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Gender, Employment Status, and Abortion: A Longitudinal Analysis

Ted G. Jelen,[1,2] **David F. Damore,**[1] **and Thomas Lamatsch**[1]

Building upon extant literature, we examine the influence gender and employment status exert on abortion attitudes among the mass public. Specifically, we assess if men, employed women, and homemaker women view the abortion issue differently and if the same factors account for variation in each group's attitudes toward abortion. Analysis of General Social Survey data from 1973 to 2000 indicates that although homemaker women tend to be more "pro-life" than do men or working women, the attitudes of all 3 groups exhibit similar changes over time. In addition, our results suggest that the same variables account for variation in abortion attitudes for all 3 groups. Our results suggest that the causes and effects of abortion attitudes do not appear to be gender-specific, but rather are relatively uniform across genders and employment statuses.

KEY WORDS: abortion; employment; feminism; gender equality; reproductive rights.

For more than a generation, the controversy over legalized abortion has been among the most salient issues in American politics. In particular, the abortion issue is thought to be an important component in the "culture war" (Hunter, 1991; Williams, 1997), leading some to argue that abortion is the sine qua non for cultural polarization in the United States (DiMaggio, Evans, & Bryson, 1996). To this end, the abortion controversy has spurred political action outside the mainstream (Ginsberg, 1989; Maxwell, 2002), including violence (Blanchard, 1994; Blanchard & Prewitt, 1993), as well as more conventional forms of political participation.[3]

Given the centrality of abortion to the contemporary political landscape, it is not surprising that public attitudes about abortion have received a great deal of scholarly attention. Indeed, as Fried (1988) noted, abortion serves as a "condensational symbol" in that it intersects a number of core values including the sanctity of human life and gender roles as they relate to business, government, and the home, as well as beliefs about sexual morality and individual choice. As a consequence, abortion attitudes have been characterized as a "clash of absolutes," in which compromise is difficult or impossible (Tribe, 1989).

Against this background, our purpose is to expand our understanding of the dynamics of abortion attitudes as they relate to gender and employment status. We proceed as follows: After a review of the relevant literature, we specify the issues that frame our analysis. Specifically, we assess if men, employed women, (women who participate in the paid labor force), and homemaker women view the abortion issue differently and if the same factors account for variation in each group's attitudes toward abortion. Next, we employ General Social Survey (GSS) data from 1973 to 2000 to assess these considerations empirically. After presenting and discussing our results, We conclude by assessing the implications our findings have for the literature.

[1]Department of Political Science, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Nevada.

[2]To whom correspondence should be addressed at Department of Political Science, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Nevada 89154; e-mail: jelent@unlv.edu.

[3]For example, since the 1990s, abortion attitudes have become an important predictor of vote choice (Abramowitz, 1995; Cook, Jelen, & Wilcox, 1994a, 1994b) and partisan identification (Adams, 1997; Layman, 2001).

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THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The principal independent variable in this study is a combination of gender and employment status. We divide our respondents into three categories: men, employed women (women who participate in the paid labor force), and homemaker women. Although there clearly exist substantial differences in the employment statuses of men, there does not appear to exist a culturally accredited role expectation that corresponds to that of "homemaker" for women. Analysts of abortion politics such as Luker (1984) have shown that the contrast between employed women and homemaker women is central to understanding differences between activists involved in the abortion issue. Moreover, other researchers (Andersen, 1975; Wilcox & Jelen, 1991) have suggested that the experience of paid employment is an important source of political and social values for women so situated.[4]

Our main dependent variable, of course, is the respondent's attitude toward legal abortion. Although public attitudes about the abortion issue are complex and multifaceted, we draw on three properties of abortion attitudes to provide the focus for this study. First, many analysts have suggested that the apparent nonnegotiability of abortion attitudes can be attributed to differences in belief systems or *worldviews*. These views, in turn, may be driven by religion (Jelen, 1984, 1988; Wilcox, 2001) or different social constructions of gender. For example, in her study of pro-life and pro-choice activists, Luker (1984) suggested that female participants in the abortion debate are ultimately divided by different conceptions of the appropriate roles of women. Such differences are thought to stem from distinctions in the vested interests of working and homemaker women. Because of their different social locations, women in the employed labor force and women whose labor is concentrated around the roles of wife and mother appear, at the activist level, to place different values on the status of motherhood. In Luker's account, homemaker women were shown to view men and women as holding complementary, but fundamentally different social roles, whereas employed women were more likely to regard men and women as essentially similar.

