

~~/RUMBLES LEFT AND RIGHT/~~ AN ASSESSMENT
OF RESEARCH CONCERNING THE GENDER GAP

by

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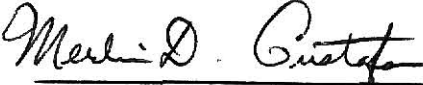
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INTRODUCTION

Each election year the political behavior of the nation falls under the systematic scrutiny of an increasingly large group of pollsters, survey researchers and political scientists. Some members of these professional groups work for specific candidates while others are connected with individual research teams or news organizations. Regardless of their affiliations, however, they more often than not share common concerns -- understanding and explaining political behavior, and ultimately for some, predicting the vote.

In pursuit of these objectives researchers approach the study of political behavior from a wide variety of perspectives, which when combined, take into account a multitude of population characteristics and voter attitudes. Using the data collected from this process researchers hope that some generalizations can be made regarding political behavior, and that a degree of voter predictability can be achieved.

From one election year to the next researchers look for voting consistencies and inconsistencies, the formation of new alignments and the erosion of old alignments, the salience of certain issues and the decline in prominence of others. As a matter of course the research has demonstrated that the portrait of American political behavior varies little over time. Occasionally though, alterations are in fact identified, and the changes in voting patterns or political beliefs subsequently serve as a focus for further research.

Such was the case in the 1980 presidential election when pollsters identified what was originally called Reagan's problem with women, and eventually labeled by a Washington Post reporter as the gender gap. At its most basic level the gender gap can be defined as the statistically significant difference in the way women and men vote for political candidates.

Many researchers have added to this definition female-male differences in viewpoints on specific political, social, economic and equity issues (Goertzel 1981; Baxter and Lansing 1983; Smeal 1984). According to polls and American National Election Study data collected by the University of Michigan's Center for Political Studies, the gender gap in 1980 was represented by an 8 percentage point difference between women's and men's votes for President Reagan. Only 47 percent of female, but 55 percent of male voters cast their ballots for the president. Forty-two percent of women compared to 36 percent of men supported Carter. Males and females both gave 8 percent of their votes to the Independent candidate John Anderson (Baxter and Lansing 1983, 187).

The initial identification of a gender gap resulted in a great deal of speculation and media interest as journalists attempted to explain the source of Reagan's woman problem. In addition, by the end of 1982 feminist organizations, such as the National Organization for Women (NOW), had assumed the public relations role for the gender gap and promoted expanded research efforts on the topic. With interest in this voting change heightened by its publicity, subsequent surveys of voter attitudes and candidate preferences included efforts to trace the continued existence of the gender gap. These pursuits demonstrated that the gender gap was not simply an anomaly reflective only of the 1980 presidential election. Polls conducted throughout the early 1980s consistently identified a gender gap concerning evaluations of Reagan's performance in office. During his first term women, by differences as high as 19 percent and as low as 8, have been found to be less approving of Reagan's performance compared to men (Smeal 1984, 3).

The 1982 Congressional and gubernatorial contests served as an additional test for the continued manifestation of the gender gap, and it received considerable attention during that period. Voter surveys in 85 races for

governor and the U.S. House and Senate identified male-female differences in 73 of the contests. For example, in the New York Senate race the difference between women and men voting for the Democratic candidate was 6 percent. This margin was repeated in the Michigan Senate contest and the Connecticut governor's election, while in the Massachusetts gubernatorial race the gender gap was 14 percent (Epstein and Carroll 1983, 4). The latest chapter to this recent statistical research was provided by the 1984 presidential election. Although women did increase their electoral support for President Reagan compared to 1980, so too did men, and a gender gap of 8 percent again was realized (Gallup 1984, 7).

While the gender gap constitutes a relatively new branch of study regarding political behavior, the gender gap itself is at least as old as the Nineteenth Amendment. In the 1915 mayoral election in Chicago men gave a majority of their votes to that city's party machine candidate, while women overwhelmingly supported the reform candidate (Deckard 1983, 283). Since that time small differences occasionally have surfaced. In 1952 pollster Lou Harris found that women more than men favored Dwight Eisenhower and warned that a women's voting bloc was in the making. And in 1956 and 1972 actual differences were realized between women and men. In both elections the difference was 7 percent (Goertzel 1983, 210). It has been hypothesized that these differences were caused by disagreement about which candidates were best able to resolve or keep the United States out of military conflicts. In addition, women and men historically have been divided on issues such as social welfare spending and military involvement, with women more likely to favor increases in social spending and less likely to approve of any type of military involvement.

In general, however, the voting behavior of women has been found to

differ little from men since women won the battle for suffrage, and their political activity received only passing interest (Githens and Prestage 1977). That the gender gap became a legitimate area of interest following the 1980 elections is the result of developments in polling techniques and in research concerning women. Through the use of exit polling the media was able to immediately identify voting differences on the basis of sex, resulting in widespread and quick publicity for any differences discovered (Smeal 1984, 9). More importantly, by 1980 the study of women's political participation had begun to receive scholarly recognition. It had become acceptable to isolate the variable of sex for the purpose of political studies. And by the time the gender gap emerged there existed a substantial number of scholars who devoted much of their research efforts to women and politics. Thus, although the gender gap itself is not entirely a new phenomenon, by the 1980 elections the conditions were favorable for its identification and study.

While the creation and maintenance of a data base certainly have been valuable in settling doubts about the existence and potential importance of the gender gap, the statistical evidence tells only part of the story. For as the amount of statistical evidence became more convincing, researchers began to formulate theories about the origins, causes and significance of the gender gap. The theories advanced range from reaction to so-called women's issues in the 1980 election campaign such as equal pay, abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), to the economic and psychological autonomy of women. In between are theories crediting the gender gap to the progress of the women's movement and the fact that more women than men are identifying themselves as Democrats. Just as researchers disagree as to why the gender gap appeared in 1980, so too do they lack consensus about what groups of voters are producing the gap, i.e. black women, upper-middle class women, women in the lower socioeconomic group, women with feminist attitudes and beliefs.

Debate and disagreement, of course, are part of the research process. But the debate about the gender gap has resulted in a seemingly endless number of protagonists, an equally fatiguing package of plots and subplots, and a choice of endings which tend to concentrate on predicting the future instead of illuminating the present. For those seeking an understanding of the gender gap then, this growing mass of conflicting data and interpretations leads to bewilderment and doubts about what--if any--conclusions can be drawn by studying the topic. Does the gender gap realistically signal women's political evolution into a powerful and independent voting force as former NOW President Judy Goldsmith has asserted? Or does the real story lie with women's economic vulnerability and dependence on men? Is the voting change the result of demographic and societal changes, or is it more in tune with the specific candidates, issues and events of the first half of the 1980s? Is the gender gap symptomatic of women's attraction to the Democratic party, or is it men's attraction to the Republican party that is causing the gender gap?

Any confusion created from these conflicting debating points is compounded by past voting behavior research which demonstrates that voters make their decisions according to an array of factors: socioeconomic status, party identification, education, socialization, national and parochial issues, the personalities and characters of the candidates, information and misinformation, and apparently now, gender (Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes 1960; Sniderman and Brody 1977; Jennings and Farah 1980; Welch and Secret 1981; Wassenberg, Wolsborn, Hagner and Pierce 1983; Baxter and Lansing 1983; Klein 1984).

This description of the gender gap as a research topic involving unresolved questions, contradictions and confusion is not meant to trivialize the research nor deny its merits. Rather the intent has been to describe the

theoretical conflicts around which the research is organized, and to demonstrate the dilemma faced by students of the topic. For given the lack of consensus concerning the gender gap, and the complex nature of voting behavior in general, the question of whether the research is contributing to a greater understanding of women's political behavior or compounding the confusion becomes a valid issue worthy of further consideration. And it is a question which this paper seeks to resolve. Is the gender gap research relevant, and if so, to what and to whom is it relevant? Why is it that the gender gap has generated such concern both in and outside academic fields? What information about women's political behavior does one obtain by studying the gender gap that isn't available elsewhere? Does the gender gap research contain legitimate insights that might serve as a more productive base for continued investigation?

For those desiring to resolve some of the existing conflicts about the gender gap, and to evaluate its overall significance to women and politics, these questions serve as an appropriate point of departure from which to review and critically assess the literature.

SCOPE AND METHODS

Research concerning the gender gap is, for all practical purposes, still in its infancy considering the brief period since its identification. But the topic has received serious attention during the past few years resulting in a body of literature which continues to grow and develop as more statistical data is gathered. Consequently, enough material has been written and published to enable and justify an assessment of the research. The remaining sections of this report will attempt to provide a review and critical assessment of the existing literature, and an evaluation of its implications for the study of women and politics.

