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NEWS FROM THE FRONT: INTERSEX AND INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICT OVER THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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CONSCIOUSNESS and conflict are essential prerequisites of change in the status of women. As Harriet Martineau wrote one hundred forty years ago, "All women should inform themselves of the condition of their sex, and of their own position. It must necessarily follow that the noblest of them will, sooner or later, put forth a moral power which shall prostrate cant, and burst asunder the bonds (silken to some, but cold iron to others), of feudal prejudices and usages."[1] Martineau, like the feminists of today who join or organize consciousness-raising groups, viewed self-consciousness and consciousness of the status of women as a group necessary to change. Her observation shows an early recognition of the difference between "objective social reality" and perception as well as the effect of both on behavior. Consciousness raising, as suggested by Martineau and asserted by more recent feminists, is a change in self-perception as well as a change in social relations involving women. Martineau assumed that feminist activity was impossible until women became capable of seeing their lives as they "really were."

Each time large numbers of women become conscious of their situation conflict follows. It has never been enough for women to point out the ills they observe. More often than not change has involved the development of and conflict between feminist movements and organizations on the one side and counter movements and organizations on the other; in other words, a public, social conflict. Change does not seem to occur without the development of both consciousness and social conflict. This paper is addressed to the problem of consciousness or perception of social conflict over the status of women.

THE STUDY: SEX, GENERATIONS, AND SOCIAL CONFLICT

Louis Kriesberg defines social conflict as "a relationship between two or more parties who (or whose spokesmen) believe they have incompatible goals."[2] By this definition, which includes a social movement as a party to a social conflict, "if the parties come to *believe* that they have incompatible goals, a social conflict has emerged."[3] The crucial aspect of this formulation for the purposes of this paper is the element of belief, awareness, or percep-

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[1] Harriet Martineau, "Society in America," in *The Feminist Papers,* ed. Alice Rossi (New York: Bantam, 1974), pp. 142-43.

[2] Louis Kriesberg, *The Sociology of Social Conflict* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 17.

[3] Ibid., p. 18. Kriesberg distinguishes between social conflict and competition by noting, "Conflict is related to competition; but the two are not identical. Competition may or may not involve awareness; conflict does. In the case of competition parties are seeking the same ends whereas conflicting parties may or may not be in agreement about the desirability of or generally seek that which is not already part of or dominated by the competitor" (p. 18).

tion, *whether correct or incorrect,* of the incompatibility of goals or of the distance in normative position of at least two parties. Kriesberg futher defines the conditions of awareness as follows: "First, the groups or parties to the conflict must be conscious of themselves as collective entities, separate from each other. Second, one or more groups must be dissatisfied with their position relative to another group. Finally, they must think that they can reduce their dissatisfaction by the *other* groups acting or being different. . . ."[4] He concludes, "Without self-conscious groups, discontented persons may express their dissatisfaction individually but not engage in a social conflict."[5]

A social conflict over the rights, roles, and status of women exists. There are parties to the conflict, members of feminist groups on one side, the large number of legislators, judges, and members of "New Right" organizations on the other. These groups are obviously painfully aware of an incompatibility of goals. But however clear the social conflict appears to what we might call the activist elite — the Steinems, Friedans, Schlafleys, and Bryants — in order to understand the full breadth and depth of the conflict it is essential to know the extent to which the mass public is involved. This requires assessing the degree to which perceptions in the mass public fit the conditions suggested by Kriesberg. Thus, this paper focuses on the following questions: Who, other than the formal organizations leading the battle, are the "parties to the conflict"? In the eyes of those who may be partisans but not activists which, if any, larger social categories do the leaders represent? How does the public evaluate its relationship to the conflict? These questions focus our attention on the definition of the social conflict in the eyes of the public, on public perceptions of the public.[6]

The question of who constitutes the parties to the conflict over women's rights may appear shallow at first. The Women's Movement, of course, claims to represent the interests of women. But upon reaching this conclusion we are led immediately to a series of problems. First, the Women's Movement claims to represent not only the interests of women, but the interests of humanity at large. More importantly, claiming women constitute one party to the conflict suggests that men constitute the other party. Envisioning the conflict as one of men vs. women presents a number of problems. A quick glance at the news shows the leaders and activists of both sides include both women and men. Moreover, it is unlikely that a conflict perceived simply as one of women versus men would attract many people. The majority of women are tied economically, emotionally, or at least legally to men. Most people's lives and interests are intricately entangled with the lives and interests of a person of the other sex. Despite many of the public arguments of feminists and anti-feminists, and especially the images of the conflict presented by the mass media, the two sexes are not very clearly on opposite sides of the conflict.

Another way of defining the parties to conflict over women's rights is in terms of generational conflict. The women's movement is fighting for changes in economic, social, and political norms and behavior that were dominant in earlier generations. The women's movement is often characterized as young women (and men) making choices about their education, careers, and family life that their mothers (and fathers) would not have made. The conflict over women's roles can be seen as essentially generational

[4] Ibid., p. 61.

[5] Ibid., p. 62.

[6] For other discussion of the role of person perception, see Albert H. Hastorf, David J. Schneider, and Judith Polefka, *Person Perception* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1970).

in two senses; first, as a conflict between or among generations socialized to different gender norms because they grew up in different eras, and second, as a conflict between biological generations over how the younger generation will structure its life.