Differences in the gender role conceptions of women that are related to differences in employment status also appear to have implications for the importance of parenthood and children. Luker's pro-life activists (a group largely composed of homemaker women) regarded motherhood as an essential component of being female and, consequently, regarded childbearing as the ultimate fulfillment of womanhood. Abortion, for these activists, is seen as illegitimate, because abortion terminates a process that is seen to be natural and God-ordained. By contrast, Luker's pro-choice activists did value parenthood, but regarded childbearing as one of several options that should be available to women. Control over one's fertility, which is *not* typically valued by pro-life activists, is seen by pro-choice activists (composed primarily of women who participate in the paid labor force) as a necessary condition for equality between the sexes.

Similarly, activist-level differences in employment status have been shown to be related to differences in attitudes toward sexual activity outside marriage and to different *gestalts* regarding the importance of human life. Although Luker's pro-life and pro-choice activists both clearly place a high value on human life, Luker showed that the pro-choice activists tend to be somewhat more concerned with the *quality* of life a given person might experience. The general point here is that the differences in worldviews that Luker identified among pro-choice and pro-life activists extend to a number of different aspects of the abortion issue.

As a consequence, pro-life and pro-choice activists might literally be talking past one another because of fundamentally different perceptions of the abortion issue. Although it is unclear if activist-level distinctions account for differences among members of the mass public, it seems plausible that differences in the employment status of women could have clear implications for the politics of abortion. If control of one's fertility is in fact necessary to pursue gender equality in the workplace, abortion attitudes seem likely to vary according to the value placed upon such equality.

A second feature of public attitudes concerning abortion that we address is the apparent stability of

[4]Of course, people may elect to enter the paid labor force for a variety of reasons, which would often include some combination of the intrinsic value of such activity and economic necessity. Although we have no means of assessing the mix of such motives for employed women, our data suggest that the mix did not change during the period under consideration. When we examine the relationship between education (an approximate indicator of economic security) and the dependent variable, we observe that the relationship has become weaker in the most recent time period for both employed women and homemaker women. This uniformity suggests that the mix of goals for paid employment has not changed in any systematic way. Of course, personal or familial income would be a preferable measure of economic security, but the range of the GSS income variable is restricted at the upper end to $25,000/year.

such attitudes. Abortion attitudes are quite stable at the individual (Converse & Markus, 1979) and aggregate levels. Collectively, past research suggests that large majorities favor legal abortion for "traumatic reasons," such as maternal health, rape, incest, or possible fetal defect. Somewhat weaker support exists for access to abortion for "elective" reasons (e.g., economic or family planning considerations; Cook, Jelen, & Wilcox, 1992; Sharp, 1999).

The apparent stability of abortion attitudes, however, is somewhat surprising given the emergence of a variety of factors since *Roe* v. *Wade* that may have pushed citizens' attitudes in a pro-choice direction. Specifically, there have been several highly visible Supreme Court cases, which could have mobilized public attitudes in a manner analogous to *Roe.* Also, there has been substantial population replacement since 1973, with younger, more pro-choice citizens replacing older, more pro-life counterparts (Wilcox & Norrander, 2001).[5] In addition, attitudes about nonmarital sex have become considerably more permissive over time, and attitudes about appropriate gender-based divisions of labor have progressed. Finally and perhaps most importantly, the gender composition of the paid labor force has also changed drastically since *Roe*. To this end, our analysis of the GSS indicates that the share of the overall White population engaged as homemakers declined from 28% in 1972 to just over 12% in 2000.[6] This represents a major change in the aggregate distribution of the occupational status of women, and if the positive relationship between female employment status and abortion attitudes persists, this change should have resulted in a large increase in public support for legal abortion. As a consequence, the apparent placidity of aggregate abortion attitudes may mask important, but countervailing, changes in public opinion.

Of course, aggregate abortion attitudes have not been completely stable in the years since *Roe*, and it is the dynamics of the distribution of such attitudes that provide the focus for this paper. Approval of legal abortion rose in the immediate aftermath of the *Roe* decision, although *Roe* also appeared to have something of a polarizing effect on public opinion (Franklin & Kosaki, 1989). Support for the pro-choice position dropped somewhat in the mid-1980s and rose again in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's decision in *Webster* v. *Missouri Reproductive Services*. Since *Webster*, there has been a slight decline in pro-choice sentiment that began in the mid-1990s (Wilcox & Norrander, 2001).