The major section of this paper, and the one to follow, will consist of the review and critical appraisal of the literature, including papers presented at conferences as well as published sources. The intent in this section will be to explain the research and to scrutinize the various theories which have been advanced. Four areas have been selected according to which the theories will be assessed.

1. Approach: The approach of a particular theory is a crucial aspect as it not only helps define the scope of the work, but may influence any conclusions made. Approach for the purpose of this paper refers to the intent of the theory. For example, is the author attempting to show how the gender gap can be used to predict future voting behavior, identify origins of the gender gap or identify who is contributing to the phenomenon? Or is it some combination of goals? In other words, exactly what is it that the researchers are trying to demonstrate?

2. Methods: This category takes into account the conceptual and analytical frameworks of the theories and how well they are justified and explained. By carefully examining the methods used one should be better able to determine

the appropriateness and logic of the theories. In this respect, the main concern is how a particular theory gets from point A to point B, and whether the route taken is reasonable. As will become evident, although authors frequently are using similar data bases, the conceptual and analytical framework leads to different directions and conclusions.

3. Originality: Because the gender gap is a relatively new area of study one could argue that any piece of research which addresses this topic is original. However, that may not be true. Originality here refers to insights into political behavior which the theories offer. Does the theory actually produce new information, or does it simply validate or replicate previously identified behaviors or trends?

4. Connectedness: One of the most frustrating aspects of examining new areas of research is attempting to reconcile how and if the findings relate to past investigations. Some authors attempt to make a connection. Others don't try. Connectedness looks specifically at this aspect of the literature. Does the study or theory connect to or conflict with past research, and how is the connection made or conflict resolved? Although this is somewhat related to the issue of originality, it moves beyond that area and requires that the theory not only offer insights, but that it come to terms with what has come before or justify why the findings represent something new.

Although alternative criteria certainly could be constructed and employed to analyze the literature, these four categories constitute a broad perspective which will advance a thorough critique. At the same time, the categories are specific enough to help identify aspects of the research which are legitimately novel and therefore worthy of further consideration. Most importantly, these four areas all are related to helping answer the fundamental questions previously posed. Finally, they will help to determine

whether the gender gap is just an interesting sidelight to the politics of the 1980s or a significant and powerful alteration in voting behavior.

One cannot definitively diagram what results the review and assessment will produce; however, it is expected that this examination will yield the results outlined below.

1. Despite the rapid growth of the gender gap literature and the intensity of the pursuit for answers, it is expected that the literature as a whole contains as many unresolved questions as it does concrete explanations.

2. It is further expected that except for isolated cases, the research is biased in that it treats women's voting behavior in the 1980, 1982 and 1984 elections as deviant. As is often the case in many fields of research, women in the gender gap literature are likely to be judged against the behavior of white males.

3. In addition, it is believed the results will indicate that further research on the gender gap should be encouraged, but that it should follow a course different from the one currently being taken.

4. Lastly, it is expected that in spite of its flaws and inconclusive nature, the literature does, however, contain implications relevant to group politics and policymaking agendas.

In summary, the remainder of this paper will explore whether substantial problems do indeed exist with the gender gap research, whether expanded efforts to study the topic should be promoted, and whether the research is useful for identifying areas which are worthy of further exploration.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT

Given that prior to the early 1970s little systematic research was conducted about women's voting behavior, and more specifically, about the ways in which women as a group view social and political issues, it is perhaps somewhat unexpected that not more than 15 years later a topic such as the gender gap would receive extensive attention by researchers and concern by politicians running for office. Women, it appeared to many, had matured politically and emerged as a threat to a predictable pattern of behavior which had remained relatively constant for 60 years. As Kathleen Frankovic, director of surveys for CBS News has observed:

Election surveys date back to 1936, and in every one conducted since then through 1978, the voting patterns of men and women look almost exactly the same. 1980 sticks out. The differences observed in the way men and women cast their ballots have forced academics, pollsters, political journalists and the politicians themselves to examine this phenomenon (1984, 4).

This examination has yielded a moderate, but not inconsequential body of literature which is most definitely diverse, sometimes divisive, and often defensive of women's political power as a distinct and separate group. Despite its diversity, however, the gender gap literature is not so fragmented that it eludes categorization for the purpose of review and assessment. Six categories have been created to facilitate this endeavor. They are: The Women's Movement Explanation; The Sex Role Explanation; The Self-Interest Explanation; The Liberal Democratic Explanation; The Reverse Gender Gap Explanation; and The Economic and Psychological Autonomy Explanation. As might be expected the category involving the gender gap and its relationship to the modern women's movement houses a large portion of the literature, and it is this section that will be examined first.

EXPLAINING THE GENDER GAP

The Women's Movement Explanation

The gender gap literature which has been placed in this category is somewhat different in both style and substance but shares a common commitment to the modern women's rights struggle as the most plausible explanation for the gender gap (Smeal 1984; Steinem 1984; Thom 1984; Stone, Cohn and Freeman 1983; Mandel 1982; Abzug 1984).

This explanation is supported by a two-tiered argument with differences of opinion between men and women as the base. Evidence is presented showing that males and females disagree substantially on a variety of issues including economic policies, defense and social welfare spending, protection of the environment and military involvement. Smeal takes this one step further, arguing that the single issue which permeates and binds all others is sex discrimination. According to this line of thought women view war-peace issues differently because of their exclusion from full participation in the military and because of socialization. Similarly, women view economic issues differently because they are paid less than men and suffer more from unemployment (1984, 15).

With issues established as the base, proponents of this theory then explain how the women's movement transformed the differences of opinion into the gender gap. First and foremost it is asserted that the modern women's movement pushed issues such as economic equality and social welfare spending back into the forefront of public debate, expanded the range of issues associated with women's equality and intensified their discussion through the struggle for passage of the ERA. Because of these efforts it is asserted that political candidates were forced to address women's issues and differences between candidates became widely known.

The second level of this argument as it relates to the women's movement concerns the individual. It is proposed that involvement in or sympathy with the equal rights struggle has provided women with the self-confidence needed to express differences in viewpoints by voting differently from their male counterparts. As Abzug states:

Most American men and women have no cohesive political ideologies other than general descriptions of themselves as liberal, conservative, or middle of the road. Yet, in the process of liberating themselves, women, of necessity, have had to learn how to fight against institutionalized discrimination, violence and oppression, and it has been a transfiguring experience (1984, 11).

Attempts also are made to map this transformation statistically as well as theoretically. Demographic changes such as women's increasing participation in higher education and the labor market are used to emphasize role changes, and changes in attitudes over time are employed as further support. Thom shows that in 1970 42 percent of women opposed efforts to strengthen women's rights, while by 1984 86 percent of women were found to believe that women's rights needed to be strengthened. Additionally, 74 percent of women now believe that females do not receive equal pay for equal work compared to 52 percent in 1971 (1984, 55).

Assessment: While one of the objectives of the women's movement explanation is to present evidence for the existence of the gender gap, it's clearly intended to demonstrate a cause-and-effect relationship between the women's movement and the gender gap, and equally, to show that women have achieved political power as a distinct and separate group.

Abzug, for example, believes that the gender gap is a part of the third stage of the women's rights movement, with the first stage being the activity of the mid-1800s and the second stage represented by the battle for suffrage in the first part of this century (1984, 105-115). And Smeal maintains that

creating a women's voting bloc was a goal of the women's movement, resulting in the recognition of women's voting power and the manifestation of the gender gap (1984, 9).

This is an altogether unconvincing approach to the gender gap. Just as one cannot with any certainty claim that the women's rights movement of the mid-1800s is directly related to the fight for suffrage, and that these two encouraged the present struggle, it is difficult to accurately claim that the gender gap is an intentional product of the recent activity. As Susan and Martin Tolchin so aptly point out, the growth of women's political behavior has coincided with other diverse political movements and has been spurred by unforeseen and unrelated events. It is the combination of women's liberation and Watergate, George McGovern and higher expectations, the peace movement and the so-called sexual revolution, increasing educational opportunities and increasing frustrations with a discriminatory economic system (1973, 241).

Attempts to argue that the gender gap represents women's political power as a separate and distinct group also do not hold up under scrutiny. The issue of women's newly discovered political power realistically comes into play because of two points. First, women are now voting at a rate equal to or higher than that of men. Secondly, because women outnumber men in the voting-age population, this means that female voters outnumber male voters during elections (Baxter and Lansing 1983, 181). The matter of political clout, then, is one involving potential. That women are using the potential to speak in a single voice for equality is not reflected in the electoral outcomes of the 1980s.

