the results have been inconsistent. On the other hand, research in this area has adopted a range of methods for evaluating 'feminism,' including feminist identification, feminist attitudes and feminist consciousness. These varying approaches have led to difficulty in disentangling feminism's effects on women's attitudes more broadly.

In this paper, we argue that the spread of feminist attitudes among the general public, and particularly among women, restricts the use of feminist attitudes as markers of feminist identity. The adoption of a feminist position on issues need not necessarily indicate acceptance of feminism more personally. Moreover, the relative unwillingness of younger women to adopt a feminist identification despite holding attitudes that are decidedly feminist (a phenomenon referred to as post-feminism) reveals that the use of feminist identification on its own is also fraught with difficulty. We show that the development of a more nuanced indicator of feminist identity, one which takes into account both willingness to identify and the strength of that identification, provides researchers with a better understanding of the relationship between feminist attitudes and feminist identity. In short, the relationship varies with the nature of a woman's willingness to identify with feminism and the type of feminist attitude in question.

Feminist Identification

This paper examines feminist identification, how it relates to social characteristics and its role in shaping feminist attitudes. Identification involves perceiving oneself as being similar to members of a group (Roy et al. 2007). As such, women who are willing to identify themselves as feminists see themselves as being similar to women whom they perceive to be feminists. Although related, feminist identification ought not to be confused with gender or feminist consciousness (Tolleson Rinehart 1992). Feminist consciousness involves identification with the group but goes beyond it to include believing that women experience sex discrimination and that collective action is required to eliminate it (Gurin 1985). Additionally, feminist identification ought not to be confused with measures of closeness to women or to feminists (often using feeling thermometers) as these tap feelings of closeness (affective ties) rather than identification with (similarity to) (Rhodebeck 1996). And although feminism is oftentimes measured with responses to attitudinal measures tapping gender-related and feminist issues, such measures ought not be confused with identification with feminists as such.

We choose to examine women's feminism separately from men's as research suggests that the processes underlying the adoption of feminist attitudes vary between the sexes (Banaszak and Plutzer 1993; Klein 1984; O'Neill 2001). What do we know about women who are willing to identify as feminist? Research in the US suggests that between 11 and 27 percent of women are willing to self-identify (Ramsey et al. 2007: 611). The broad range reflects in part

the use of multiple measures and approaches by researchers examining feminism. The use of a range of measures and indicators has unnecessarily complicated research in the area.

This complication extends to analyses of the structural and situational factors related to feminism. The conclusions vary and are shaped in part by the measure of feminism employed. But some factors have nevertheless emerged with relative consistency as important determinants of feminist identity and attitudes.¹ One important determinant is education; women with a college or university degree are more likely than other women to identify as feminist (Cook 1989; McCabe 2005; Pultzer 1988). Higher education provides many women with knowledge of feminism, equity concerns and patriarchy, as well as a set of opportunities that can result in the adoption of a feminist outlook. Moreover the institution legitimates feminist concerns. This is especially true for women who have taken women's studies courses (Aronson 2003).

Income, interestingly, has not been found to play an important role in shaping feminism although results have been mixed (Banaszak and Plutzer 1993; McCabe 2005; Peltola et al. 2004). As indicators of socio-economic status, the effects of income and education can be argued to work in a similar fashion: higher levels of both ought to increase support for feminism given the learning, resources and networks that each provides. Peltola et al. (2004) found, however, that lower income women were more likely to identify with feminism when controlling for other socio-demographic factors. Employment status has been shown to play a role in shaping feminism as it can indicate a turning away from a traditional lifestyle, although the strength of this relationship varies across studies (Banaszak and Plutzer 1993; Carroll 1988; Gerson 1987; Klein 1984; Plutzer 1988). The type of employment undertaken can be particularly important for the adoption of feminism. A "commitment to paid employment" that "prove[s] satisfying in terms of quality of work life and financial returns" is more likely than other forms of employment to encourage feminist beliefs (Banaszak and Plutzer 1993:50). The presence of children can indicate the adoption of a more traditional lifestyle, as can marital status but the latter has not consistently been found to relate to feminism (Banaszak and Plutzer 1993; Carroll 1988; Klein 1984). Religious commitment can also signal a more traditional lifestyle, as many religions include doctrine that advocates a more traditional role for women. As such, greater religiosity is often found to be negatively related to feminism (Banaszak and Plutzer 1993).

More recently, race has been identified as important for American women's willingness to identify with the feminist movement (Harnois 2005; Kane 2000). The history of different groups of women in the movement, particularly as it shifts in priority and membership over time, can be expected to shape willingness to identify with it and its salience in one's life. Moreover, gender relations are likely to vary across racial and ethnic groups, variation which is likely to influence feminism (Kane 2000). In Canada, the degree to which women of visible minority status are more or less willing to identify as feminist has received little attention in the literature; one could expect that cultural traditions in minority groups differ from the dominant culture resulting in differing rates of self-identification with feminism from dominant groups. Alternatively, the experiences of women of colour with marginalization based on race, gender and class and their increasing participation in the women's movement might also be linked to differences in their rates of identification with feminism. Lastly, women who live in urban areas have been found to be more likely than other women to identify as feminist (McCabe 2005). As

noted by McCabe, “urban communities may offer increased opportunities for non-traditional experiences and lifestyles than smaller communities” (2005:487-490).