Drawing on these findings, we assess two general issues. First, are there differences in the manner in which men, employed women, and homemaker women view the issue of abortion? That is, are the worldview differences documented by Luker and Ginsburg at the activist level replicated at the level of public opinion? Second, are the factors affecting each group's attitudes similar, or are there differences in the dynamics of abortion attitudes stemming from distinctions in the life circumstances of men, working women, and homemaker women?

DATA AND METHOD

Data for this study were taken from the GSS from 1973 to 2000. The dependent variable is a scale of attitudes toward legal abortion, ranging from 0 (*most pro-life*) to 6 (*most pro-choice*). The scale was computed by adding affirmative responses to questions asking if the respondent believed that legal abortions should be available under the following circumstance: if the woman's health was endangered by the pregnancy, if there was a chance for a serious defect in the baby, if the woman became pregnant as the result of rape, if the family was poor and could not afford more children, if the family did not want more children, and if the woman was single and did not wish to marry the man.

The principal independent variable is a combination of gender and employment status. Respondents were assigned to one of three categories: men, women who participate in the paid labor force (hereafter designated as employed women or working women), and homemaker women. We analyze the abortion attitudes of each of these groups separately.

To assess the dynamics of abortion attitudes over time across these groups, we divide the GSS into four time periods: post-*Roe* captures the period immediately following the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe* v. *Wade* and runs from 1973 to 1982; Reagan, which

[5]The relationship of generations or other age-related variables to abortion attitudes is complicated by the fact that there is a general tendency for the youngest cohorts to exhibit more frequent pro-life attitudes. We suspect that this is something of a life cycle effect, occasioned by the inexperience of very young adults with the possibility of contraceptive failure. See Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox, 1993, and Wilcox and Norrander, 2001, for further discussion of this phenomenon.

[6]In other words, a woman living in the United States at the end of the twentieth century is less than half as likely to be engaged as a full-time homemaker than her counterpart during the Nixon administration.

serves as the comparison category, captures a period in the mid-1980s, which we term the Reagan era (1983–88); post-*Webster* denotes the period following the Supreme Court's decision in *Webster* v. *Missouri Reproductive Services* (1989–93); and post-*Casey* is used for the period following the Court's decision in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania* v. *Casey*, in which the Court's essential holding in *Roe* was reaffirmed. These periods correspond to changes in the marginal distribution of abortion attitudes reported in previous research (Sharp, 1999; Wilcox, 2001; Wilcox & Norrander, 2001) and are derived inductively from the extant literature. The terms used to designate the time periods are simply descriptive and are not intended to convey causal explanations. Thus, we have no direct evidence that changes in aggregate abortion attitudes that began in the 1980s are necessarily attributable to the influence of Ronald Reagan's pro-life advocacy, nor are we convinced that changes in the marginal distributions of abortion attitudes occurring after 1989 or 1993 are necessarily occasioned by public reactions to the *Webster* or *Casey* decisions. It is perhaps as likely that changes in a pro-life direction occurring in 1980s or 1990s may be attributable to public reaction to elite-level debate about so-called partial birth abortions, or to responses to the AIDS crisis reducing the acceptability of sex outside marriage.

A variety of control variables are used for the multivariate analysis reported below. We impose controls for demographic variables such as southern residence,[7] urban–rural residence, age, and education. We also included the respondent's age squared as a variable, to account for possible curvilinearity of the relationship between age and abortion attitudes (Cook et al., 1993; Wilcox & Norrander, 2001). Race is controlled with a dummy variable, coded 1 for African Americans and 0 for European Americans (Whites). Because religious variables have been shown to be important predictors of abortion attitudes, we include controls for evangelical Protestantism (denominational affiliation), Roman Catholicism, Judaism, church attendance, and secularism.[8]

Finally, the effects of several attitudinal variables were considered as well. We examined the impact of attitudes toward euthanasia, which we regarded as an acceptable, albeit imprecise, indicator of "respect for human life."[9] This variable was measured as a dummy variable, coded 1 for respondents who supported euthanasia and 0 for those who did not. We used a measure of attitudes toward premarital sex as an indicator of traditional or permissive attitudes toward sexual morality.[10] This variable ranged from 1 to 4 with higher values indicating more permissive attitudes toward premarital sex.