The women's movement explanation is further weakened by the methods used to argue its position. Links are made between the existence of an active feminist movement, demographic and role changes and positions on issues--

links that are not so clear as to make this reasoning viable. It is likely that demographic changes such as women's increased participation in the paid labor force and in higher education are having some effects on the way women view social and political issues, and subsequently on the way they vote. This may be especially true for middle-class women who have been the most active in the movement. It also is likely that the women's movement is one of the catalysts for the emergence of the gender gap, as it has been successful in keeping equity issues as part of the political agenda. But to draw direct relationships between these diverse changes and to place them under the umbrella of the modern women's movement seems to be faulty reasoning. As Abzug herself observes, the emergence of role changes and the steady movement of women into the paid labor force have their roots in the late 1940s, a good 20 years before the feminist movement had gained substantial momentum and support (1984, 111). In addition, the framework of this theory fails to account for the statistically significant gender gap which occurred in the 1956 presidential election when women supposedly were still in the grip of what Betty Friedan has labeled as the feminine mystique (1963).

Based on recent public opinion poll data as well as the theoretical power and influence of the women's movement, this theory offers little in the way of originality and fails to reconcile past voting behavior research with the present.

The demographic changes cited are well known, as are the results of public opinion surveys. That the women's movement is in part affecting the way women view social and political issues also is well documented (Poole and Ziegler 1981; Thornton and Freeman 1977; Mason, Czajka and Arbor 1976; Miller, Gurin, Gurin and Malanchuk 1981). If one aspect of originality could be extracted, it would be that the women's movement has helped transform what

traditionally were viewed as personal concerns--i.e. equal pay, child care, career advancement--into political and socially-located concerns, and that this may be increasing women's willingness to vote according to a different agenda. But even this has received some related attention in the past (Brody and Sniderman 1977), and the women's movement explanation does not fully explain or document how this could or did result in the gender gap.

Past voting behavior in this theory is glossed over or ignored. Only Smeal begins to address how this explanation connects to or conflicts with previous findings, but does little more than state that the gender gap is evidence that past research portraying women as apolitical and followers of male voting patterns is flawed. There are legitimate reasons for not addressing past research, however. Most of it, especially mainstream political science studies, does not support claims made through the women's movement explanation. Studies done in recent years still indicate that women tend to be less of idealogues than men, and that there continues to be large gaps in political interest between women and men, with men showing more interest at every education and income level (Jennings and Farah 1980).

Moreover, even those who might be considered sympathetic to the feminist movement have produced results which are not encouraging. Lansing (1974) and Andersen (1975), for example, have shown that voting is a political act that is not easily influenced by gender differences or egalitarian beliefs. And Fulenwider's detailed study of the impact of feminism on political behavior shows that feminism is indeed a strong predictor of political participation for black women, but weak for whites. She concludes that for white women feminism tends to reduce political efficacy, that the relationship of feminism to women's political behavior usually remains stable over time, but that it is relatively weak, and that it is most potent when women who also

suffer from actual deprivation are involved (1980, 124-125).

The women's movement, as a highly visible and potentially powerful avenue for change, is perhaps the most obvious possible explanation for the gender gap. Unfortunately, however, it is not a strong nor a convincing theory as presently developed.

The Sex Role Explanation

Like the women's movement explanation, the sex role explanation uses as its base differences of opinion on specific issues or policy positions. Unlike the women's movement theory, though, the sex role explanation places little if any emphasis on feminism, and instead asserts that the gender gap is the result of women's position and role in a still predominantly patriarchal society. This theory is best represented by the works of Baxter and Lansing (1983) and Frankovic (1982).

Despite profound changes in the structure and functions of the family during the past 20 years it is argued that a sexual division of labor persists, which in turn helps create and perpetuate different viewpoints between the sexes. Because of the differences in roles, it is believed that women are more concerned with protecting human life and the environment. In 1980 differences in viewpoints supporting this theory were found in surveys regarding war-peace and the environment. Frankovic explains that women, as they have been in the past, are more likely than men to fear a nuclear war and significantly less likely to advocate aggressive behavior in diplomatic relations. Beyond these differences, women are more likely to take a stronger stand on preserving the environment. Women consistently are less likely to support offshore oil drilling efforts and less likely to favor continued construction of nuclear power plants--a difference that was apparent even before the accident at Pennsylvania's Three Mile Island nuclear power plant.

Like Frankovic, Baxter and Lansing point out that opposition to war historically has bound women as voters and divided men's and women's viewpoints. Polls since 1950 have portrayed women as more opposed to military involvement in Korea, Vietnam and in Central America, as well as in other parts of the world. This persistent tendency is not, they argue, the result of political organization and a strong women's movement; rather it is produced by "shared personal attitudes" (1983, 196). They conclude that although the ranking and relationship of war-peace issues to others in the 1980 campaign is not completely clear, it is most likely that the gender gap had its origins in women's perception of President Reagan as the candidate most inclined to involve the United States in military conflict.

Assessment: Whereas the intent of the women's movement explanation is to connect the gender gap with an active equality struggle, this theory is less concerned with assigning credit or blame, and more interested in isolating the factor or factors which most likely were responsible for the emergence of the gender gap in 1980. In this sense, the gender gap is not treated as a major alteration in voting behavior for women, but is seen as a possible long-term trend that at least deserves to be monitored.

It also is a reflective instead of a reactive approach, relying on concrete National Election Studies data as well as public opinion polls. If the sex role explanation contains a degree of vulnerability to criticism, it is because of its conclusion, not its approach. The assertion that women continue to react to war-peace and compassion issues in the 1980s because of their childbearing capacity and their role as the primary nurturers in U.S. society is certainly open to criticism as being sexist and myopic, especially when contrasted with the enormous role changes encountered by many women during the past 20 years.

However, the methods employed to reach this conclusion appear to lessen the theory's vulnerability. Baxter and Lansing first explore demographic variables which historically have been associated with voting behavior, i.e. socioeconomic status, age and education. They subsequently examine a variety of questions and issues which could have been related to the gender gap. For example, is it due to Reagan's personality, his campaign strategy or the issues debated? Did 1980 indicate a major turning point in electoral politics with a major realignment in party identification, and what was the female voter's role in it? Through analysis of 1980 election data Baxter and Lansing show that age and occupation were the most powerful predictors of the vote, followed by education and region. Gender and income failed to emerge as strongly, suggesting that at least as single-factor explanations, they are insufficient.

Using normal vote analysis, which distinguishes the effects of long-term voting patterns from short-term alterations, and which argues that party identification is a strong and lasting force, they surmise that the expected Democratic vote in 1980 was 53 percent male and 54 percent female. The most revealing aspect of this analysis is that 77 percent of men who identified themselves as Independents voted for Reagan, while less than half of Independent women voted for the president. In addition, women, no matter how weak their Democratic party affiliation, voted for Carter in higher percentages than men. Despite the tendency for Independent males to vote for Reagan, though, Baxter and Lansing argue that the 1980 election did not indicate an ideological shift to the right.

Continuing on to the area of campaign issues, Baxter and Lansing demonstrate that although the economy was a prominent issue in 1980, for women the strongest issue was war-peace and was represented by detente,

defense spending and foreign policy positions. They show that their conclusion pointing to war-peace as the most salient issue is supported not only by various public opinion polls, but by President Reagan's own chief survey consultant.

Frankovic's methods, although perhaps not as statistically sophisticated, produce the same conclusion. She also eliminate popular explanations for voting behavior as being responsible for the gender gap, and subsequently gravitates back to the war-peace issue. Eliminating other issues, and placing statistical controls on questions regarding fears that Reagan might involve the country in a war, Frankovic shows that the gender gap is reduced to a point that approaches insignificance, thus pinpointing war-peace issues as the catalysts for the gender gap. The reduction is consistent in all age groups and at every educational level (1982, 446).

Through a carefully documented process of elimination then, combined with the prominence of war-peace issues in the 1980 election campaign, it is not surprising that to explain the gender gap these researchers have turned to the area in which political scientists have noted difference between the sexes.