There are problems with seeing conflict over women's roles as a pure generational conflict. Again, if we turn to the media image of the women's movement, the focus has shifted in many respects from campus activity to the activities of middle aged and older Americans. The prominent leaders are drawn from all ages, and, especially with the revitalization of fundamentalism, many of the very active antis are young women. Most women's issues affect older people; among a list of concerns that includes, for example, employment, sexuality, abortion, social security benefits, divorce laws, and inheritence laws, there is something for everyone in the feminist "programme." Older Americans are not immune to development of alternatives to traditional family structures; because of discriminatory social security laws many older women find cohabitation with a new liaison a less expensive alternative to marrying him. There is some evidence that role relationships among the old have not been as different from those of the young as we once thought. Van den Berghe, for example, points to a curvilinear relationship between age and egalitarian relationships in marriage.[7]

There are reasons for the public to see conflict over women's roles as a social conflict between the sexes and among the generations. There are also factors mitigating against this type of conceptualization. The empirical question explored in this paper is primarily a descriptive one; the degree to which the public conceptualizes the conflict over women's rights as sex conflict and/or generational conflict. This paper first examines public attitudes toward and beliefs about women compared across the sexes and generations in order to assess the general degree of conflict existing in the public. Second, it show the public's perceptions of intersex and intergenerational conflict over equality of women and men. Third, it demonstrates the relation between self-reports and the positions of the sexes and generations as perceived by the respondents. Finally, it offers a speculative discussion of the implications of the results.

The data used in this analysis are drawn from the University of Michigan 1976 Election Study (Wtd N=1203 men and 1659 women).[8] Conflict over women's rights appeared to be at a high point; battles over abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment, and "reverse discrimination" were very much in the news.

The task of deciding how to define generations for analysis is difficult.[9] If we understand a generation as a group of people who "are endowed ...

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[7] Pierre Van den Berghe, *Age and Sex in Human Societies: A Biosocial Perspective* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1973), pp. 117-18.

[8] The data utilized in this paper were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. The data for the CPS 1976 American National Election Study were originally collected by the Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, under a grant from the National Science Foundation. Neither the original collectors of the data nor the Consortium bear any responsibility for the analysis or interpretations presented here.

[9] For discussion of the "problem of generations," see Vern L. Bengston, "The Generation Gap: A Review and Typology of Socio-Psychological Perspectives," in *The New Pilgrims,* ed. Philip Altbach and Robert Laufer (New York: David McKay, 1972), pp. 195-217; Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," in *The New Pilgrims,* ed. Altbach and Laufer, pp. 101-38; and Vern Bengston, Michael Furlong, and Robert Laufer, "Time, Aging, and the Continuity of Social Structure: Themes and Issues in Generational Analysis," *Journal of Social Issues* 30 (1974): 1-30.

with a common location in the historical dimension of the social process"[10] rather than as a biologically defined group we have the problem of deciding first, which "common location" is relevant and second, how to determine who is located there. Thus, operational definitions of generations must vary widely depending on the subject under study as well as the researcher's conception of "the historical dimension of the social process."[11] Strictly speaking, decade analysis, a form commonly used in social research, is not generational analysis. Clustering people according to whether they are between the ages of 30 and 40 or 60 and 70 is not usually based on any socio-historical conceptualization.

Table 1 shows the generational breakdowns used in this analysis. The eras are defined in relation to women's history.[12] The eras or transitions are marked by either events of particular importance to women or by the type of broad characterizations we often use to mark off historical periods. Thus, the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment serves as a time marker, and the twenties, characterized by a post-suffrage flurry of recognition of women, is distinguished from the Depression era. Of particular interest is the transition from World War II, the era of Rosie the Riveter and national day care centers, to the thirteen-year period characterized by Betty Friedan as the time of the "Feminine Mystique," a "dark age" in women's history according to feminist observers.[13] Although the entire post-1960 period saw the growth of social movements and policy-making aimed at equality, it is further divided by the birth of the Women's Liberation Movement. The generations are defined by "adulthood cohorts," or the period during which the respondents became 21, rather than "birth cohorts." If we are interested in period effects on people's consciousness or ideology, focusing on the year of birth is less relevant than the time at which a person passes through other critical phases of life. Of course compelling arguments could be made for using any of a range of ages. In this study the age of twenty-one was chosen

TABLE 1. THE GENERATIONS DEFINED

Generation	*Year Became 21*	*Birth Cohort*	*Age in 1976*
Pre-Suffrage	Pre-1920	1899	77+
Twenties	1921-1929	1900-1908	68-76
Depression	1930-1939	1909-1918	58-67
War	1940-1945	1919-1924	52-57
Mystique	1946-1959	1925-1938	38-51
Sixties	1960-1966	1939-1945	31-37
WLM	1967-1976	1946-1958	18-30

[10] Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations . . .," p. 105.

[11] There are many approaches to operational definition of generations. For different examples, see David Butler and Donald Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (New York: St. Martin's, 1969); Vincent Jeffries, "Political Generations and the Acceptance or Rejection of Nuclear War," *Journal of Social Issues* 30 (1974): 119-36; Arthur Johnson et al., "Age Differences and Dimensions of Religious Behavior," *Journal of Social Issues* 30 (1974): 43-67; Paul Abramson, "Generational Change and the Decline of Party Identification in America: 1952-1974," *American Political Science Review* 70 (June 1976): 469-78; and Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, *The New Presidential Elite* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

[12] This is not to say that these eras, for example the Depression and World War II, did not affect men. The problem here is to find eras that presumably have specific relevance to women's roles and cultural ideology regarding these roles. For a useful work on twentieth century women's history, see William Chafe, *The American Woman* (New York: Oxford, 1974). For discussion of feminist historiography as well as specific studies, see Bernice Carroll, ed., *Liberating Women's History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974).

[13] Betty Friedan, *The Feminist Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1963).

in part because it was for most of this century the legal age of majority throughout most of the country, and a time when most people have left the domain of their parents' authority and have begun to have independent contact with the society and culture around them. In addition, 21 is close to the average age of first marriage for women in this century, the age at which women make critical decisions affecting their gender roles.