Also included are indices of two distinct gender role attitudes. Some research (Jelen, 1989) has suggested that stereotypes about women are multidimensional. Some gender role traditionalists have suggested that women should not participate in business or politics because they consider women unfit for these more "masculine" activities. Others (see especially Falwell, 1980; Gilligan, 1982) have suggested that, although women may not be less able than men to participate in activities outside the home, they are uniquely suited for the more domestic roles of wife and mother. It has been shown (Jelen, 1988) that the dimension of "public inferiority" and "domestic superiority" are empirically, as well as conceptually, distinct. We computed indices that attempt to capture both aspects of gender role stereotypes, which we term *public* and *private feminism*, respectively (for an elaboration of a similar distinction, see Stoper and Johnson, 1977).

The index of public feminism consisted of the following items:

> Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Women should take care of their homes and leave running the country up to men.
>
> Do you approve or disapprove of a married woman earning money in business or industry if she has a husband capable of supporting her?
>
> If your party nominated a woman for President, would you vote for her if she were qualified for the job?

[7] Readers familiar with the GSS are aware that the coding of regional variables is somewhat unorthodox. Thus, for present purposes, the "South" is defined as including Maryland, Virginia, the District of Columbia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Texas, Alabama, and Mississippi.

[8] Seculars are defined stringently as respondents who report no denominational preference, *and* who never attend religious services.

[9] For arguments justifying the use of this measure, see Cook et al., 1992, and Jelen, 1984, 1988.

[10] Previous researchers (e.g., Cook et al., 1992; Jelen, 1984, 1988) employed an index of sexual morality attitudes, which involved attitudes toward premarital sex, extramarital sex, and sexual relations among gays. However, in the most recent versions of the GSS, different combinations of these items were included on different "ballots," making the computation of a multi-item index impractical.

> Tell me if you agree with this statement: Most men are better suited for politics than are most women.

After these items were recorded to a common range and direction, they formed an index (mean value) with a high level of reliability ($\alpha = .68$). We term these attitudes public feminism because they seem to tap attitudes about the fitness of women for roles outside the domestic sphere, such as business, industry, or politics.

By contrast, a measure of private feminism taps attitudes about possible female abilities in the area of child care and domestic nurturing (see Gilligan, 1982). The private feminism index was computed from the following Likert items, which exhibit a reliability (alpha) of .70:

> A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as one who does not work.
>
> It is more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself.
>
> A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.

The feminism indices are coded from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating more liberal responses with respect to women's rights and gender equality. A dummy variable is used to control for the respondent's status as a parent. Finally, respondents' ideological self-identification is a 7-point scale with lower values indicating greater liberalism.

Readers familiar with the GSS will remember that many of the attitudinal questions considered here were not asked every year, and, in a number of years, certain items were only asked of a subset of respondents. As a consequence, the full multivariate models presented below exhibit very low numbers of cases, relative to the large *N* that characterizes the GSS as a whole. To determine whether the exclusion of so many respondents results in findings that may be substantively misleading, we also estimate more parsimonious models, which do not include the attitudinal variables under consideration here.

GENDER, LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION, AND ATTITUDES TOWARD ABORTION

To assess if substantial differences in abortion attitudes exist among men, working women, and homemaker women, we examine the distribution of abortion attitudes across these three groups and consider the extent to which respondents share a common understanding of the values involved in the abortion controversy. The distribution of abortion attitudes over time is shown in Fig. 1. This figure shows the mean abortion attitude over time for each of the three groups under consideration. It should be noted that the actual differences are very small and that the data range shown was reduced to highlight the differences over time. However, most of the mean values indicated are significantly different from those of the preceding period.

As the analysis in Fig. 1 demonstrates, men and employed women exhibit quite similar distributions of attitudes toward legal abortion, and these attitudes appear to change in the same manner over time. Specifically, both men and employed women display relatively high support for legal abortion in the post-*Roe* era, with a fairly dramatic decline in pro-choice attitudes in the 1980s. Pro-choice attitudes for these two groups increase somewhat in the aftermath of *Webster*, and decline slightly in the period following the *Casey* decision. All of these changes are statistically significant at .05, except that, among employed women the difference between responses in the post-*Webster* and post-*Casey* eras is significant at .08.