In their pursuit of explaining the gender gap, both Baxter and Lansing and Frankovic's analysis uncover some interesting pieces of information that may or may not be related to the recent change in voting behavior. Baxter and Lansing, while finding that the portrait of the female voter did not change much from 1976 to 1980, did find some alterations. For the first time homemakers voted at a higher rate than blue collar women and those working in clerical or sales fields. In addition, southern women, who traditionally have turned out to vote in lower proportions than women in other regions, voted at a slightly higher rate than women in all other regions, except for those women in the border states. They also show that sympathy with the

positions taken by the Moral Majority may have influenced the vote. Women who identified themselves with the Moral Majority were significantly more likely to vote for Reagan. And based on expected voting preferences, they found that religious men and women who would have been expected to vote for Carter, gave their support to Reagan (1983, 205).

Frankovic's contribution to producing new information centers upon the evaluations Reagan has received from men and women since taking office. She found that not only do women give Reagan lower ratings than men, any time Reagan's name appears on a public opinion poll, gender differences appear. What she calls a "knee-jerk reaction" even extends into Reagan's personal life, with women more than men believing that the White House lifestyle is too extravagant. Frankovic suggests then, that the root of the gender gap reappearing in 1980 may be the president himself (1982, 440).

Because of its thorough documentation there is little reason to question the validity of the conclusions drawn. Baxter and Lansing and Frankovic all attempt to connect the 1980 vote to long-term historical trends, carefully demonstrating what has and has not changed, and considering a variety of possible explanations. When conflicts with past voting behavior were found, attempts were made to explain the conflict and to relate it to the research. For example, the increased voting rate of southern women is connected to evidence showing that these voters have been increasing their participation since 1952, the more recent urbanization of the South, and the specific Reagan strategy of minimizing Carter's advantage in that region (Baxter and Lansing 1983, 184). Thus the sex role explanation is both reflective in regards to past research and critical and analytical of current trends.

The Self-Interest Explanation

The third major area into which the gender gap literature can be placed

involves the self interests of the voters. Most of the researchers who advance this belief connect differences in viewpoints and voting choices to socioeconomic status. Because women on the average earn little more than half of what men make, and because more women than men live below the poverty line, it is argued that they are more likely to be dependent on social services. Consequently, women in the early 1980s were more likely to react negatively to Reagan's proposed and actual dismantling of the welfare state. Advocates of this theory include Goertzel (1983), Blydenburgh and Sigel (1983), Miller and Malanchuk (1983), Schlichting and Tuckel (1983), and Klein (1984). Klein's self-interest explanation, however, is a variation of this theme and is different in both scope and substance. While all other researchers in this category concentrate on women in the lowest socioeconomic group as the ones who are creating the gender gap, Klein attempts to demonstrate that women in general have different interests than men, and are voting according to those interests.

Blydenburgh and Sigel also add a different twist to this theory. In addition to emphasizing the economic aspects, they maintain that women's political behavior is more easily understood if they are perceived as a disadvantaged and vulnerable minority. The key group in this self-interest explanation includes women who are economically disadvantaged and who perceive themselves as being disadvantaged or vulnerable (1983, 1-2).

Assessment: As with the sex role explanation, the intent of this theory is not to assign credit for the gender gap, rather it is designed to isolate variables; in this case to isolate which group is contributing most to the gender gap. A secondary goal seems to be resolving whether the gender gap is a long-term trend or simply a phenomenon specific to the candidates and politics of the early 1980s.

Turning to women in the lowest socioeconomic group as the ones most likely

to be contributing to the gender gap does not seem to be an unreasonable approach when demographics are taken into account. Families headed by single women continue to be one of the fastest growing family units in the United States. Women now maintain almost 16 percent of the nation's 61.4 million families, a 70 percent increase since 1970. Moreover, 33 percent of all single, female-headed families live in poverty. They are now 50 percent of the nation's 6.4 million poor families. And 80 percent of poor families headed by women include children, indicating that they are likely to be highly dependent on social service programs (Women's Equity Action League 1984). With these figures in mind, it was perhaps inevitable that some researchers would examine the gender gap from this perspective.

Goertzel, Miller and Malanchuk, Schlichting and Tuckel, and Blydenburgh and Sigel, combined, use longitudinal election study data to support their self-interest explanation. Goertzel's 1983 study serves as an adequate representation of this theory. In his analysis of election study data Goertzel divides survey respondents into income groups and shows that those in the lowest third of the income distribution (under \$17,000), appear to be the largest contributors to the gender gap. In this group 43 percent of the men, but 57 percent of the women, cast their votes for Carter in 1980. In the middle and upper income categories the differences were found to be statistically insignificant. In 1956 and 1972, the other two elections in which he discovered sex differences, again the gap only was significant in the lower income category (1983, 210).

Goertzel's statistical analysis of election study data is supported by his own 1982 survey data collected in New Jersey, which was designed to examine opinion differences on social and economic issues. As he expected, Goertzel found that women more than men agreed Reagan had made too many cuts

in social service programs, and that women were more likely to give the president an overall unfavorable rating. The gap again is magnified when income is controlled for, with the largest differences in opinion occurring in the lowest income group. Goertzel surmises that because women and their children have become a larger proportion of low-income families during the past 10 years, and because of their frequent dependence on social service programs, they had a vested interest in voting against President Reagan in 1980 and the Republican candidates for Congress in 1982, resulting in the emergence and continuation of the gender gap.

Klein's version of the self-interest theory uses the impact of issues or policy preferences on the voting patterns of men and women to demonstrate differences in self interests; and it does not concentrate on socioeconomic groups.

Through detailed analysis of election survey data, Klein shows that in 1972 different issues had an unequal impact on the vote for men and women. Men were more inclined to support a military victory in Vietnam and more likely to view unemployment as an individual problem. Sex differences also were evident on race issues such as government aid to minorities and busing to achieve integration. The differences in 1972, she concludes, were not particularly striking, but were significant enough to use 1972 as the starting point for the continued development of different self interests.

In 1976 a variety of issues had a different impact on the way women and men voted, including the economy, health insurance, busing, aid to minorities, jobs and women's rights. For women, the issue of women's rights, jobs and the economy had the greatest impact on their votes. For men, the issues of aid to minorities, busing and health insurance were the key (1984, 155). Feminist issues, she points out, were not a central element of the 1976 campaign, but

those who did view Carter as more in line with equality issues gave him 80 percent of their votes.

The Carter-Reagan election, of course, is seen by Klein as the watershed year. Women and men disagreed on the importance of several issues in making their voting decisions, including jobs, defense spending, cut-backs in government services, aid to minorities, women's rights and inflation. With women's rights as a central campaign issue, women were more likely to support Carter because of his pro-ERA stance.

Klein concludes that women, because of a variety of factors, have developed their own self interests and are expressing them in the voting booth:

Women are not responding simply to a theoretical discussion of injustice but to a rising divorce rate that leaves them economically disadvantaged, to increasingly longer periods in the workforce, to a double burden of home and work responsibilities, and to a prolonged life that allows them to be productive long beyond the years of child rearing. These changes have redefined what it means to be female in a postindustrial society and have produced in women a political consciousness and willingness to express their concerns in the political arena (1984, 165).

It might be relatively easy to criticize the self-interest explanation for producing little in the way of original findings. That those in the lower socioeconomic group are more likely to vote Democratic is not exactly revealing. But Goertzel and Klein both uncover some interesting information. Goertzel found that despite voting similarly, women in the lowest income group did not consider themselves as part of a distinct interest group. This would seem to suggest that neither gender nor economic status by themselves, or combined, consciously bind voters and influence them to support a certain candidate. At the same time, Goertzel may have discovered, in part, why women and men in the lower socioeconomic group differ in their vote for Reagan, even

though they may share a dependence on social service programs. Men, he found, often expressed the level of criticism of the welfare state that would be expected of upper-income conservatives. They were likely to state that social service programs discourage self-initiative and provide rewards to people who actually do not want to work. Women, on the other hand, appeared to be more interested in protecting the system and the benefits which go along with it, such as income maintenance, and medical care for themselves and their children (1983, 206).

Klein also helps further an understanding of issues which may influence the gender gap. She shows that despite public opinion polls portraying men and women as supporting equity issues equally, differences do exist. Though not denying the accuracy of previous polls, Klein demonstrates that for men, equality issues do not impact their voting decisions as significantly as they do for women. In the 1980 election, when equal rights was a major campaign issue, gender equality had a negligible influence on men's votes. Unlike women, she argues, men did not punish Reagan for opposing the ERA. Klein concludes that differences between men and women on equality issues are not just a matter of intensity of support; rather they reflect differences and a willingness to abandon equity issues in favor of personal opportunity and economic advancement (1984, 162).