The inconsistency of results may stem from the range in time periods during which the data were collected. As a social movement, feminism is neither static nor able to control how the movement is portrayed by the media and within the public at large. The willingness of some women to identify with the movement could change over time depending on women’s experiences with the movement itself, or with changes in how the movement is perceived and portrayed in the media. Popular claims in recent years of feminism’s and the feminist movement’s demise and the growth of negative stereotypes attached to feminists have been shown to have had a dampening effect on women’s willingness to identify with the movement and with feminists (Peltola et al. 2004). This effect, however, has not been consistent across all women. Instead, research reveals that rates of feminist self-identification exhibit strong cohort effects (Aronson 2003; Banaszak and Plutzer 1993; Peltola et al. 2004; Schnittker et al. 2003). Women who came of age after the peak of the second wave of the feminist movement in the US (the early 1970s) have been found to be less willing to identify as feminists than are older women. This greater unwillingness has been attributed to negative stereotyping of feminists, the perceived negative stereotyping of feminists by others, and to the absence of a belief in the need for collective action (see Peltola et al. 2004 for a review of these arguments). Without panel data, however, it is important to accept the possibility that these results might reflect life-cycle (or age) effects; that is, as women age, changes in their lives are likely to have an impact on their willingness to adopt the feminist label. For example, older women are more likely to encounter sexism in the workplace which is likely to increase the chances that they will adopt the feminist identity. Alternatively, as women age religion often becomes more important and this will exert an opposite pressure on their willingness to identify as feminist. Disentangling life-cycle and generation effects requires a move beyond cross-section data, which unfortunately is beyond the scope of much research due to data constraints. In line with others (Schnittker et al. 2003), we believe these differences are more likely to signal cohort than age effects.

Feminist Identification and Feminist Attitudes

The relationship between feminism and gender-related and feminist attitudes has also occupied much research in the area, although little of it has focused exclusively on feminist identity (for exceptions, see McCabe 2005 and Peltola et al. 2004). As Johnston Conover (1988) pointed out, willingness to identify with a movement ought to be associated with a willingness to adopt the set of values and beliefs associated with that movement. Research suggests that the relationship is less straightforward than this, particularly for women. While research does indeed reveal that feminist attitudes are associated with more liberal attitudes generally (Johnston Conover 1988; Gidengil 1995; O’Neill 2001), investigations focussing specifically on feminist identification suggest that the relationship is a complicated one. McCabe shows that feminist identification is strongly associated with some, but not all feminist attitudes related to ideal gender arrangements, and more importantly, that the association is stronger for men than it is for women (2005). As she notes, “gender is at least as good a predictor, and in most cases a much better predictor, of a person’s gender-related attitudes than is feminist self-identification” (2005: 495). She argues that where the link fails among women is in part because some feminist attitudes – particularly

those related to the specific causes of gender inequality—have become so normative among women that they no longer provide an ability to differentiate between feminists and non-feminists. As such, employing feminist attitudes as measures of feminist identity is an especially problematic research strategy when studying women.

Alternatively, Schnittker et al. also find that feminist identification is associated with gender-related attitudes although they suggest that the relationship is much less strong among younger generations, a result they argue of 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” (2003:629). McCabe makes a similar point when she suggests that research examining feminism has equated it largely with liberal feminism (2005). The feminist movement has a multiplicity of beliefs and values, and in some cases, feminists of different stripes can hold contradictory beliefs and values. Moreover, there exists tremendous ambiguity among the general public as to what feminism entails. Thus for a number of women, identification with feminism may be less well connected to feminist attitudes than for others.

Much of this ambiguity has been apparent in research examining the unwillingness of younger women to identify with feminism in spite of their holding largely feminist attitudes. The “I’m not a feminist but...” or post-feminist phenomenon has been identified by a number of researchers (Aronson 2003; McCabe 2005; O’Neill 2003; Peltola et al. 2004; Schnittker et al. 2003). Estimates in the US suggest that approximately 63 to 75 per cent of women fall into this category (Ramsey et al. 2007:611). Others have highlighted the ambiguity regarding feminism among young women who are nevertheless aware of gender issues (Aronson 2003). The unwillingness of younger women has been argued to stem from the growth in progressive attitudes regarding gender roles with a concomitant rise in the negative stereotyping of feminists. Since the crest of the second wave of the feminist movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the efforts of the movement appear to have translated into progressively stronger feminist attitudes among the Canadian public (Everitt 1998). Such general shifts in attitudes alone ought to raise a flag for research employing attitudes on gender roles to differentiate between women who *identify* as feminists and those who do not. McCabe (2005) rightly points out that much research has employed responses to just such questions as a measure of feminist identification; this is problematic, however, since liberal gender related attitudes have become more mainstream and normative. Many women hold these attitudes regardless of whether or not they consider themselves to be feminist. This is less true for men, however, as they are less likely to have adopted more progressive attitudes on gender roles.