"Real Differences": Comparisons of the Sexes and Generations

Before evaluating perceptions of sex and generational conflict it is necessary to assess the degree to which evidence of sex and generational conflict emerges when we look at the beliefs and attitudes of these different groups. Table 2 shows generational and sex breakdowns of responses on four measures, each focusing on a different aspect of attitudes toward or beliefs about women and/or men. The results reveal little conflict between the sexes and a moderate amount of conflict among generations.

The first measure, egalitarianism, will be used throughout as a key indicator of self-placement with regard to attitudes toward women's roles. The respondents were asked to place themselves on a 1 to 7 scale ranging from "women should have an equal role [with men in running business, industry, and government]" to "women's place is in the home." Table 2 shows no sex differences in egalitarianism except in the Pre-Suffrage generation, although patterns of generational change appear different for women and men. Male attitudes appear virtually identical from one generation to the next. The "average male," regardless of generation, perceives his position as leaning toward the egalitarian side of the measure. In contrast, there is a clear tendency for older generations of women to express more traditional attitudes than do the younger. Indeed, the oldest generations of women lean toward the traditional side.

The second measure, "Power," combines the responses to two questions in order to show the degree of power discrepancy between the sexes observed by the respondents. They were asked whether (1) men and (2) women have "too much influence," "just about the right amount of influence," or "too little influence in American life and politics." On the resulting measure a value of -2 would mean the respondents think men have too much influence and women have too little, a value of 0 would indicate they think men and women have the same amount of influence (whether "too much," "about right," or "too little"), and a value of 2 would mean the respondents think women have too much power and men have too little. The results show that the public, with the possible exception of the oldest men, believes men have somewhat more power than do women, although by and large the perceived power gap is not large. Women, especially in the postwar generations, see greater inequity in influence than do men. Older men and women tend to see power distribution as relatively more egalitarian than do younger men and women. The increase in sex differences in perception of an "influence gap" may be due to the differential impact of the Women's Liberation Movement. The women's movement, which has involved primarily people of the postwar era, concentrates its message much more on women's relatively small access to power (include access to power resources) than it does on a more general notion of equality. Therefore, although all generations have received the message that women should be regarded more as equals to men than they were in the past, the young women have been affected especially by the message that women are lacking in power and influence.

TABLE 2. SELF-PLACEMENT, BY SEX AND GENERATION

	WLM		SIXTIES		MYSTIQUE		WAR		DEPR.		TWENTIES		PRE-SUFF.	
Generations	*Men*	*Wom.*	*Men*	*Wom.*	*Men*	*Wom.*	*Men*	*Wom.*	*Men*	*Wom.*	*Men*	*Wom.*	*Men*	*Wom.*
Egalitarianism														
$\bar{x}$	2.70	2.77	2.69	2.72	3.28	3.23	3.35	3.34	3.31	3.85	3.32	4.10	3.30	4.87
St. Error	.104	.096	.160	.150	.150	.142	.251	.178	.194	.158	.249	.216	.370	.301
Power														
$\bar{x}$	−.44	−.71	−.33	−.76	−.30	−.73	−.26	−.44	−.19	−.38	−.15	−.16	−.11	−.27
St. Error	.054	.045	.076	.067	.056	.062	.073	.082	.062	.068	.091	.066	.129	.107
Nature-Nurture														
$\bar{x}$	6.66	6.85	6.32	6.86	6.25	6.44	6.10	6.18	5.69	6.09	5.50	5.38	5.42	5.58
St. Error	.079	.068	.154	.106	.112	.108	.183	.131	.148	.180	.197	.171	.244	.191
Strategy														
$\bar{x}$	2.80	2.79	2.74	2.69	2.76	2.72	2.56	2.81	2.80	2.70	2.74	2.71	2.67	2.80
St. Error	.049	.037	.073	.057	.052	.051	.079	.069	.065	.051	.087	.069	.113	.092
Average N	278	398	109	162	203	211	75	119	111	182	74	96	27	55

The third item on Table 2 measures the degree to which respondents attribute sex differences in men's and women's achievements to nature or to social factors, the latter including socialization and discrimination.[14] This scale measures a form of egalitarianism. The higher the score the more the respondents feel discrimination or socialization restricts women's opportunities, the lower the score the more they attribute differences to men's innate superiority. A score of 6 means the individual gave half "nature" responses and half "nurture" responses. Table 2 shows only the postwar generations averaging less than half "nature" responses, while all prewar male generations and pre-Depression female generations averaged more than half "nature" responses. Although most generations profess some belief in equality between women and men, most — especially the older generations — also tend to believe men are more naturally capable or desirous of achievement. In these matters women seem in agreement with men; there are no apparent sex differences except in the Early Sixties generation, in which women blame sex differences on social factors more than men do.

The last measure, "Strategy," combines two questions on the best manner in which women can improve their status. In the first the respondents were asked whether "women can best overcome discrimination by pursuing their individual career goals in as feminine a way as possible" or, alternatively, whether "it is not enough for a woman to be successful herself; women must work together to change laws and customs that are unfair to all women." The second question asked respondents to decide whether "the best way to handle problems of discrimination is for each woman to make sure she gets the best training possible for what she wants to do" or "only if women organize and work together can anything really be done about discrimination." In the resulting additive scale, individuals scored 2 if they chose only individual solutions and 4 if they chose only group solutions. Table 2 shows general agreement across the sexes and generations that it is preferable for women to rectify social problems through isolated individual efforts. Only in the War generation are women more favorable toward group solutions than are men. There seems to be remarkable intergenerational agreement. Despite the cliché of America as a nation of joiners, Americans appear to prefer individualist solutions to social ills, at least in the area of equality.