By contrast, the pattern for homemaker women is distinctive in two respects. Although the pro-choice attitudes of homemaker women decline significantly during the Reagan era, subsequent changes are extremely small and are not statistically significant. For homemaker women, there is no significant increase in pro-choice sentiment following *Webster*, nor is there a drop in pro-choice sentiment following *Casey* corresponding to the pattern for men and employed women.[11] Further, what is quite striking about the pattern observed for homemaker women is the magnitude of the difference between homemaker women and the other two groups. In all periods, homemaker women are clearly the most pro-life set of respondents under consideration.

Do these differences reflect differences in understanding the values involved in the abortion controversy, or what Luker (1984) has termed, different worldviews? To address this question, we have constructed multivariate models of support for legal abortion for each of the three groups. These models are presented in Table I. Again, we offer reduced

[11] For homemaker women, the difference in abortion attitudes between the Reagan and the post-*Webster* eras, and between the post-*Webster* and the post-*Casey* eras, are not statistically significant ($p = .48$ and .52, respectively).

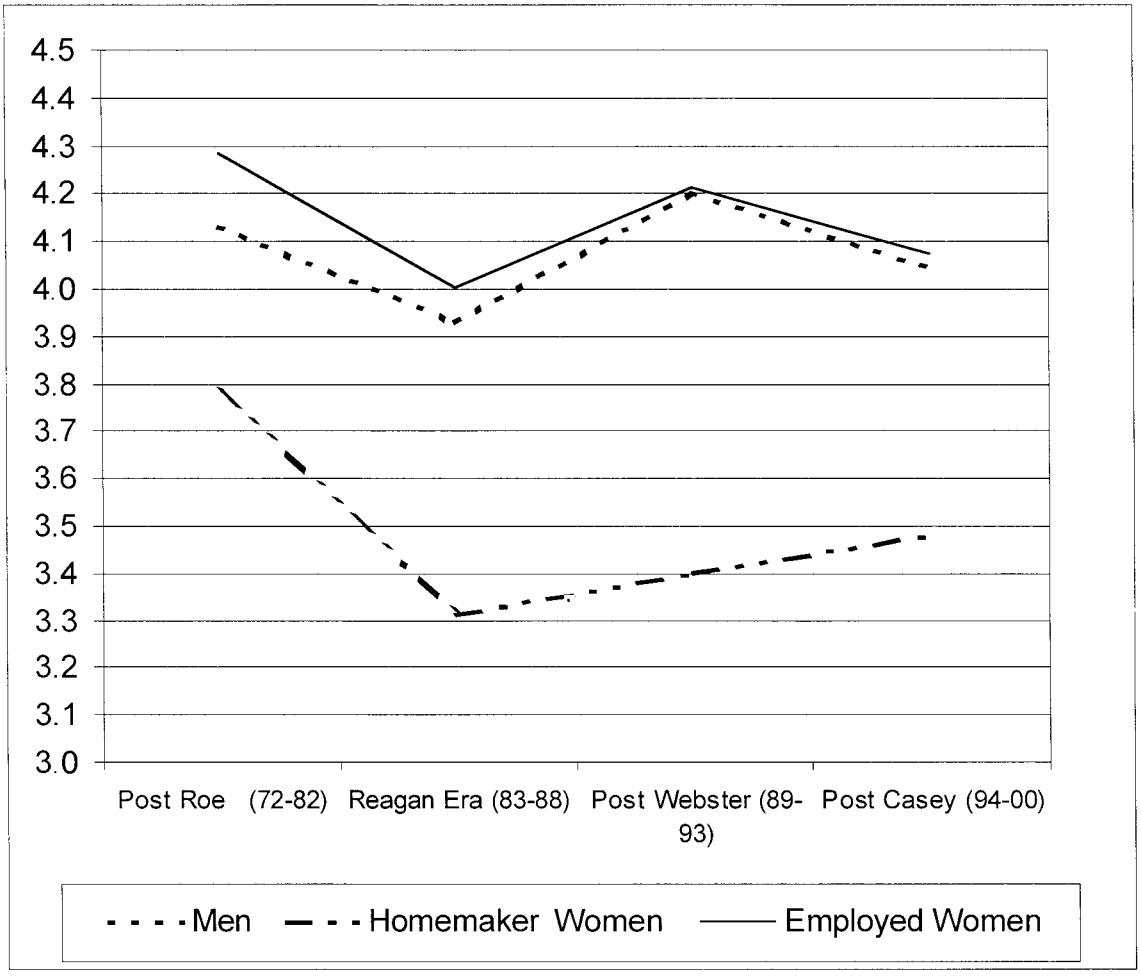

Fig. 1. Abortion attitudes over time (by gender and employment status).