A New Approach

While the weakened connection between feminist identification and gender-related attitudes has been linked to changes in gender-related attitudes, we suggest that investigations have overlooked the possibility that a dichotomous indicator of feminist identity may well be too blunt a measure. The feminist identifier/not a feminist identifier dichotomy may be too simplistic to capture the reality of feminist identification for women in the 21st century. Quantitative analyses of feminist identification often employ a simple measure to assess identification with the group asking “Do you think of yourself as a feminist or not?” to which respondents can respond yes, no or don’t know (see for example Schnittker et al. 2003). Qualitative analyses, on the other hand,

have established that employing a continuum of feminist identity more accurately depicts the reality of women's feminist identification (see Aronson 2003). Creating a revised typology requires a look at why some women refuse to identify as feminist. Extant research suggests that women do not self-identify because of the social stigma (Burn et al. 2000) and negative stereotypes attached to the label, including being anti-male, stubborn, angry, lesbian and radical in their beliefs (Ramsey et al. 2007). Importantly, research has noted that this reluctance stems "not from women's own views of feminists, but because they assume that *others have negative views of feminists*" (Ibid.: 148, italics added). Sigel (1996), for example, suggests that some women may reject feminism not because they accept unfairness but because they hope to avoid antagonizing men. Moreover, research suggests that all women, regardless of whether they self-identify, believe that others have these negative views of feminists but that transformative experiences allow some women to self-identify in spite of this (Ramsey et al. 2007; Roy et al. 2007). Transformative experiences can include taking a women's studies course, having a feminist as a friend or family member or directly experiencing discrimination. The key between identifiers and non-identifiers appears to be direct exposure to feminism. But not all non-identifiers are the same. Ramsey et al. (2007) found significant differences between non-feminists and feminists who rejected the feminist label but expressed sympathy with feminist goals. Other women are non-identifiers because of ambiguity regarding feminism; such uncertainty ought to be addressed in a typology that seeks to comprehensively address the many dimensions of feminist identification.

Accordingly, our goal is to develop a new typology of feminist identification, one that does not rely on gender role attitudes and that differentiates between women who reject the feminist label outright, those who adopt it wholeheartedly, and women who fall somewhere between these two poles. The new measure is then tested to assess how it varies across a set of socio-demographic indicators in order to understand how it is structured, and in particular, to assess how well it distinguishes feminist identification across various cohorts of women. Finally, the typology is tested against gender role attitudes to assess the relationship between the two, and in particular, if the typology assists in understanding the determinants of such attitudes given the increased progressiveness in women's attitudes towards gender role equality. The approach assumes that the adoption of a feminist identification is causally prior to the adoption of feminist attitudes, and that socio-demographic factors are causally prior to the adoption of a feminist identity. This approach differs from that adopted elsewhere. Unfortunately, statistical analysis cannot identify which approach has greater merit.

Method and Measures

The Women's Political Participation Survey (WPPS) was undertaken between July 18 and October 2 in 2007.² In total, 1,264 telephone interviews averaging approximately 18 minutes in length were completed with a random sample of women 18 years of age and older in nine of Canada's 10 provinces (Quebec was excluded from the sample).³ The response rate for the survey was 59 percent. Data in this analysis are weighted to reflect provincial and household size populations (weight is the *natwgt* variable in the survey). This weighting brings the sample size up to 1,277.

Measuring Feminist Identification

The WPPS survey includes a set of questions that were designed to directly measure feminist identification. Women were asked if they considered themselves to be a strong feminist, not a very strong feminist or not a feminist at all (see Appendix A for survey question wording). Women who answered the latter were given a follow-up question asking them if this was because the feminist movement was too extreme, because feminism was no longer needed or because ‘you are not really sure what feminism is’. These questions were combined to produce a four category typology of feminist identification (see Table 1): non-feminist, uncertain, soft feminist, and strong feminist.⁴ The uncertain category includes women who responded “don’t know” when asked if they considered themselves a feminist (N=38) and those who responded they did not know what feminism was or “don’t know” when asked why they were not at all a feminist (N=101). The non-feminist category includes respondents who responded that they were not at all a feminist because the feminist movement was no longer needed or because the feminist movement was too extreme.

Measuring Feminist Beliefs and Attitudes

The survey included several questions tapping feminist beliefs and attitudes (see Appendix A for question wording). In line with McCabe’s (2005) argument for employing attitudinal clusters rather than single items when evaluating gender-related attitudes, exploratory factor analysis was employed to pull clusters of attitudes out of the set of questions in the survey that were gender-related. The procedure identified two underlying dimensions to these questions: one addressing gender roles in the family and another related to issues of gender in the workplace and working more generally (see Appendix B for a summary of the factor analysis results). Rotated factor scores were calculated (using Varimax rotation in SPSS) and these are employed to investigate their relationship with feminist identification. Two additional questions were examined for their relationship to feminist identification: attitudes towards abortion and attitudes toward same-sex marriage.⁵ The abortion attitude measure is an additive measure based on several questions dealing with providing access to abortion under a range of circumstances (scored from 0 to 1). Attitudes on same sex marriage are tapped by a single question that is scored from 0 ‘strongly oppose’ to 1 ‘strongly favour’. All of these measures are scored so that higher values correspond to more liberal/progressive attitudes.