In addition to producing interesting findings, this theory must be credited for its comprehensive use of both past and recent research concerning political behavior, as well as theories involving the women's movement's influence on political activity. Klein's explanation is especially strong in this area, partially because it is contained in a book about gender and politics. Having said that, the self-interest explanation still must be criticized for not addressing studies which show that political efficacy has

been declining throughout the voting population, and that voter turnout, especially among the economically disadvantaged, also has declined (Brody 1978; Cavanaugh 1981). These studies seem to restrict the conclusion that the gender gap is a long-term trend which could magnify in future elections.

The Liberal Democratic Explanation

This theory constitutes an interesting, but unconvincing presentation of what the gender gap is and is not, especially in light of the fact that it claims not to be an explanation. But in the process of arguing that the gender gap research is inconclusive, another theory is offered for consumption--one which maintains that the gender gap represents a strong and intensified ideological split between Republicans and Democrats, between liberalism and conservatism (Oliphant 1982). The gender gap is minimized as symptomatic of the continuous public debate about income distribution, the proper role of government, opportunity and equality--a debate heightened by changes in society and the positions of political candidates (1982, III-7).

While acknowledging that a gender gap does indeed exist, Oliphant stresses that it is a phenomenon by and large created by feminist organizations which represent liberal democratic interests, and not the interests of women in general. Republicans, he concludes, simply have been outmaneuvered in the marketplace of ideas, namely on the issues of war and compassion, which in turn has created an image problem for conservative candidates. And as an image problem, Oliphant suggests that any real dissent can be controlled through education and persuasion.

Assessment: Unquestionably, the intent of this explanation is not to refute past research nor to illuminate the present; rather it is to downplay the legitimacy of the gender gap as an area of concern to Republicans, and to counter the image of the gender gap as windfall for Democrats.

Interestingly, the approach of the liberal democratic explanation also includes a blueprint for combatting the gender gap while simultaneously denying the potential impact of the gap on the vote. When one considers the strategies used by Republicans in the 1984 elections, i.e. the parade of prominent female Republicans at the convention, the emphasis on bills and policies passed or in the making which benefited women and children, it becomes evident that Oliphant's report on the gender gap was taken seriously by campaign strategists and followed closely.

If Oliphant's explanation were to be examined without first having been exposed to other data or theories, the path he takes might seem semi-plausible. But Oliphant doesn't seem to fully develop this theory, nor does he provide a logical flow. Differences of opinion exist on war-peace issues, he argues, because the public does not fully understand that defense is a key social service designed for protection, and therefore should not be viewed as conflicting with other social programs. He then asserts that the Reagan budget cuts have been misrepresented in the popular press and that the poor are not suffering increased hardships under the present administration.

From this point he launches into a lengthy discussion of the accomplishments of Republican women and the legislative achievements of the Reagan administration which have benefited women. He believes this shows that the Republican party has, and continues to be, concerned with protecting the American family. Concluding with an examination of voting records, he points out that groups which rate Congresspersons, such as the National Women's Political Caucus, give their highest ratings to liberal Democrats and their lowest ratings to conservative Republicans. This, he suggests, is evidence that the gender gap is ideologically motivated. "If there is anything else here, it is only the earnest attempts of assorted ideological and political groups to create a class conflict between the sexes and have someone else take

the blame" (1982, III-8).

In between this mixture of ideology and questionable interpretations of voting records lies some equally questionable logic. In a discussion about an amendment to alter food stamp distribution policies, Oliphant argues it is unreasonable to consider this a women's issue because only 11 percent of all U.S. women receive food stamps. The fact that two-thirds of all food stamp recipients are women is acknowledged, but is not considered important.

Weak in both its approach and reasoning, the liberal democratic explanation fails in adding substantially to the gender gap debate. Although it is certainly a different perspective on the topic, as presented it represents little more than an untested hypothesis. This does not mean that new or revealing information could not be produced by pursuing such an approach, only that Oliphant may not have developed the theory far enough to produce new data.

. These problems are compounded by a failure to incorporate past or present research. Only passing attention is given to the recent gender gap studies, and no support is offered for the viewpoints and claims made throughout the paper. Apparently Oliphant was not concerned with providing a base for this theory, as one does not need to look far to find related support. For example, in arguing that the gender gap is part of the debate about equality and opportunity, Oliphant could have employed Theodore White's analysis of the 1980 election (1982). Additionally, in asserting that feminist groups are using the gender gap to create the perception of conflict and division between Republicans and Democrats, support also could have been found. Smeal as much as states that NOW worked diligently to create the perception of a women's voting bloc and to magnify the gender gap (1984, 9).

The Reverse Gender Gap Explanation

The reverse gender gap explanation is the rival to the women's movement theory and offers a direct challenge to its validity. Turning the tables, this theory concentrates on the role of male voters in producing the gender gap; and it attempts to show that the gender gap is a myth, both in respect to its role in recent elections and in the way it has been conventionally understood (Bolce 1985, 384). The actual culprits, Bolce asserts, are white males who continue to drift to the Republican party in increasingly large numbers. Reagan's so-called woman problem is reduced in this explanation to a problem involving black females, and not women in general. The Republican party, it is argued, is not having a problem winning the hearts and minds of males or females, rather the Democratic party, for some reason, is experiencing difficulties in recruiting the male vote.

Assessment: While it could be effectively argued that who is producing the gender gap is a matter of perspective, it is difficult to find fault with the approach of this theory. Given that except for casual references, i.e. Mandel (1982), no researchers have devoted their full attention to this perspective, such an approach is not only appropriate, but an important added dimension to the debate. Bolce's approach also differs from others in that it is less concerned with isolating the catalysts or underlying causes of the gender gap, and more concerned with simply demonstrating that women's support of President Reagan has not been inconsequential.

The path taken to argue the reverse gender gap theory is well organized and relatively easy to follow. Using national election study data, and controlling for region, Bolce shows that in most regions of the country women gave the plurality of their votes to Reagan. Only in the West did a substantial gender gap appear. In the Northeast 53 percent of men and 55 percent of women

supported Reagan. In the Midwest somewhat of a gap was evident, with 60 percent of men, but only 50 percent of women voting Republican. In the South the percentages evened out again, with 62 percent of men and 60 percent of women voting Republican. A large gap, however, occurred in the West where 45 percent of women voted for the Republican ticket compared to 65 percent of men. About 21 percent of female voters in the West supported candidates other than Reagan or Carter.

Controlling for race, Bolce maintains, further supports the existence of a reverse gender gap. He points out that in 1984 Reagan and the Republican party scored important victories with both white men and women. The president received about 60 percent of the white female vote and two-thirds of the votes of white males. Furthermore, in the 1982 Congressional elections, 52 percent of women and 57 percent of men voted Republican. Blacks provide a dramatic contrast to white voters. Approximately 89 percent of black votes went to Mondale in 1984 and 90 percent to Democratic Congressional candidates in 1982.

The strongest evidence for a reverse gender gap, he says, is discovered when examining the role of self-described Independents in the 1980 election. Forty percent of white males described themselves as Independents, and two-thirds of this group supported Reagan. Carter lost 50 percent of their votes compared to 1976. While female Independents supported Carter over Reagan, almost one-fourth supported third-party candidates.

The role of Independents is related to changes in self-proclaimed party identification from 1976 through 1984. Bolce shows that in 1976 white Republicans were outnumbered by white Democrats 37 to 25 percent. By 1980 there was a slight change, but not significant; 36 to 26 percent. In 1984, however, the statistics reveal a different picture, with whites identifying more with the Republican party by a margin of 36 to 33 percent. The party has

gained substantially with white males. By 1984 this group, by a margin of 36 to 30 percent, were more likely to label themselves as Republicans. White females also exhibited an increased movement to the Republican party, but still were more likely to identify themselves as Democrats, 37 to 35 percent. The vital story, Bolce concludes, is not the fairly even split of women between Republican and Democratic candidates, but the steady movement of the white male voter to the GOP (1985, 383).

If Bolce's methods can be criticized it is for comparing white and black female voters. White women, he points out, were 17 times more likely than black women to have voted for Reagan. Compared to the racial gap, he suggests the gender gap between men and women appears trivial. But it is somewhat unusual and perhaps unproductive to directly compare the voting behaviors of black and white women. Blacks have consistently and overwhelmingly voted Democratic since the 1960s; and there was no reason to have expected otherwise in 1980, especially when Reagan's campaign was plagued by charges of racism and sexism. While some parallels can be drawn between the voting behaviors of black and white females, it is more often the case that they are treated separately, i.e. Baxter and Lansing (1983), and Githens and Prestage (1977).