multivariate models (designated as "Model 1" for each group) to account for the loss of cases in the full multivariate models ("Model 2" for each group).

Although overall the results for the three groups are quite similar, there do appear to be some differences among men, employed women, and homemaker women. In the full models, residence in the South is a statistically significant predictor only among employed women. We hypothesize that this somewhat counterintuitive finding is attributable to a mobilization effect among Southern women. If it is the case that traditional gender role expectations are communicated more clearly among Southerners, one consequence may be that employed women adopt more nontraditional attitudes across a number of areas. Such intellectual mobilization might well reduce the cognitive dissonance experienced by some Southern women as they confront the distinction between their own lifestyles and cultural expectations that may be locally salient.

In the full models, only among male respondents are Jews significantly more pro-choice than the rest of the male population, and secularism is significantly related to abortion attitudes only among homemaker women. Although secularism and Judaism are powerful predictors of abortion attitudes in the reduced models, these effects are generally reduced when controls for attitudinal variables are imposed. Surprisingly, the index of private feminism is not a significant predictor of abortion attitudes among homemaker women, and the effects of membership in an evangelical denomination are not significant for men and homemaker women once church attendance is controlled.

Finally, one feature of Table I is particularly noteworthy. Despite the elaborate nature of the models,

Table I. Multivariate Models of Abortion Attitudes Scale, by Gender and Employment Status (OLS Regression)

	Men		Employed Women		Homemaker Women	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Demographics						
South	.00	.07	.00	.25**	.01	.21
Urbanization	.25***	.07**	.37***	.15	.34***	.41***
Age	.00	.01	.01**	.01***	.01***	.01**
Age squared	.00	.00	.01*	.01**	.01**	.00
Education	.11**	.01***	.14***	.10**	.13***	.11***
Parent	—	−.29***	—	.00	—	−.20
Race	−.18**	.16	−.11*	.24†	−.17**	.14
Religious						
Church attendance	−.24***	−.15***	−.26***	−.11***	−.23***	−.15***
Secular	.22**	.00	.30**	.16	.49**	.73*
Evangelical denom.	−.58***	−.26	−.63***	−.34***	−.55***	−.14
Catholic	−.54***	−.39***	−.54***	−.58***	−.55***	−.44**
Jewish	.63***	.49*	.54***	.20	.56**	.01
Period[a]						
Post-*Roe*	.21***	.54***	.30***	.89**	.41***	.67***
Post-*Webster*	.17**	.14	.01	.01	.01	−.23
Post-*Casey*	.00	−.11	−.13*	.00	.01	.00
Attitudinal						
Euthanasia	—	1.11***	—	1.14***	—	1.05***
Private feminism	—	−.61*	—	−.81***	—	−.67
Public feminism	—	−.41**	—	−.39*	—	−.53*
Ideology	—	.01*	—	−.14***	—	−.14**
Premarital sex	—	.36**	—	.36***	—	.31***
Constant	3.54	1.61	3.07	.72	2.47	.92
N	11577	2467	7813	1888	4874	853
Adjusted R^2	.20	.36	.22	.39	.19	.24

Note. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients.
[a] Reagan era (1983–93) comparison category.
† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

the effects of the earliest, post-*Roe* period are strong and statistically significant for all three groups. This result is quite robust; we have experimented with a variety of model specifications (the model presented in Table I uses the Reagan era as the comparison category), and across all different models, the post-*Roe* period is distinctive, and the subsequent periods (Reagan era, post-*Webster*, and post-*Casey*) are statistically indistinguishable from one another in this multivariate context.