Socio-Demographic Measures

A set of socio-demographic measures, all dummy variables, was produced to assess their role in shaping feminist identification and feminist attitudes.⁶ To assess the influence of education, three dummy variables were created: less than high school, college graduate (which includes those with some university) and university graduate. To address generational and life-cycle differences, a series of 10 year age dummy variables were created: aged 30 and under, between 31 and 40, between 41 and 50, and over 60 years of age. To account for the effects of occupation, two dummy variables were created; the first includes those employed in managerial and professional occupations and the second, women employed in any other type of occupation. To address marital status, a dummy variable to identify women who were married or living common-law was created for use in the investigation. A variable to identify children in the home

was also created and a secular dummy variable to identify respondents who claimed not to have a religion. A dummy variable to identify the number of women who were members of a visible minority (of non-European descent) was also created. Finally, to assess the importance of place, a dummy variable was created to identify women living in an urban core (as defined by Statistics Canada) and two others to identify women living in Atlantic and Western Canada were created. As such, the reference categories for the regressions are women with a high school diploma, between the ages of 51 and 60, who are not employed, have never married or are separated, divorced or widowed, who do not have children currently living in their home, who claim a religious denomination, are not a member of a visible minority and who live in Ontario.

Results

Feminist Identification

The typology for feminist identity suggests that the majority of Canadian women, over 72 percent, express a willingness to identify with the feminist movement, a significant number given recent claims in the popular press of the demise of feminism (see Table 1). Twenty-five percent of the women surveyed were willing to identify themselves as strong feminists. This is a relatively high percentage, given that studies in the US suggest that anywhere from 11.4 to 26.6 percent of women are willing to accept the feminist label, which is less demanding than the ‘strong feminist’ label employed herein (Ramsey et al. 2007:611). A significant share of respondents rejects the feminist label altogether, just over 16 percent of the sample. And a little over 1 in 10 of the women displayed uncertainty regarding feminism and the feminist movement. Data collected in 1996 in the US on rates of feminist identification show that 5 percent of women responded “don’t know” when asked if they identified as feminists. This provides some evidence that uncertainty surrounding feminism and the movement may be increasing. But almost half of the women were willing to place themselves in the weaker feminist identification category of ‘not a very strong feminist.’

The measure employed in this study differs from those used elsewhere in relying exclusively on questions related to feminist identification rather than including these with questions concerning gender role attitudes or relying exclusively on attitudes related to perceptions of feminism (and/or women) or gender roles. Moreover, it includes a category to identify women who are uncertain about feminism and feminists (rather than simply categorizing such women as non-labellers). As such, it is difficult to compare this measure to others that have been employed. The most comparable measure is that employed by Ramsey et al. (2007) that groups women into three categories: feminists (24 percent), non-labellers (56.5 percent) and non-feminists (20%). The feminist and non-categories are roughly equal in size to the strong feminist and non-feminist categories employed in this study.

The breakdown of the feminist identity typology by age reveals a significant although not necessarily strong association. The greatest willingness to identify as a strong feminist is found among those women between the ages of 41 to 60 years; these women came of age during the 1970s and early 1980s, a time that can be argued to have been the height of the feminist movement in Canada. As such, this group’s heightened feminist tendencies can be argued to

stem from having come of age at a time when the feminist movement's messages were particularly strong. The only other clear distinction in the categories of the typology across the age groups comes in the heightened share of soft rather than strong feminists among the youngest group of respondents. Over half of those aged 30 and under, 57.9 percent, were willing to identify themselves as soft feminists. This is nine points above the percentage in the next highest cohort, women aged between 31 and 40 years of age. Importantly, the percentage among this group displaying uncertainty regarding feminism is not much different, and indeed smaller, than many of the other age groups. As it is constructed, the typology may well be tapping into the youngest cohort's unwillingness to be identified as strong feminists given the stereotypes associated with them. It also suggests that this group may be less averse to and know more about feminism than previously suggested. If the feminist movement has become more heterogeneous over time, one might expect that younger cohorts would exhibit greater uncertainty concerning the movement than is suggested here (see Schmittker et al. 2003 for a review of this argument).

Accounting for Feminist Identification

The second step is to evaluate how the typology relates to socio-demographic characteristics often associated with feminist identification and feminist beliefs. The relationship between the feminist typology and a set of socio-demographic variables was tested using linear regression analysis (see Table 2).⁷ In line with much of the literature in the area, the importance of education for willingness to identify with the feminist movement is clear. Moving beyond a high school diploma has a significant positive effect on willingness to identify. A college degree provides a significant boost to a women's likelihood of identifying with feminists. A university degree increases the chances even more than a college degree.