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[14] The text of the questions is as follows:

We'd like to ask you a few questions now about some of the differences between groups in our society. People have different ideas about these things. For each set of statements in this booklet, we would like you to check the one you agree with most.

G14. Many qualified women can't get good jobs; men with the same skills have much less trouble. — or — In general, men are more qualified than women for jobs that have great responsibility.

G20. It's more natural for men to have the top responsible jobs in a country. — or — Sex discrimination keeps women from the top jobs.

G22. By nature women are happiest when they are making a home and caring for children. — or — Our society, not nature, teaches women to prefer homemaking to work outside the home.

G24. Men have more of the top jobs because they are born with more drive to be ambitious and successful than are women. — or — Men have more of the top jobs because our society discriminates against women.

Intercorrelation of the items (Pearson's r; all significant at the .05 level):

G14	1.00			
G20	.43	1.00		
G22	.30	.42	1.00	
G24	.38	.52	.35	1.00
	G14	G20	G22	G24

Table 3 shows two measures of the public's policy preferences with regard to the status of women. The first shows the distribution of opinion about whether "the first workers to be laid off should be women whose husbands have jobs" or "male and female employees should be treated the same." Here the sex differences that emerge in the Mystique, War, Depression, and Twenties generations show women more favorable toward discrimination against women than are men. There is strong tendency for the older generations to be more discriminatory; about three quarters of the youngest generation would treat men and women equally while about two thirds of the oldest group would discriminate against women. The second question, which asks for approval or disapproval of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment, shows perhaps the most surprising results. At least three-quarters of both sexes in every generation express approval of the endangered policy proposal. There is no evidence of generational variation excepting a relative low point among men of the Mystique generation. The sexes are differentiated only in the oldest group which, coincidentally, is also the only group that "came of age" before the ERA had been proposed in any form. In contrast to their disapproval of group-based efforts for change, Americans are remarkably in favor of constitutional change.

TABLE 3. POLICY PREFERENCES, BY SEX AND GENERATION

	% SAYING TREAT SAME		% APPROVAL ERA	
Generations	*Men*	*Wom.*	*Men*	*Wom.*
WLM	78	74	85	87
Sixties	66	67	81	83
Mystique	73	54	75	76
War	65	57	83	83
Depression	52	39	81	77
Twenties	52	36	81	76
Pre-Suffrage	37	34	86	76

Summarizing the "real" picture of generational and sex conflict is a difficult task. If we compare men's and women's perception of their own attitudes toward and beliefs about the equality of men and women we find little evidence of sex differences. Both sexes believe that they are relatively egalitarian, both remain unconvinced that women's success in public life is impeded by socialization and discrimination rather than by chromosomes, hormones, and "nature." The reports of women and men show equal and widespread support for the ERA. In contrast, men express less discriminatory attitudes toward job lay-offs, women seem more cognizant of women's lack of influence in public affairs. This survey provides no opportunity for investigating non-conscious ideology or congruence of behavior with publicly expressed values. Although the self-reports do not reveal much intersex conflict, they do show fairly consistent intergenerational disagreement, especially among women. The only cases in which intergenerational disagreement do not appear are in the public assessment of whether discrimination should be fought by individual or group action and in support for the ERA. Unfortunately it is difficult to arrive at conclusions regarding unique residuals of particular generational effects. If, for example, the Depression, War, or Feminine Mystique eras had unique, shared socialization effects on the young adults of those times, they are not clearly discernible here. There is little question that intergenerational disagreement exists, but it may be char-

acterized here only as a disagreement between the generally older and the generally younger.

Before moving on to public perception of public opinion, one compelling problem must be solved. Are these measures valid indicators of public opinion regarding women's roles? It is difficult to believe women and men differ so little in their attitudes toward women's roles and status and, more particularly, in their attitudes toward change. No doubt the perception of the conflict over women's rights as a social conflict between women and men is strong enough to suggest skepticisim over the validity of the measures.

The theoretical response to the validity question may be drawn from research on sexism as a form of prejudice or stereotype. Much of this work has been inspired by Helen Hacker's landmark discussion of the minority group status of women.[15] Women, perhaps more than other minority groups, are integrated into the dominant culture system and therefore, are subject to the norms of the dominant socialization agents. Women, more than other minority groups, are trained not only to respect, but to love and seek security from those with more social power and status than they have. Indeed, women are trained to see other women as competitors for the dominant group's attention. Women are socialized therefore to accept traditional mores, and to be more jealous of the relatively small social power of other women than of the greater social power of men. As Hacker wrote,

> From those (to us) deluded creatures who confessed to witchcraft to the modern sophisticates who speak disparagingly of the cattiness and disloyalty of women, women reveal their introjection of prevailing attitudes toward them. Like those minority groups whose self-castigation outdoes dominant group derision of them, women frequently exceed men in the violence of their vituperations of their sex.[16]

One of the most vicious results of oppression is that the victim may be led, in turn, to victimize herself.

At the same time Hacker was writing in the United States, Simone de Beauvoir was addressing the same question in France. Her book, *The Second Sex,* is dedicated in large part to answering the question,

> Why is it that women do not dispute male sovereignty? No Subject will readily volunteer to become the object, the inessential; it is not the Other who, in defining himself as the Other, establishes the One. The Other is posed as such by the One in defining himself as the One. But if the Other is not to regain the status of being the One, he must be submissive enough to accept this alien point of view. Whence comes this submission in the case of women?[17]

The answer de Beauvoir provides is three-fold. First, women are socialized to the dominant myths of womanhood. Second, part of the goal of socialization is to teach women to enter relations where they are dependent upon the powerful. Third, women are kept from establishing the type of group consciousness (similar to Hacker's minority group consciousness) that would allow them to become conscious of themselves as women and of the effects of their relationships with others.