Substantively, we interpret the period results as follows: The 1980s witnessed a strong pro-life period effect, which was relatively uniform across groups, and which may have been suppressed by increased tolerance of sexual activity outside marriage, increased female labor force participation, and substantial changes in attitudes about appropriate gender roles. Once these effects have been controlled, the period effect perhaps becomes even more striking. By contrast, the pro-choice changes that are observed post-*Webster* and post-*Casey* seem largely artifactual, and may be attributable to changes in the composition of the U.S. population over time.[12]

Of course, it would be desirable to understand the nature of the 1980s pro-life period effect. We are not in a position to offer an explanation for this finding, but it does seem unlikely that the drop in pro-choice sentiment can be attributed to President Reagan's highly visible pro-life advocacy. If some sort of presidential leadership effect was in fact occurring, we would expect the effect to be strongest among those respondents most predisposed to respond to presidential cues, such as Republicans or self-reported supporters of President Reagan. The model shows that the decline in pro-choice sentiment

[12] It should be noted that we performed diagnostic analyses to determine whether time period interacted with other variables. Although we cannot dismiss the possibility of interaction effects, our examinations of relationships between the regressors in Table I and the abortion scale over time reveal no important differences. Although some changes clearly did occur, they were relatively uniform across groups.

that occurred in 1980s is quite genuine and does not appear confined to particular subgroups.

We cannot, however, dismiss the possibility that a possible "Reagan effect" might be more subtle. It seems quite possible that Reagan's very public support for a pro-life position on the abortion issue may have had the effect of making pro-life rhetoric more acceptable and therefore more conspicuous. Given the educational differences between pro-choice and pro-life activists reported by Luker and others, pro-life discourse may have seemed unsophisticated or parochial prior to the Reagan administration. Reagan's popularity, and the visibility of his position on abortion, may have introduced articulate pro-life voices into the public dialogue (see Noelle-Neuman, 1993).[13]

Although recent studies have suggested that attitudes toward abortion have become polarized along party lines (Abramowitz, 1995; Adams, 1997; Cook et al., 1994a, 1994b; Layman, 2001), our analyses suggest that the Reagan era period effect and partisan polarization of the abortion issue are largely independent phenomena. Inclusion of variables measuring Republican and Democratic partisanship in the models reported in Table I do not affect the effects of the time periods we examine in this analysis. Of course, such a model is seriously misspecified, in that it assumes that partisanship drives abortion attitudes, rather than vice versa. Nevertheless, the analysis has heuristic value and suggests the statistical independence of changes in the marginal distributions of abortion attitudes from the increasing relationship between abortion attitudes and party identification within the mass public.

Although the full models depicted in Table I are based on small and perhaps unrepresentative subsets of the GSS samples, we are confident that the full models are reasonable estimates of the U.S. population parameters for the period under consideration. The full models compare quite favorably with the more parsimonious models (Model 1 for each group). Of course, the addition of attitudinal variables in the full models (Model 2 for each group) does make some difference. When church attendance is controlled, race is no longer a significant predictor of abortion attitudes and the sign of the relationship is reversed. Certain period effects are significant in the reduced specification models, but not when the full models are estimated. The effects of secularism and Judaism are significant in the reduced models, but, in the full models, secularism is only related to abortion attitudes among homemaker women, and Judaism only affects abortion attitudes among men. Nevertheless, the overall similarity between the full and reduced multivariate models is quite impressive.

The data from these multivariate models can also provide insight into differences in worldviews at the level of the mass public. The attitudinal variables included in the full models permit us to determine whether different attitudes have diverse effects on abortion opinions among men, employed women, and homemaker women. For example, Luker's analysis of abortion activists might lead us to suspect that employed women would exhibit a strong relationship between abortion attitudes and beliefs about the desirability of female employment (our indicator of public feminism), whereas homemaker women might place a higher value on traditional sexual morality.

To investigate this possibility, we compare the effects of various attitudinal variables on abortion attitudes for each of our three comparison groups. Table II contains the standardized regression coefficients associated with the religious and attitudinal variables included in Table I. This enables us to estimate the relative impact of each variable within each comparison group. We cannot compare coefficients across groups, using the standardized regression coefficients. However we can compare the relative magnitude of different variables within each group.