The women in our sample also exhibit the generational divide in feminist identification that has been noted in previous research. Like the first order analysis of age and feminist identification, after accounting for the effects of other socio-demographic factors, the divide is largely between women over and under 40 years of age, with the former group revealing a significantly greater tendency to adopt the feminist label than younger women. Women aged 31 and under were particularly less likely to identify as feminists but women between the ages of 31 and 40 also revealed less willingness than older women to adopt the label. When a woman came of age appears to have an important effect on whether or not she is likely to adopt a feminist identity. Women born after the mid to late 1960s came of age after the second wave of the feminist movement had peaked, and as such, are less likely than other women to adopt the 'strong feminist' label.

Secular women, also in line with previous research, are significantly less likely to identify with feminism. Religious doctrine often encourages a more traditional role for women, and women who belong to such denominations are likely to have greater difficulty reconciling this traditional role with the more egalitarian role for women that feminism encourages. And interestingly, women of visible minority status are more likely than other women to identify as feminists, although they form only a small minority of the women in our sample (15 percent). The success of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women in integrating racial and ethnic minorities may lie behind this result (Vickers et al. 1993).

The results also provide support for McCabe's (2005) contention that urban areas provide greater opportunities for non-traditional experiences and lifestyles. Women living in urban core areas in English-speaking Canada are somewhat more likely than other women to adopt a feminist identification.

Equally interesting are the factors that do not influence feminist identification. The adoption of a traditional lifestyle appears to play little part in identifying as a feminist. Women in our sample who were married or with a partner were no less willing than other women to adopt the feminist label and the presence of children in the home does not appear to have any effect on the adoption of a feminist identity. Region matters little to the adoption of a feminist identity in English-speaking Canada; women in the Atlantic and Western provinces are no more or less likely to identify as feminists than women in Ontario.

The Relationship between Feminist Identification and Feminist Attitudes

The third step in the investigation is to assess how well the feminist identification typology helps to explain feminist attitudes among women. Four attitudes were regressed first on a set of socio-demographic factors (Model 1), and then on an additional set of dummy variables for feminist identification (Model 2). The two-step model is employed in order to identify the degree to which socio-demographic factors are working through feminist identification in shaping attitudes. The dummy variables for feminist identification identify non-feminists, uncertain feminists and strong feminists. The reference category is soft feminists. The results of the examination are found in Table 3.

The results suggest that for three of the four attitudes examined here, the feminist typology provides a significant addition to our understanding of the factors shaping attitudes and, moreover, that socio-demographic factors do not work exclusively through feminist identification in exerting an influence on feminist attitudes. The feminist typology functions largely as expected: non-feminist women hold less progressive attitudes, soft feminists hold more progressive attitudes, and strong feminists hold the most progressive attitudes on feminist issues. Uncertain feminists, perhaps not unexpectedly, are less consistent in the attitudes. On two issues, same-sex marriage and workplace/working issues, they anchor the least progressive end of attitudes. On gender role issues and abortion, however, they reveal attitudes similar to soft feminists. Strength and direction of feminist identification have an independent effect on these attitudes.

The typology performs best for workplace/working attitudes in that each category of the typology reveals a distinct set of attitudes. It helps the least in explaining women's abortion attitudes in that only strong feminists appear to hold attitudes that are significantly different. The failure of non-feminism to exert a strong negative effect on abortion attitudes is likely due to the dominance of the impact of religiosity on this particular issue. Attitudes on gender roles fit between these two in that only non-feminists and strong feminists reveal attitudes that are

significantly different from other women. These results could signal that more progressive attitudes on gender roles have become the norm for many women regardless of feminist identity.

The results also highlight the importance of factors other than feminist identity for shaping attitudes on these issues. The significant and strong positive independent influence of higher education on three of the four attitudes reinforces results elsewhere suggesting the importance of the institution for the adoption of progressive attitudes among women.

Generation also plays a role in independently shaping feminist attitudes although its effect is not consistent across the set of attitudes examined here. This suggests that progressive attitudes may well be stronger on some but not all issues among younger generations of women. In the case of attitudes on same-sex marriage, younger generations reveal significantly more progressive attitudes than earlier generations. Attitudes on this issue become increasingly more progressive with more recent generations, and the difference in support for same-sex marriage between women in the youngest and oldest generations is 1.4 points on a seven-point scale. In the case of gender role attitudes, however, only the youngest generation of women is distinct from previous generations in the progressive attitudes that they exhibit on this issue. This finding suggests that women of all generations have more readily adopted progressive attitudes on gender roles than on same-sex marriage, perhaps because the latter has only recently entered the political agenda or because the former is of more immediate concern to a greater number of women. The two youngest generations of women are less progressive in their attitudes on women in the workplace. This may well be a life-cycle rather than a generational effect. Women under 40 years of age are perhaps less likely than other women to have experienced discrimination in the workplace; alternatively, their life experiences may be such that they have failed to recognize the importance that older women attach to an independent income.

Generational differences on abortion attitudes stand apart from the others. Here the results suggest that the youngest cohort (born after 1977) and the oldest cohort (born before 1947) are much less supportive of allowing access to abortion than other women.⁸ These results would seem to suggest life-cycle rather than cohort effects given that support for abortion access has been growing over time, but this must remain speculation. It remains unclear why the youngest women in our sample reveal significantly less support for access to abortion than other women; further research could shed light on this finding.