Empirical studies document women's acceptance of sexist norms. Perhaps the most well-known is Philip Goldberg's, in which he found women non-consciously rated women's achievements lower than those of men.[18]

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[15] Helen Hacker, "Women as a Minority Group," in *Women: A Feminist Perspective,* ed. Jo Freeman (Palo Alto: Mayfield, 1975), pp. 402-16.

[16] Ibid., pp. 404-5.

[17] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Knopf, 1952), p. xxi.

[18] Philip Goldberg, "Are Women Prejudiced against Women" *Transaction* 5 (April 1968): 28-30.

Although there are some gender issues on which women and men tend to differ,[19] and some evidence that women are not subject to nonconscious sexism as are men,[20] most evidence shows women far from free of the sexism feminists expect from men.[21] Although the majority of leaders and activists in the women's movement are women,[22] the similarity of male and female opinion in mass surveys should not be surprising. Given the nonconscious nature of gender ideology, we may assume that members of neither sex realize how inegalitarian they are.

Another test of the validity of the measures is the high degree of consistency found across the different measures of attitudes toward women. If there is a bias in either the women's or men's responses, it is a consistent bias. Even if we are not getting a "true" indication of the respondents' views on equality of the sexes, we may still learn something from examining the relationships among perceptions, biased though they may be. As Graber wrote in her study of politics and verbal behavior,

> Even if statements are known to be deceptive or slanted, they are still worthy of study. For instance, if a politician falsely denies that he has promised to work for the retention of a military base, the denial may indicate that he has reasons for concealing his promise. Politically significant inferences may be possible. There may be inferences about his perception of the situation. As one team of researchers put it, "Language ... deceives the deceiver: it cannot be stripped bare of its complex relation to a total flow of subjectivity. Within limits, it remains an unwilling 'mirror of the soul.' "[23]

Thus, even biased self-reports of mis-self-perceptions may be useful in judging the public's *perception* of and relationship to social conflict over equality between women and men.[24]

Perceptions of Public Opinion: Problems

One of the major problems in analyzing the accuracy and meaning of perceptions of public opinion is our own difficulty in judging what constitutes an accurate perception. Most studies of person perception analyze situations where there is a "right answer," where the observer knows what an accurate perception is. Analysis of perception of public opinion or "public

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[19] Marie Withers Osmond and Patricia Yancey Martin, "Sex and Sexism: A Comparison of Male and Female Sex-Role Attitudes," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 37 (November 1975): 744-58.

[20] Marianne Ferber and Joan Huber, "Sex of Student and Instructor. A Study of Student Bias," *American Journal of Sociology* 80 (January 1975): 949-63.

[21] John P. McKee and Alex Sherriffs, "The Differential Evaluation of Males and Females," *Journal of Personality* 25 (1957): 356-71; Gail Pheterson, Sara Kiesler, and Philip Goldberg, "Evaluation of the Performance of Women as a Function of Their Sex, Achievement, and Personal History," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 19 (1971): 114-18; Clinton Jesser, "A Dim Light on the Way to Damascus: Selective Feminism among College Women," *Youth and Society* 6 (September 1974): 49-62; Ferber and Huber, "Sex of Student . . .;" Osmond and Martin, "Sex and Sexism . . . ."

[22] "The progression or emancipation of any class usually, if not always, takes place through the efforts of individuals of that class; and so it must be here," Martineau, "Society in America," p. 142.

[23] Doris Graber, *Verbal Behavior and Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 14.

[24] The issue of the definition of equality is a subject of extensive argument among theoreticians of the feminist movement. One additional premise underlies the analysis in this paper: I am presenting no argument regarding either the tie between self-declared egalitarianism and behavior (except to argue that the most viscious form of sexism is non-conscious) or of the likelihood of consistent, well-defined ideology. These matters are beyond the scope of this paper.

beliefs about the beliefs of the public"[25] is impeded by at least two problems: (1) the object of the perception is a "generalized other" rather than specific known individuals and (2) the nature of public opinion itself is very complex.

The difficulty of defining public opinion on women's roles and of assessing the accuracy of public beliefs in this area of public opinion is readily apparent. In the present case, we are interested in public perception of sex and generational conflict. Measures of perception of conflict are drawn primarily from a series of questions following the original egalitarianism measure. Respondents were asked for their perception of how "most men," "most women," "most older people," and "most young people" would respond to the same question. Table 4 shows the distribution of responses and means on the self-placement question as well as the responses to the questions about "most men" and "most women."

TABLE 4. DISTRIBUTION AND MEANS: SEX DIFFERENCES IN EGALITARIANISM

	SELF-PLACEMENT		MOST MEN		MOST WOMEN	
Egalitarianism	*Men*	*Wom.*	*Men*	*Wom.*	*Men*	*Wom.*
Women=Men 1	34%	33%	5%	3%	46%	34%
2	14	12	4	2	24	20
3	11	8	12	6	11	16
4	17	21	26	21	12	21
5	9	8	27	25	4	5
6	5	5	15	21	1	2
Women in Home 7	9	14	10	22	2	2
Total	99%*	101%	99%	100%	100%	100%
$\bar{x}$	3.04	3.27	4.55	5.15	2.15	2.58
St. Error	.067	.060	.052	.043	.049	.045
(N)	(890)	(1271)	(837)	(1157)	(833)	(1160)

*Columns do not add up to 100% because of rounding error

It is clear that no single response reflects the way most women or men feel. If we look for the smallest space in which the most responses cluster we would have to conclude simply that most people place themselves closer to egalitarianism that they do to traditionalism; that is, 59 percent of the men and 53 percent of the women responded with a "one," "two," or "three." These figures constitute a majority, but do they indicate what most people mean when they think of "most men" or "most women?"