What stands out most clearly in Table II are the strong similarities between the effects of different variables on the abortion attitudes of men, employed women, and homemaker women. Among the

Table II. Predictors of Abortion Attitudes, by Gender and Employment Status (OLS Regression)

	Men	Employed women	Homemaker women
Church attendance	−.21***	−.15***	−.21***
Secular	.01	.02	.06
Evangelical	−.06***	−.08***	−.14***
Catholic	−.09***	−.13***	−.09***
Jewish	.04	.01	−.01
Euthanasia	.25***	.27***	.25***
Private feminism	−.05*	−.06***	−.05
Public feminism	−.06**	−.04*	−.06*
Ideology	.05*	−.10***	−.14**
Premarital sex	.22**	.23***	.19***

Note. Entries are standardized regression coefficients. Models include controls for southern residence, urbanization, age, age squared, education, parental status, race, and time period.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

[13] We are indebted to Mark Rozell for this insight.

religious variables, the effects of church attendance are consistently more powerful than membership in a particular denomination. Only among employed women do the effects of a particular religious affiliation (Catholicism) approach those associated with church attendance. Religious devotion, rather than exposure to specific messages, is the most important religious consideration in accounting for variation in attitudes toward legal abortion for all three groups.

Among attitudinal variables, the euthanasia item, despite its questionable validity, is consistently the strongest predictor of abortion attitudes, closely followed by attitudes toward premarital sex. Although the items measuring personal ideology, feminism, and the ideal number of children are generally significant as well, these variables appear less important in explaining abortion attitudes for all three groups. Again, the most important finding is the strong similarity between the three groups. Far from exhibiting different and potentially incommensurable worldviews, men, employed women, and homemaker women bring the same considerations to bear on their attitudes toward abortion and weigh these considerations in virtually identical ways.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to investigate if differences in gender and employment status affect attitudes toward abortion and if these differences have distinctive cognitive bases. The results of this study indicate both similarities and differences between Americans based on their gender and employment status. The main contrast, of course, is in the marginal distribution of abortion attitudes among homemaker women when compared to the other two groups. Apparently, as might be anticipated by Luker and others, the experience of domestic labor provides distinctive preferences on the abortion issue.

Of course, many analysts have suggested that the abortion debate is characterized by a "clash of absolutes," in which holders of incommensurable worldviews talk past one another. Our data suggest that, whereas such a description might accurately describe activist-level abortion discourse, it does not reflect the pattern of mass attitudes about legal abortion. Members of all three comparison groups generally employ similar considerations and rank the competing values relating to abortion in very similar ways. Moreover, it is perhaps of interest to note that, although attitudes about appropriate gender roles in the home, workplace, or public arena are significant predictors of abortion attitudes for all three groups, the effects of gender role attitudes are much weaker than those associated with respect for human life and sexual morality. To a large extent, then, abortion is not a "woman's issue" at the level of the mass public. That is, the vested interests that characterize pro-life and pro-choice activists do not seem salient to nonactivist members of the mass public. The differences in the marginal distributions of abortion attitudes between women with diverse economic roles is not generally translated into conscious considerations of gender role interests or identity.

Our research has uncovered some interesting patterns over time. We find that abortion attitudes are generally stable, with a slightly pro-life trend during the period since *Roe* v. *Wade*. The most robust finding, of course, is the decline in pro-choice attitudes that occurred during the early years of the Reagan administration. Unlike the more recent changes in abortion attitudes, the changes that coincided with the presidency of Ronald Reagan are quite robust and clearly cannot be attributed to compositional changes in the electorate. Given these changes, and changes in attitudes toward sexual morality and gender roles, this trend is quite remarkable. Future research will undoubtedly focus on the nature of the period effect, which appears to have occurred during 1980s.[14]

Thus, a generation of heated discourse surrounding the issue of abortion has apparently led to the development of common frames of reference among men and women. Clearly, abortion *is* a woman's issue to the (considerable) extent that the availability of legal abortion has a much greater potential effect on the lives of women than on those of men. Men and women (regardless of labor force participation) appear to have very similar cognitive maps of this issue in that their attitudes toward abortion are shaped by the same considerations. As a consequence, to the extent that abortion is an important component of a "culture war," there is at least general agreement about the shape of the battlefield and the rhetorical weapons that may legitimately be employed.

[14] Wilcox and Norrander (2001) reported increases in the percentage of respondents who believe that "abortion is murder" in recent years, suggesting the possibility of a changing "framing" of the abortion issue. We find no corresponding trend with the euthanasia item used here, but this may simply reflect the imprecise nature of the measurement in question.

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