The importance of the effects of a traditional lifestyle in exerting conservative pressure on these attitudes, tapped here with indicators for marital status, children in the home, working and secular, suggests that research ought not to dismiss them in light of contradictory results. In their gender role, workplace/working and same-sex marriage attitudes, women who are married or partnered are distinct from other women in having more traditional positions. The presence of children in the home exerts a similar conservative pressure on gender role attitudes. And working, regardless of the type of occupation, is associated with more progressive attitudes on the issue of gender roles. This result is perhaps indicative of working women's experiences trying to juggle work and family.

Being a woman from a visible minority appears to have a significant and progressive influence on workplace/working attitudes, perhaps as a result of the double discrimination that they experience in the workplace; their attitudes on abortion and same-sex marriage, on the other

hand, are significantly less progressive than those held by other women, which is perhaps indicative of cultural differences. Living in an urban centre has a progressive effect on all but gender role attitudes. However, region matters little overall to variation in gender-related and feminist attitudes, except for the less progressive attitudes on gender roles held by women in Western Canada; this contrasts with research suggesting that region plays a role in shaping Canadian attitudes on these questions (O'Neill and Erickson 2003).

Discussion and Conclusion

Our results reveal that just over 7 in 10 women in English Canada identify as feminists, a larger share than has been suggested in previous research. This result stems from the use of an original indicator of feminist identification that allowed women to identify with a 'soft' version of feminism, an opportunity that 47 percent of women availed themselves of. Another 25 percent of women were willing to identify as 'strong' feminists, a share close to that found in previous studies for feminist identification overall. When the indicator was examined across cohorts of women, younger women reveal themselves to be far less willing to adopt the stronger version of feminism than older women, evidence that supports the existence of a post-feminist era. But young women are also much more likely than other women to identify as soft feminists, a finding that weakens claims of feminism's demise. And these age/cohort differences persist after controlling for a range of socio-demographic factors. Thus, to quote Aronson (2003: 919), these results are optimistic in that "young women may be passive supporters rather than agents of change, but they are supporters nonetheless."

A handful of additional situational and structural determinants appear to shape feminist identification.⁹ Education continues to play an important role in motivating women to identify with feminism, especially a university education. Universities and colleges provide the space, learning and legitimacy that move many women to see themselves as feminists. Unlike in the popular press, negative stereotypes of feminists are likely to be challenged in institutions of higher learning resulting in a greater willingness to identify with the movement and its members. But indicators of a more traditional lifestyle – not working for pay, being married and having children in the home – no longer appear to divide feminists from other women. Banaszak and Plutzer (1993) suggested that work that was satisfying and added to one's quality of life was important for the adoption of feminism; we find that work matters little. Instead, the effects appear to be largely restricted to education. If commitment to a traditional lifestyle plays a part in shaping women's feminism, it does so largely through religious beliefs. Secular women are found to be significantly more willing to identify with feminism than women who belonged to a religious denomination.

Two additional results are of interest: the greater willingness of visible minority women and those living in an urban core to identify with feminism. The former, although only a very small group, nevertheless identifies the importance of further investigating intersectionality in the shaping of feminist identification among minority groups. In line with Aronson's work on the importance of race for identification with feminism in the US (2003), the greater awareness of obstacles among visible minority women in English Canada may explain their greater propensity to identify as feminist. The latter indicates that women's feminism may depend on the degree to

which the area in which they live provides opportunities for experiencing and expressing that feminism.

Investigating the relationship between feminist attitudes and feminist identification reveals that the two are not interchangeable. While related, the relationship changes somewhat with the attitude in question, revealing differences in the degree to which feminist positions have been largely accepted in modern society. The strength of feminist identification as a predictor of gender role and abortion attitudes is relatively limited compared to that for workplace/working and same-sex attitudes. Unlike the conclusion reached by McCabe (2005), however, we find that even on issues that reveal a weaker relationship to feminist identification, our indicator is able to distinguish between feminists, non-feminists and other women; this result is due in part to the use of the more nuanced indicator of feminism that we develop. Moreover, on two of the four attitudes that we examine, women in each of the four categories of our indicator reveal attitudes that are significantly different from each other. Feminist identification is, then, an important predictor of feminist attitudes but this conclusion requires that the measure employed as an indicator better reflect the various ways in which women relate to the movement. A measure that reduces feminist identification to a binary measure may be too simple when one considers the group of women who were unwilling to identify strongly with feminism. This group includes soft feminists, uncertain feminists, and non-feminists. Grouping these women together in a non-feminist category limits the usefulness of the measure in evaluating the importance of feminist identification in shaping attitudes.

Table 1: Breakdown of Feminist Identification Typology

Feminist Identification Typology	All Women	30 years and under	31 to 40 years	41 to 50 years	51 to 60 years	Over 60 years
Strong Feminist Identifier	25.4	16.8	22.3	28.6	30.0	26.7
Soft Feminist Identifier	46.7	57.9	49.1	42.1	45.1	44.0
Uncertain	11.2	10.3	11.8	12.9	8.0	11.7
Non-feminist	16.7	15.0	16.8	16.4	16.9	17.7
Total	1277	214	220	280	237	266

Note entries are percentages. Differences across 10-year age groups significant at $p < .05$; Gamma=0.04.