Although the sexes do not differ in their self-evaluations of egalitarianism they do perceive a clear difference of opinion between the sexes. Both men and women believe women are more egalitarian than are men, and men attribute more egalitarianism to both sexes than do women.

The public appears to be mistaken in its perception of beliefs about egalitarianism in the United States, especially in its judgment of male opinion. This finding is similar to those of earlier related research.[26] Twenty-one percent of the men and 11 percent of the women think most men fall closer to the egalitarian side of the measure. In contrast, 81 percent of the men and 70 percent of the women think most women fall closer to the egalitarian side. Moreover about one third of the women and close to half of the men —

[25] James Fields and Howard Schuman, "Public Beliefs about Beliefs of the Public," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 40 (Winter 1976-77): 427-48.

[26] Ann Steinmann and David Fox, "Male-Female Perceptions of the Female Role in the United States," *Journal of Psychology* 64 (November 1966): 265-79; Walter G. McIntire, "Female Misperception of Male Parenting Attitudes and Expectancies," *Youth and Society* 6 (September 1974): 194-12.

rather sizable proportions — place women at the extreme egalitarian end of the measure. There is a tendency for both sexes, but particularly the men, to exaggerate the egalitarianism of women. The public sees a war between the sexes on the issue of women's rights.[27]

Perceptions of Sex and Generational Conflict

Table 5 shows sex and generational differences in perception of "most men" and "most women" as well as differences in their perception of sex conflict. "Sex Conflict" combines the responses to the questions that "most men" and "most women" so that a value of −6 indicates a perception of extreme egalitarianism among men and extreme traditionalism among women, a value of 0 indicates a perception of agreement between the sexes, and a value of 6 indicates a perception of extreme traditionalism among men and extreme egalitarianism among women.

TABLE 5. Perception of "Most Men," "Most Women," and "Sex Conflict," by Sex and Generation

	Most Men		Most Women		Sex Conflict	
Generation	*Men*	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*
WLM	4.66[a]	5.28[a]	1.94[a]	2.34[ad]	2.71[ab]	2.95[defg]
Sixties	4.36[c]	5.13[c]	1.88[b]	2.51[b]	2.47	2.59[h]
Mystique	4.76[b]	5.08	2.22[c]	2.69[c]	2.53[c]	2.39[d]
War	4.51[d]	5.34[d]	2.30	2.84[a]	2.16	2.55
Depression	4.13[abe]	4.98[e]	2.32	2.56	1.79[ac]	2.38[e]
Twenties	4.63	4.89	2.84[ab]	2.93	1.79[b]	1.90[fh]
Pre-Suffrage	4.23	5.16	2.21	2.96[d]	2.02	2.16[g]

[a, b, c, . . . h] Shared letters indicate statistically significant difference of intergenerational means within sex or inter-sex means within generation on each measure ($p<.05$).

There is a clear pattern of sex differences in perceptions of both male and female attitudes, although the differences are not statistically significant in all generations.[28] Women of all generations except the two oldest plus the Mystique generation view men as significantly more traditional than do men of the same generation; women of the three postwar generations also view women as significantly more traditional than do men of the same generation. Women, especially younger women, see public opinion of both sexes as less emancipated than do men. In contrast, the different generations of Americans are in remarkable agreement over the opinions of men and women with regard to egalitarianism.

Turning to the summary measure, "Sex Conflict," it is apparent that although men and women differ in exactly how traditional or egalitarian they think the two sexes are, they are in agreement in general in every generation on how much conflict there is between the sexes: men and women of each generation believe women are somewhat more egalitarian than are men. There is evidence of intergenerational disagreement within the sexes, however. The younger men see more sex conflict than do older men. This pattern is more stark among women; those of the Women's

[27] It will be increasingly difficult to make comparisons using percentage distributions when generational breakdowns are included. For this reason, although the question calls for the opinions of *most* (men, women, older, young) and not the *average* (man, woman, older, young), the remainder of this paper demonstrates means rather than percentage differences.

[28] Throughout the paper "significant" refers to statistical significance at the .05 level.

Movement generation see more conflict than does every other generation of women except those of the Sixties and War era.

We have abundant evidence of generational conflict over women's rights. Table 6 shows the public's perception of this conflict. Included are the mean scores of responses to the questions about the attitudes of "most older people," "most younger people," and "Age Conflict." The construction of "Age Conflict" is similar to the construction of "Sex Conflict." A score of −6 indicates a perception of extreme egalitarianism among older people and extreme traditionalism among young people, a score of 0 indicates perception among older and younger people is identical in their level of egalitarianism, and a score of 6 indicates a perception of extreme egalitarianism among younger people and extreme traditionalism among older people.

TABLE 6. PERCEPTION OF "MOST YOUNG," "MOST OLDER," AND AGE CONFLICT, BY SEX AND GENERATION

	MOST YOUNG		MOST OLDER		AGE CONFLICT	
Generation	*Men*	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*
WLM	2.49	2.20[a]	5.03[a]	5.46[a]	2.55[a]	3.25[a]
Sixties	2.47	2.08[b]	4.95[bd]	5.51[b]	2.43[b]	3.38[b]
Mystique	2.55	2.30	5.58[acd]	5.47	3.01[a]	3.13
War	2.20	2.73[ab]	5.21	5.46	2.95	2.77
Depression	2.47	2.37	4.69[ce]	5.52[c]	2.26[c]	3.07[c]
Twenties	2.55	2.60	5.40[e]	5.29	2.92	2.79
Pre-Suffrage	2.26	2.53	5.39	5.50	3.26	3.29

[a, b, c, d, e] Shared letters indicate statistically significant difference of intergenerational means within sex or inter-sex means within generation on each measure ($p<.05$).