Despite this relatively minor conceptual problem, the reverse gender gap explanation does produce interesting findings. Two points in particular deserve attention. First, Bolce is the only one to address the dilemma others have avoided--the fact that differences in public opinion have not been translating into equally high gender gaps in the actual vote. He shows statistically that although men and women differ greatly on issues involving military risk and compassion, neither exhibit a greater willingness to translate the concerns into a vote against Reagan. It was only among voters who took a liberal position on abortion that the voting choices of men and women

differed substantially. And even this did not hurt Reagan greatly. He carried 44 percent of the votes of white females who took a liberal position on abortion compared to 37 percent for Carter (1985, 380).

Bolce also makes a contribution to the gender gap debate by refuting the popular belief that this trend transcends race, age, education, socioeconomic status and region. Clearly, Bolce shows that the gender gap only was significant in the Midwest and West. And in the West the vote was unusual in that 21 percent of women voted for third-party candidates. Had these women voted Republican, or split their votes between Democratic and Republican candidates, the gender gap in the West might have been greatly reduced or become statistically insignificant. This finding suggests that the diverse nature of the gender gap needs to be reexamined if conclusions are to be made.

The respectability of the reverse gender gap theory also is reflected in its incorporation of past voting behavior research, as well as a good portion of the gender gap literature. Bolce consistently looks into the past to help explain and document the development of the gender gap; and he is careful to separate those aspects of the gender gap which legitimately appear to be representative of the current political climate from those that have been in progress for a number of elections. For example, the movement of men to the Republican party is traced back to the early 1970s, while enhanced differences of opinion on war-peace and social welfare issues are connected more to the candidates and policies of the 1980s.

The Economic and Psychological Autonomy Explanation

The autonomy explanation, for short, is a two-dimensional theory offered by Epstein and Carroll (1983) and Carroll (1984). It is perhaps one of the most unusual explanations in that it incorporates a socialist-feminist

framework--one which attributes the gender gap to a more equalized participation rate in the labor force and a psychological commitment to equality. The two dimensions of this theory are an objective or economic dimension, and a subjective or psychological dimension.

The origins of this explanation can be found in Epstein and Carroll's analysis of the 1982 Congressional and gubernatorial elections. Examining the results from 13 states they concluded that a gender gap was most likely to occur in a population which includes large numbers of working women, women with professional/managerial jobs and those who have a post-graduate education. These women, it is argued, have the economic freedom to make choices, political or otherwise, independently from men (1983, 17-18).

Expanding on this economic theme, Carroll adds psychological autonomy to the material component. Psychological autonomy, she explains, indicates a person has transcended traditional sex-role socialization and patriarchal viewpoints, which also produce a degree of independence from men. These two dimensions are believed to be necessary for women to consider their own political interests, and to evaluate candidates and policies independent from the priorities of men (1984, 13).

Assessment: The approach of the autonomy explanation is designed to isolate those groups of women who are likely to vote differently from their male counterparts, and secondly, to determine the conditions under which a gender gap is likely to occur. Epstein and Carroll focus on the groups of voters who appear to be contributing most to the gender gap, while Carroll focuses on the conditions of the voters.

In carrying the theory to its full development, the family is not viewed as a consensus-building unit in which women and men come to agreement on issues and candidates, rather it is assumed to be a locus of struggle with

competing interests, viewpoints and concerns. In addition, this approach does not take into account possible intervening variables such as the policy stance of the candidates, campaign issues and personalities. However, hypothetically the focus on conditions might allow one to better estimate the future of the gender gap, as causes may change from election to election, but the human condition tends to remain more constant.

Although the approach of the autonomy explanation appears reasonable, the methods employed by Carroll are vulnerable to criticism. Economically autonomous women are defined in a way that permeates all socioeconomic classes, but concentrates on those in the upper and lower groups. At the upper level Carroll places college-educated, professional and managerial women, regardless of marital status, in the economic autonomy category. Because of their education and professional experience, Carroll believes these women are able to provide for themselves despite economic discrimination. Also included in this category are single, divorced, separated or widowed women who are not well educated professionals or managers. While not as economically self-sufficient as professional/managerial women, Carroll argues that they are not, in most cases, dependent on a man for their income. By contrast, women who are full-time homemakers, and married women working outside the home in nonprofessional, nonmanagerial positions, and who do not have a college education, are classified as the least economically autonomous women. These women are believed to be either totally dependent on men for their economic survival, or their income is not high enough for total financial independence.

Psychological autonomy refers to a belief in and/or commitment to an egalitarian society. Carroll maintains that women who believe in equal roles are more conscious of their individual interests and less likely to abandon them for the interests of men. To measure psychological autonomy she employs

data generated by the equal roles question included in the 1980 National Election Studies. This question requires that respondents place themselves on a 7-point scale, with a belief in equal roles for women at one end, and a belief that women's place is in the home at the other end.

Testing the effects of these conditions Carroll found that the least economically autonomous women voted for Reagan at a rate equal to or greater than men, while the most economically autonomous women supported Reagan at a rate 10 percent less than men. The most economically autonomous women also were found to support equal roles for women at a rate substantially higher than the least economically autonomous group, thus establishing a relationship between the two conditions. The combined effects of the two are shown to be quite strong. Only one-third of all economically and psychologically autonomous women voted for Reagan in 1980. However, women who lacked either psychological or economic autonomy, or both, voted for Reagan at a rate equal to that of men with the same demographic characteristics (1984, 22).

While these results are interesting, Carroll seems to be making two assumptions which are at best questionable. First, the categorization for economically autonomous women appears to be flawed. It is certainly reasonable to label women who are college educated and in professional/managerial positions, regardless of marital status, as economically autonomous. It does not seem reasonable, though, to place in this category all women who are single, divorced, separated or widowed, and who are not well-educated professionals or managers. As Carroll herself states, many of these women are clustered near the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder and may be living below or near the poverty line (1984, 16). To then categorize these women as economically autonomous when in fact they are likely to be dependent on government welfare programs does not seem to be justified. In addition,

divorced or separated women may be partially or fully dependent on a former spouse's income. Given that 39.1 percent of the respondents are in this category, the validity of the study deserves careful scrutiny.

The second area in which the methods are somewhat questionable involves the measurement tool for psychological autonomy; the 7-point equal roles question/scale. There is no certainty that such a question is appropriate for measuring whether a person is likely to make voting decisions independently. Although this is perhaps not quite as serious a problem as that described above, it does represent a loose interpretation and use of data that may or may not be related to what Carroll wants to measure.

In contrast to Carroll's full development of the autonomy theory, the methods used in the 1983 study by Epstein and Carroll appear relatively tame. Examining the results of state electoral contests they attempt to identify the factors which increase or minimize the gender gap. Such measurements as demographic characteristics, voter attitudes and the specifics of campaigns are used. They conclude that demographics are most useful in helping to explain where the gender gap was largest, and subsequently, that economic autonomy seems to be influential.

Irrespective of the mixed results achieved by examining the methods used, Epstein and Carroll have produced information which, if not original, is interesting. They found that the manifestation of a gender gap is quite inconsistent across the nation. For example, during the 1982 mid-term elections sizeable gaps were discovered in Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York and Virginia. Florida, Minnesota and Texas had signs of a gender gap, but they were not outside the range of sampling error. In Ohio, New Jersey, Illinois and California no gender gap was evident. They found the results of these three states particularly interesting in that they all have large numbers of working, professional/managerial women.

In addition, in Michigan, in which a sizeable gender gap was evident, the proportion of working women was below the national norm and the proportion of homemakers was above the norm. While this aberration is explained through the particulars of the campaigns, no explanation is found for the absence of a gender gap in California. Not demographics, voter attitudes nor the campaigns themselves help explain the nonexistence of a gender gap there.

Although the autonomy explanation is intriguing because of its nontraditional approach, it perhaps could have been strengthened by addressing past voting behavior research and studies concerning women and politics. Carroll does support her framework with the writings of socialist-feminists such as Heidi I. Hartman and Gayle Rubin, however, connections to past investigations tend not to extend beyond these boundaries. Some of the previously offered theories for the gender gap are discussed, but why the autonomy approach should be taken in lieu of more mainstream electoral explanations, i.e. issue voting, normal vote, the evaluation of potential and performance, is not addressed.

CONCLUSIONS

The women's movement explanation, the sex role and self-interest explanations, the liberal democratic explanation, the reverse gender gap and autonomy explanations; combined these six theories present a comprehensive picture of the gender gap research. While all are substantially different from each other, each theory has contributed to furthering an understanding of this complex topic. With the literature review and assessment of these theories completed, it is now appropriate to turn to any conclusions that can be drawn from this investigation.