Table 2: Assessing Socio-Demographic Determinants of Feminist Identification

Model	b	SE
Less than High School	-.013	.034
College Graduate	.069***	.024
University Graduate	.144***	.026
30 years of age or less	-.060*	.035
Between 31 and 40	-.076**	.031
Between 41 and 50	-.013	.029
Over 60 years of age	-.001	.031
Professional Occupation	.047	.030
Other Occupation	-.009	.023
Married/Common law	-.033	.022
Children in the home	.012	.027
Secular	.098***	.024
Visible Minority	.073***	.028
Urban core	.037***	.020
Atlantic Canada	-.035	.033
Western Canada	-.013	.020
constant	.533***	.034
Adjusted R ²	.062	
N	1200	

Note: Estimation by ordinary linear regression. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors.

Significance levels: * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01.

Table 3: Modelling the Determinants of Feminist Attitudes

Determinants	Gender Role Attitudes				Workplace/Working Attitudes			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	Less than High School	-.076	.110	-.078	.109	-.042	.113	-.033
College Graduate	.141*	.074	.134*	.074	-.090	.077	-.122	.076
University Graduate	.382***	.083	.356***	.083	-.018	.085	-.089	.085
30 years of age or less	.173	.108	.191*	.108	-.390***	.112	-.347***	.111
Between 31 and 40	.068	.095	.087	.095	-.261***	.098	-.214**	.097
Between 41 and 50	-.015	.089	-.025	.088	-.136	.091	-.129	.090
Over 60 years of age	.025	.098	.032	.098	.061	.102	.055	.100
Professional Occupation	.374***	.093	.360***	.093	.106	.096	.052	.095
Other Occupation	.340***	.072	.352***	.071	.049	.074	.045	.073
Married/Common law	-.160**	.069	-.135*	.069	-.228***	.072	-.218***	.071
Children in the home	-.217**	.084	-.241***	.084	-.132	.087	-.136	.086
Secular	.239***	.074	.210***	.075	.080	.077	.015	.076
Visible Minority	-.052	.083	-.083	.083	.144*	.086	.112	.085
Urban core	-.064	.061	-.072	.061	.180***	.063	.160**	.062
Atlantic Canada	.053	.103	.063	.102	-.069	.106	-.036	.104
Western Canada	-.131**	.063	-.130**	.062	-.049	.065	-.039	.064
Non-feminist			-.169**	.083			-.193**	.085
Uncertain feminist			.162	.101			-.297***	.103
Strong feminist			.174**	.073			.291***	.075
constant	-.095**	.133	-.109	.109	.284**	.137	.319**	.139
Adjusted R ²	.104		.115		.031		.062	
N	1075		1075		1075		1075	

Note: Estimation by ordinary linear regression.
 Significance levels: * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01.

Table 3 (cont'd): Modelling the Determinants of Feminist Attitudes

Determinants	Abortion Attitudes				Same-Sex Marriage Attitudes			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
Less than High School	-.002	.048	.001	.048	-.293	.223	-.252	.220
College Graduate	.081**	.033	.074**	.033	.411***	.156	.349**	.154
University Graduate	.136***	.037	.115***	.037	1.031***	.172	.874***	.172
30 years of age or less	-.162***	.047	-.144***	.047	.567**	.223	.672***	.221
Between 31 and 40	.004	.041	.017	.041	.553***	.197	.663***	.196
Between 41 and 50	-.023	.039	-.021	.039	.291	.186	.315*	.184
Over 60 years of age	-.089**	.043	-.090**	.043	-.693***	.202	-.705***	.199
Professional Occupation	.013	.041	.001	.041	.270	.196	.184	.194
Other Occupation	-.009	.032	-.011	.031	.266*	.149	.258*	.147
Married/Common law	-.049	.031	-.046	.031	-.425***	.145	-.401***	.143
Children in the home	-.037	.037	-.037	.037	-.245	.172	-.232	.170
Secular	.242***	.033	.224***	.033	1.349***	.154	1.227***	.153
Visible Minority	-.116***	.038	-.128***	.038	-1.319***	.180	-1.396***	.178
Urban core	.075***	.027	.068**	.027	.606***	.128	.581***	.126
Atlantic Canada	-.061	.044	-.050	.044	.257	.216	.307	.213
Western Canada	-.025	.028	-.020	.028	.007	.130	.030	.128
Non-feminist			-.060	.037			-.481***	.172
Uncertain feminist			-.034	.043			-.539***	.203
Strong feminist			.091***	.032			.524***	.150
Constant	.445***	.057	.446***	.059	3.621***	.274	3.674***	.278
Adjusted R ²	.102		.113		.217		.240	
N	960		960		1146		1146	

Note: Estimation by ordinary linear regression.

Significance levels: * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01.

Appendix A – WPPS Question Wording

Feminist Identity

[fem_1a and fem_1b] Do you consider yourself to be a strong feminist, not a very strong feminist, or not a feminist at all?