Men and women of each generation agree in their assessments of younger people. There is also no apparent disagreement among generations of men, and little among generations of women. Women of the War generation do not appear as convinced of the egalitarianism of young people as do the two youngest generations of women. The War generation of women was also less convinced of the egalitarianism of women than were the youngest women. Much of the substance of the visions young feminists have is hardly new or radical to those women who came of age during World War II; they participated in war work and had little opportunity to be dependent on men at that critical stage of life.

We find more disagreement about the attitudes of older people. Women of the youngest two generations plus those of the Depression era see older people as more conservative than do men of these generations. With regard to assessments of older people, women show intergenerational agreement while the men do not, although the pattern among men does not suggest an interpretation readily.

Analysis of the summary measure, "Age Conflict," shows that women of the two youngest generations and those of the Depression era (their mothers?) see more age conflict than do men of these generations. There is little disagreement among the generations of men or women over how much generational conflict there is. The American public appears to regard current controversies over the status of women not simply as a media event, but as a man-based conflict between men and women, old and young.

How does the battle of the sexes compare with the battle of the generations in the eyes of the public? Table 7 shows sex and generation comparisons of the perception of sex and generational conflict. Among the men, the

WLM generation is the only one which may regard sex conflict as more intense than generational conflict, although these differences are not statistically significant. In contrast the older men, especially those of the Twenties, see the battle of the generations as more intense. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to see the conflict as a battle of generations. This is particularly true among women of the Sixties, Mystique and Depression eras. The similarity of perceptions of sex and generational conflict is most notable among WLM and War women.

TABLE 7. SEX AND CONFLICT COMPARED, BY SEX AND GENERATION

	MEN		WOMEN	
Generation	*Sex Conflict*	*Age Conflict*	*Sex Conflict*	*Age Conflict*
WLM	2.71[ab]	2.55[d]	2.95[bcde]	3.25
Sixties	2.47	2.43[b]	2.59[a]	3.38[a]
Mystique	2.53[c]	3.01[bde]	2.39[b]	3.13[b]
War	2.16	2.95	2.55	2.77
Depression	1.79[bc]	2.26[e]	2.38[c]	3.07[c]
Twenties	1.79[a]	2.92[a]	1.90[d]	2.79
Pre-Suffrage	2.02	3.26	2.16[e]	3.29

[a, b, c, d, e] Shared letters indicate statistically significant differences of intergenerational means and differences of mean level of sex versus age conflict perceived within sex ($p<.05$).

TAKING SIDES: THE RELATION OF SELF-PLACEMENT TO OTHER GROUPS

The final question for empirical investigation is how people see their own position relative to where they place women and men, younger people and older people. The question of relative self-placement may have important bearing on the propensity to accept change, as well as on the validity of the self-placement measure itself. Regardless of the "real" views of men, women, old, and young, the public sees divisions between the sexes and among the generations. Do people tend to place themselves closer to those they think are more egalitarian or to those they think are more traditional?

Table 8 shows how the sexes and generations see themselves in relation to where they see the different "parties to the conflict." A score of −6 on any of these measures would indicate respondents see the group in question as much more egalitarian than themselves, a score of 0 would indicate the respondents place themselves in agreement with the group, and a score of 6 would indicate they see themselves as much more egalitarian than the group.

The most striking result is that "average" men and women — regardless of age — see themselves as more egalitarian then most older people and most men. The self-placement of three generations, those of the Mystique, War, and Twenties eras, as well as all generations of women except those of the Pre-Suffrage era, does not differ significantly from their placement of women. The self-placement of all generations of men except those of the Pre-Suffrage era and of all generations of women except those of the Mystique era do not differ significantly from their placement of the young. Once again, these perceptions appear remarkably stable across generations.

This finding has parallel corroboration in Fields and Schuman's research on public perception of racial attitudes.[29] They too found a tendency for the public to perceive public opinion with a conservative bias; that is, for people to perceive the public first, as more racist than they feel themselves to

[29] Fields and Schuman, "Public Beliefs about Beliefs of the Public."

TABLE 8. SELF-PLACEMENT RELATIVE TO "MOST WOMEN," "MOST MEN," "MOST YOUNG," AND "MOST OLDER," BY SEX AND GENERATION

	MOST WOMEN		MOST MEN		MOST YOUNG		MOST OLDER	
Generation	*Men*	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*
WLM	$-.57^{a*}$	$.02^{a}$	2.15^{ac*}	2.94^{ac*}	$-.03$	$-.09$	2.52^{a*}	3.15^{a*}
Sixties	$-.64^{b*}$	$.15^{b}$	1.83^{b*}	2.73^{b*}	$-.09$	$-.28$	2.44^{b*}	3.12^{b*}
Mystique	$-.23$	.10	2.33^{ef*}	2.51^{*}	.11	$-.31$	3.16^{abc*}	2.89^{*}
War	$-.27$	.13	1.97^{*}	2.69^{*}	$-.29$	.07	2.72^{*}	2.76^{*}
Depression	$-.41^{*}$	$-.12$	1.38^{ae*}	2.26^{a*}	$-.28$	$-.31^{*}$	1.98^{c*}	2.79^{c*}
Twenties	.13	.30	1.92^{*}	2.21^{c*}	$-.17$	$-.07$	2.72^{*}	2.70^{*}
Pre-Suffrage	$-.84^{c*}$	$.78^{ac*}$	1.18^{cdf*}	2.95^{d*}	$-.87^{*}$	.07	2.34^{*}	3.47^{*}

$^{a, b, c, \ldots f}$ Shared letters indicate statistically significant differences of intergenerational means within sex and inter-sex means within generation on each measure ($p<.05$).