Conclusion One

Despite the rapid growth and intensity of the gender gap literature, the research as a whole contains as many unresolved questions as concrete explanations or answers.

The three significant areas which the research addresses involve the groups of voters who are most likely contributing to the gender gap, the catalysts for this voting alteration and its overall importance to electoral politics. However, even after a detailed examination of the research one is still left somewhat unsure about who or what groups of voters are responsible for producing the gender gap.

If the self-interest theory is accepted, women in the lower socioeconomic group must be credited for this phenomenon. But if the women's movement theory is accepted, women in all socioeconomic groups and in all regions must be viewed as the protagonists. The autonomy explanation maintains that it is those women in the lowest and upper income groups, and who hold egalitarian beliefs who are responsible. And the reverse gender gap theory contends that women's role in the gender gap is confined to black women.

Much the same can be said about the literature's ability to adequately settle questions regarding the catalysts for the gender gap. Among those offered are women's increasing participation in higher education and the professional/managerial workforce, men's increasing alignment with the Republican party, the prominence of war-peace and compassion issues in the 1980s, Ronald Reagan, the feminization of poverty, the continued maintenance of a strong women's rights movement, the clear and substantial differences between the policy preferences of the presidential candidates in the 1980s, the emergence of the New Right, etc.

With a lack of any meaningful agreement on the voting groups or likely causes involved in the gender gap's existence, it is not surprising that its significance also is a point of contention. If the autonomy theory is viewed as the strongest, then the significance of the gender gap is that patriarchal relationships are beginning to falter. The importance of this phenomenon according to the women's movement explanation is that it increases the political clout of women and gives their political viewpoints greater value. The sex role theory maintains that it only is significant as long as war-peace and compassion issues remain strong in the political climate, while the reverse gender gap theory suggests its importance lies with its ability to produce Republican victories. And, according to the liberal democratic explanation, the gender gap lacks significance.

It would be highly speculative to attempt and single out one of these causes, groups of voters or consequences and label it as the single most important finding of the gender gap literature. The majority of the theories, based on their use of data and interpretations, all produce results which may be related to the gender gap's existence. Ironically, one of the best perspectives on this point has been articulated in one of the weakest gender

gap explanations:

The quest for the most important cause of the gender gap, I believe, is a faulty pursuit. The many factors are not mutually exclusive, and in fact often overlap. At various times one factor may be more important than others. Yet each, or some combination thereof, has the potential of becoming an important factor in a particular political race (Smeal 1984, 14).

It should be evident that the gender gap literature, as an entity, does not by any measure satisfactorily resolve basic concerns. With disagreement rather than consistency or consensus as the rule, the most that can be legitimately stated about the research is it represents a series of best guesses which may have helped to clarify the boundaries of possible variables.

Conclusion Two

The gender gap research is biased in that it treats women as deviants and men as the norm from which all voting behavior should be evaluated.

The very fact that the gender gap has generated such concern in recent years is perhaps another example of the overall tendency in political science to ignore women's political participation when their behavior is consistent with that of men's. It usually is only when women's political behavior is recognizably different from men's that researchers take an active and extended interest (Goot and Reid 1975; Randall 1982). While this is possibly less true now than it was 10 years ago, the focus on women in the elections of the 1980s seems to indicate there still exists a substantial degree of validity in this observation.

Beyond this general bias, the gender gap literature does tend to treat women's recent behavior as deviant, which is interesting when historical voting patterns are examined. Men and women historically have split their votes fairly evenly between Democratic and Republican presidential candidates

(Frankovic 1984). In 1980 and 1984 women continued this pattern, while men overwhelmingly supported Reagan by almost 20 percent in 1980 and almost 30 percent in 1984 (Bolce 1985; Gallup 1984). According to this perspective, if anyone could be labeled as deviant, it would have to be male voters. Yet the major focus of the research is why women did not follow the pattern of men. Even Bolce, who is the only one to fully examine the gender gap from an approach which emphasizes the role of male voters, specifically states that men's support of the Republican party is not a deviation, rather the continuation of a trend (1985, 384).

The bias of the gender gap literature also is demonstrated by its use of, and often emphasis on, traditional explanations for women's political behavior, i.e. that women personalize politics, that women are moralistic or socialized differently which affects their political attitudes and choices. Certainly Baxter and Lansing (1983) and Frankovic (1982) are guilty of falling back on these after addressing other possibilities. And Smeal points out that women view war differently in part because of their socialization (1984, 15). Reliance on such explanations is not only disturbing in that both feminists and nonfeminists alike are using them, but because research in recent years has demonstrated that they are inadequate explanations (Goot and Reid 1975; Welch 1977; Randall 1982; Githens 1982).

Moreover, they present a contradictory picture in relation to other data in the literature. Part of the explanations for the gender gap emphasize how the demographic characteristics of men and women have become more equal during the past 20 years, i.e. the increasing participation of women in higher education and in full-time employment. If the experiences of women and men in such important determinants of the vote as education are now similar, it seems contradictory to rely on explanations which were developed at a time when experiences were greatly dissimilar.

The only researcher in the gender gap literature who successfully avoids the entrapment of traditional explanations, and the tendency to measure women according to the norm of men, is Carroll (1984). While Carroll does use some male-female comparisons, the major sections of her work center on comparing women who are similarly situated with each other.

In concluding this consideration of the bias in the gender gap research, it seems useful and relevant to close with a quote from the work of Marianne Githens:

What one is confronted with in gender and race related research are a series of norms for participation in politics based on the behavior of more affluent white males. When Blacks and women are not found to participate in the same way, there is a search for explanations of their overall limited political participation. These explanations are predicated on group differences stemming from socialization, role orientation, etc. Further, the groups are assumed to be very homogeneous. The research, in turn, demonstrates that the groups are in fact not as homogeneous as was supposed nor are the range of differences between groups as great as was anticipated. One tortured explanation after then other (sic) is tried to explain the findings and the confusion grows (1982, 26).

Conclusion Three

Further research on the gender gap should be encouraged given the great amount of disagreement about its causes and catalysts. However, future pursuits need to be tempered by a sincere desire to advance an understanding of this phenomenon. As became clear in the literature review and assessment, most of the research efforts to date have become caught up in a struggle about whether the gender gap signals the development of a women's voting bloc, and subsequently, increased political power for women--a struggle which seems to be unproductive and premature.

While women continue to be splitting their votes fairly evenly between Democratic and Republican candidates, it seems unwarranted to be debating

the existence or nonexistence of a women's voting bloc. The realization of a women's vote remains a potential rooted in the actual number of possible female voters as compared to males. Since 1964 black voters have given a minimum of 85 percent of their votes to Democratic presidential candidates (Wayne 1984, 66). If and when female voters even come close to matching that pattern, then it will be legitimate to discuss the significance of a women's voting bloc. Given the heterogeneity of the female population, and the male population for that matter, this is unlikely to occur in the existing political climate. Perhaps this emphasis on voting power is a manifestation of the ERA's defeat and Reagan's victories, which seemed to provide that votes both at the mass and elite levels can make a difference. And indeed they do on occasion. But the importance of the vote is still in question. As Randall has pointed out, the value of the individual vote is a matter of debate "given the infrequency of elections, the at best limited choice of candidates, the profusion of safe seats, the inadequacy of the information supplied to the electorate and the independence of candidates once elected" (1982, 35-36).

Similarly, there is disagreement about the degree to which voting represents political power. Kendrigan, for example, argues that for voting to be a powerful and instrumental force in achieving feminist goals, four elements are necessary. First, women must vote in large numbers. Secondly, they must vote differently from other constituencies. Next, they must be able to elect candidates who are feminist. And finally, the electoral successes must be translated into changes of policy (1984, 91-92). Voting by itself, she maintains, can never guarantee that those with feminist beliefs will be elected, nor that women's policy concerns will be addressed.

In addition to overstressing the importance of the vote at the mass

level, this emphasis on the creation of a women's voting bloc has the capacity to enhance divisiveness at a time when many in society are becoming increasingly divided over the women's movement. The tone of the gender gap literature, especially that generated by those active in the women's rights struggle, seems intent on dividing men and women, Republicans and Democrats. This appears inconsistent and counterproductive for a movement which has spent considerable time and effort trying to convince the American public that the interests of the equality struggle are the interests of all Americans.