[fem_2a1 to fem_2a3 and fem_2b1 to fem_2b2] If answered ‘not a feminist at all’ - Is that because the feminist movement is too extreme, because feminism is no longer needed or because you’re not really sure what feminism is?

Gender Role Attitudes

[fem_3] A working mother can have just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with that statement?

[fem_4a] Society would be better off if a parent stayed home with their children. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?

[fem_4b] If answered ‘strongly agree’ or somewhat ‘agree’ – Should it be the mother or the father?

[fem_8] The feminist movement has encouraged women to work outside their home. Some people say this has made women’s lives too stressful. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?

Workplace/Working Attitudes

[fem_5] A married woman can be independent only if she has her own income. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?

[fem_6] Discrimination makes it extremely difficult for women to get jobs equal to their ability. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?

Abortion

[ab_1 to ab_4]

Do you approve or disapprove of abortion under the following circumstances?

First, when the women’s life is at risk?

When the child is likely to physically handicapped?

When the mother is a teenaged girl?

When the woman does not want to have a baby?

Same sex marriage

[same-sex]

What about same-sex marriage. Do you strongly favour, somewhat favour, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose?

Appendix B

Summary of Factor Analysis for Feminist Attitudes

Principal Component	Eigenvalue	Cumulative Variance Explained
1	1.578	31.568
2	1.175	55.065
3	.841	71.883
4	.748	86.850
5	.658	100.000

Variable	Rotated Factor 1 Loading	Rotated Factor 2 Loadings
Mother/Father should stay home	.757	-.073
Working women are stressed	.713	.158
Working Mom's relationship to children	.694	-.138
Discrimination at work	.008	.757
Independent women need own income	-.052	.753

Extraction Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

Item Analysis	Cronbach's α
Factor 1 (3 items)	.539
Factor (2 items)	.295

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Endnotes

¹ An important exception is the work by Schnittker et al. (2003) that finds little in the way of association between feminist identification and sociodemographic factors

² The survey was undertaken by the Institute for Social Research at York University. Funding for the project was provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Grant #410-2003-1822), the Institute for Advanced Policy Research, a University Research Grants Committee (Calgary) and McGill University.

³ The decision to exclude Quebec from the sample was driven by funding constraints. The small sample size of the WPPS made it impossible to pull a sample from the province of a size sufficient to be able to speak to its women's particular history with religion and feminism. Funding will be sought at a future date to extend the research project to women in Quebec.

⁴ The non-feminist category was originally divided into mild and strong versions. The former included respondents who suggested that they did not identify with the feminist movement because it was no longer needed (7 percent of all respondents) and those who said it was because the movement was too extreme (9.8 percent). The small number of cases in each category necessitated merging them for further analysis. Addressing different types of unwillingness to identify with feminism remains an important question for further research.

⁵ Abortion has a long history as an issue of importance within the feminist movement. Same-sex marriage, on the other hand, is a relatively new issue that relates to both the extension of rights to all women and homosexuality. The issue is an important source of debate in the feminist movement. See the special issue devoted to marriage in *Feminism and Psychology* (2004).

⁶ Three additional variables were included in the original analysis and then subsequently dropped. Income (both personal and household) were originally tested to assess the independent impact of income on women's feminist identification and feminist attitudes. Approximately 25 percent of the women in our sample could not or would not answer these questions, however, significantly decreasing the sample size when either was included in analyses. The instability of regression coefficients as a result of the drop in sample size and minimal increase in explanatory power given income's inclusion led to a decision to drop both from analyses. A similar decision was made when attempting to use voting for a party on the left as a proxy for holding a liberal political ideology; twenty-six percent of the sample reported not voting in the previous federal election and another 14 percent refused or could not remember for whom they voted. When included in the analyses, the drop in sample size led to significant instability in coefficients. Unlike the case for income, the liberal proxy was robust in three of the four regressions on feminist attitudes, however, but its weak statistical association to feminist identification led to a decision to remove it from the analyses as well.

⁷ The assumption here is that these socio-demographic variables influence the willingness to identify as a feminist. In some instances the relationship may be less clear; for instance, identification as a feminist can have an influence on one's decision to marry or on the type of employment that one seeks. The tests employed to assess the strength of the relationship between the feminist identification typology and the socio-demographic variables are symmetric and make no assumptions about the direction of the relationship. Moreover, given that the dependent variable is an ordinal one with a limited number of categories, the use of linear regression analysis violates the assumption of the required level of measurement of variables. The analysis was tested using a more appropriate statistical technique, ordinal logistic regression in SPSS, with comparable results. The key difference is that professional occupation has a statistically significant ($p < .05$) positive effect on the adoption of feminist identification in the ordinal logistic regression, while in the linear regression the positive coefficient just fails to reach the $p < .10$ level of significance. For ease of interpretation, the results of linear regression analysis are shown.

⁸ A cross-tabulation of cohort and abortion attitudes reveals this pattern at the first-order suggesting that the result is not an artifact of sampling or specification issues.

⁹ The importance of confirming the results obtained here with a large sample ought to be noted, given that a number of effects were in the expected direction but failed to reach an acceptable level of statistical significance. Similarly, testing the role of political ideology and income in these relationships requires a larger sample than that available here.