The rise of the New Right and its strengthening position as a legitimate competitor to the women's movement already is serving to polarize the efforts of those desiring to alter social, economic and equity policies (Harding 1981). With conflict and divisiveness seemingly inhibiting the discussion of feminist concerns, it does not appear productive to further emphasize differences by gender and political party. Now, more than ever, the women's movement needs to be concerned with bi-partisan coalitions and the support of women and men.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Despite the problems of focus, bias, and its inconclusive nature, the gender gap research does contain interesting implications for further investigation. The most obvious and perhaps the most thought provoking involves not why women voted as they did, but why the difference in men's voting behavior was so dramatic. As has been pointed out, men gave almost 20 percent more of their votes to Reagan than Carter in 1980; almost 30 percent in 1984. If, as feminists have argued, the recent elections represent an indication of support for equity, then it would seem relevant to investigate men's voting behavior to determine why or if their support of the president is a statement about commitment to an egalitarian society. Such a research effort might lead to a greater understanding of how men and women weigh equity issues in making voting decisions, as well as providing an indication about how men's and women's votes might be brought together to produce electoral victories for the women's movement.

Beyond this obvious, yet to date unexplored area, two other areas deserve attention--the implications of the data produced for group politics and for policymaking agendas.

Through its often detailed breakdown of voting groups the gender gap literature has created a useful knowledge base about where the differences are greatest between men and women, and to a lesser degree, women and women. Research should now continue to produce strategies appropriate for bringing these groups together to lobby for policy interests or to elect candidates sympathetic to women's issues. For example, the research suggests that women in the lowest income category, as well as those in the upper income brackets, are voting differently than their male counterparts. And while they may not be voting for Democratic candidates because of a shared concern for or sympathy with the feminist agenda, their interests are not dissimilar with

those of the movement, i.e. more economic security, comparable worth, increased health and insurance benefits.

Feminist research in recent years has devoted increased attention to identifying strategies which may help strengthen the equality struggle, yet strategies which will not threaten those who view some aspects of the movement as radical. Some have found that many women, although wary of the label "feminist," still demonstrate support for women's issues; and they suggest that intentional coalitions are possible when declarations of support for all aspects of the movement are not demanded (Bers and Mezey 1981, 747-748). Related to this, Gelb and Palley show that the women's movement has been most successful in recruiting support when it emphasized role equity instead of role change (1982, 167). It would seem appropriate that research such as this continue, and be expanded. Still widely viewed as an upper-middle class movement, the gender gap literature indicates that there exists potential for the movement to reach well outside its beginnings and embrace those who may not be able to provide leadership, but could be influential when lobbying or voting coalitions are needed. Clearly the strategies and methods attempted during the 1984 campaign proved ineffective, and they further emphasize the need to investigate alternatives which are more conciliatory and less divisive.

The gender gap literature also contains research potential in the area of policymaking. Although not necessarily new, the studies do serve to underscore the economic conditions which women face, as well as the effects on women of public policies in recent years. Strategically, concentrating efforts on the feminization of poverty could prove effective in influencing policymaking agendas in the existing political climate. By focusing research efforts on, and publicizing the disastrous economic conditions of millions of American women, the poverty of their children also is brought into focus. Because ERA opposition groups have been effective in reducing the equal rights

debate to a pro-family versus anti-family stance, discussion of how economic discrimination affects women and their children, may elicit a more positive response from those who otherwise might view economic legislation benefiting women as threatening or a non-priority.

While the gender gap literature does indicate areas which need continued attention, or a refocus of interest, this should not overshadow what many believe to be a more pressing and potentially more beneficial trend--women's bid for political power through representation. Rossi argues that the gender gap is interesting, but not as important as the inroads women have made in the state legislatures, in overcoming stereotypical attitudes and the opportunity structure to get elected, and in receiving diverse committee assignments in Congress (1983, 720-721). Rossi, as well as others, believe that efforts to increase the representation of women may be more important in the long run than emphasizing the mobilization of voters (Katzenstein 1984; Glenney 1982).

The women's movement has spent more than a decade developing and identifying the most appropriate strategies to effect change in a system that has not been all that receptive. These efforts have produced varied strategies, both traditional and nontraditional, effective and futile. Through constant debate and evaluation many of the ineffective methods have been altered or eliminated. There is no reason for the gender gap research to now narrow investigative efforts concerning change strategies, nor to abandon those efforts which have been valuable.

The gender gap, now considered a trend instead of an aberration, is likely to remain a part of political analysis for many elections to come. As Baxter and Lansing point out, the gender gap already has emerged as an integral part of election predictions and analysis (1983). One can only hope that those who

study and report the results in the future will exercise restraint in attempting to establish causality and in making generalizations about its significance.

For if there is anything that this report has underscored, it is that levels of knowledge and understanding about the political behavior of women still are in an early stage; and that increasing this knowledge base objectively remains a major challenge. Attempting to do so during a period of rapid change in the social and economic structure only adds to the challenge.

Statistical analysis such as that used in the gender gap literature is a major, but not the only way to map and follow change. That both men and women are experiencing changes in roles and responsibilities also is being documented through their personal stories, and communicated through the writings of feminists such as Betty Friedan (1981), and Gloria Steinem (1983). These personal stories further heighten an appreciation for the complexity of individual decisionmaking processes, voting or otherwise.

Moreover, they show that women and men both are confronting and struggling with values and roles once believed natural, necessary and healthy. Women are discovering that their interests in the maintenance of a strong economy are very similar to those of men, while men are finding that economic discrimination against women is a men's issue as families become increasingly dependent on two incomes. It may be that in such a transitional period involving not only the economic and social structures, but the very meaning of what it is to be male or female, that voting decisions will not fall into the predictable patterns that politicians depend on and pollsters attempt to identify.

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APPENDIX

A Chart of the Gender Gap Theories: Causes, Voters and Results

	Women's Movement	Sex Role	Self- Interest	Liberal Democratic	Reverse Gender Gap	Autonomy of Women
Causes	Existence of active women's rights struggle	Women's role in a patriarchal society, war and compassion issues	Reaction of women to Regan's social, defense policies	Strong ideological differences between Democrats and Republicans	Attraction of male voters to the Republican party	Ability of women to transcend socialization, patriarchal views
Voters Involved	Women in general, especially those who feel discriminated against	Highly-educated/professional women	Women in the lowest socioeconomic group (women in general, Klein)	Women who view Reagan's policies unfavorably	White males	Highly-educated women, divorced, separated or widowed women
Results	Increased political power for women, and start of women's voting bloc	Could be a long-term trend that may magnify	Could be a long-term trend depending on policy positions	Not really considered a significant political development	Increased numbers of victories for Republican candidates	May indicate that the system of patriarchy is breaking down

RUMBLES LEFT AND RIGHT: AN ASSESSMENT
OF RESEARCH CONCERNING THE GENDER GAP

by

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The gender gap, the measurable difference in the way women and men view social, economic and political issues, and ultimately cast their votes for political candidates, became a focus of research attention following the 1980 presidential election. This report explores the research concerning this topic and assesses its usefulness for the study of women and politics, as well as examining the significance of the gender gap.

Combined, researchers have developed six theories about how and why the gender gap appeared in 1980 and persists today. They are: The Women's Movement Explanation; The Sex Role Explanation; The Self-Interest Explanation; The Liberal Democratic Explanation; The Reverse Gender Gap Explanation; and The Economic and Psychological Autonomy Explanation.

These theories are reviewed and assessed according to four criteria. First, the approach or intent of the theories is examined. Is the theory designed to identify origins of the gender gap, map its growth or demonstrate women's political power? Secondly, the methods used to examine the gender gap are assessed. In other words, how well does the author explain and justify the conceptual and analytical framework? The third area involves the originality of the data produced. The concern here is whether the theories are providing insights into women's voting behavior or simply validating previously identified findings. The last criteria is connectedness, the ability of the theory to show how the findings connect to or conflict with past research about women's political behavior or political behavior in general. In addition, it examines how the connection is made or the conflict resolved.

Through the review and assessment processes the following conclusions are drawn: (1) The studies performed to date do not resolve fundamental concerns about the gender gap; (2) The research is biased in that it treats women as deviants, and men as the norm from which all voting behavior should be judged; (3) That research concerning the gender gap should continue, but that

it should follow a different course from that presently being taken.

It is recommended that some information contained in the research be used to further study how diverse groups can be brought together to lobby for specific policies benefiting women, or to elect candidates sympathetic to the women's movement. It is further suggested that the women's movement increase its research efforts concerning the feminization of poverty, as the literature underscores this growing problem. Finally, it is recommended that efforts to create a women's voting bloc be redirected toward electing women to political office.