* Sex-generational self-placement significantly different from perception of most women, men, young, or older ($p<.05$)

be and second, for people to see the public as more racist than the public reports itself to be. In this study we find that the young and old, women and men divide the sexes and generations into opposing camps and identify themselves with the forces of egalitarianism.

Although the self-reports of the youngest two generations of women and men appear to indicate a lack of conflict between the sexes, Table 4 provides some evidence that young women and men not only perceive differences in egalitarianism "out there," but also feel themselves as part of the tensions. Both these generations of men see themselves as somewhat less egalitarian than are most women. In contrast the women in these two generations identify their own position with that of most women. In these two generations, unlike the others excepting the Pre-Suffrage cohort, women and men differ significantly in both their self-placement relative to most women as well as in their self-placement relative to most men. In addition, the women of the two youngest generations see themselves as significantly more egalitarian relative to older people than do the men. The tension and difference of opinion that was not revealed in the earlier male-female comparison of egalitarianism emerges here.

Summary and Speculation: The Mass Public and Conflict over Women's Status

Analyses of the women's movement tend to focus either on elites and activists of the movement or counter organizations or on legal and policy implications of the movement.[30] Discussion of mass public attitudes toward women and feminism tend not to focus on the relationship of the public at large to the process of social change or the dynamics of the women's movement as a part of widespread social conflict.[31] In this paper I have focused exclusively on mass public perceptions of the social bases of conflict over women's status.

It is clear from these data that Kriesberg's conditions for mass-based social conflict exist. The public is cognizant of a conflict over women's status and it can identify the parties to the conflict. Moreover, the public appears to have taken sides or, perhaps more accurate in terms of these data, the public has taken side. It would be possible to leave the issue here and argue that movement leaders and activists have been successful in their attempt to raise the consciousness of the public over the issue of women's status, and that conditions are ripe for change. However, purely descriptive empirical work of the type presented here is interesting insofar as it satisfies curiosity about the state of the world. It is important in that it is a means of revealing contradictions and problems that urge us toward further speculation and hypothesis development. It is not enough to locate a conflict and identify the parties, especially when analysis seems to indicate relative consensus in terms of both self-placement and partisan alliance. The conclusion therefore offers some speculation about the implication of these findings for understanding the larger characteristics of the social conflict over the status of women as well as the prospects for change. The question addressed here is: If we are engaged in social conflict between men and women, the old and young, how is it that so many people appear to be on the same side? How can there be such consensus in the midst of conflict?

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[30] Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism* (New York: Quardrangle, 1977); Barbara Deckard, *The Women's Movement* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975); Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation* (New York: David McKay, 1975).

[31] For an exception, see Claire Knoche, "Feminism and Political Participation: The Role of Ideology" (doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1978).

One response is, of course, that everyone is not on one side; that many people are projecting themselves as more egalitarian than they really are, and that the perception of "most men" and "most older people" by men and older people is really a projection of their own attitudes.[32] But this response does not offer adequate explanation. It is easy to understand why people would want to identify themselves as being in alliance with those who have more power and status. Why is there a tendency to identify with women, the group with less power and status? More specifically, why do men identify with the "women's side" when in so doing they risk alienation from "their own," the more powerful group? Where is the power of the "women's side" of the battle that apparently overwhelms to some degree the more obvious power resources of the men? The answer may be found in the *interaction* of the sex and generational aspects of the conflict. The strong image of generational conflict, the apparent alliance of young with women and old with men gives women a valuable resource which men do not have: the future.

Use of reference group theory helps demonstrate the point. Harold Kelley distinguishes between two functions of reference groups: normative and comparative. The normative function involves "setting and enforcing standards." "A group can assume this function of norm-setting and norm-enforcement whenever it is in a position to deliver rewards or punishments for conformity or nonconformity."[33] In contrast, "a group functions as a comparison reference group for an individual to the extent that the behavior, attitudes, circumstances, or other characteristics of its members represent standards or comparison points which he uses in making judgments and evaluations."[34] Thus far, *Lysistrata* aside, we have no reason to believe men and older people use women as a reference group in the social conflict over women's rights out of a perception that women are "in a position to deliver rewards or punishments." If men's expression of alliance with women is an indication of reference group behavior, we must seek the reason in the comparative function of reference groups.

The public sees an alliance of women and the young. The young are seen as more egalitarian than the old. Therefore, working within this framework, one might assume that as the current young generations displace the old, the entire society will become more egalitarian. To ally oneself with the male-old side is to accept the destiny of being left behind, of being in a dying minority. This argument may be extended by remembering the cultural equivalence of "equality" with "modernity." Although in practice conscious planning to increase equality has been seen usually as prohibitively expensive or as too much in conflict with other values such as liberty, equality is valued as a goal for American society. The American self-image of a society constantly, although incrementally, moving toward equality is so strong that there is reason to believe that despite resistance to policies designed to increase equality, the public fully expects the future to be more egalitarian than the present.

Adoption of a reference group involves providing a social perspective from which to view oneself. In so doing, one can "visualize his proposed line of action from this generalized standpoint, anticipate the reactions of others, inhibit undesirable impulses, and thus guide his conduct.[35] If one expects

[32] For a discussion of this type, see Fields and Schuman, "Public Beliefs about Beliefs of the Public."

[33] Harold Kelley, "Two Functions of Reference Groups," in *Readings in Reference Group Theory and Research,* ed. Herbert Hyman and Eleanor Singer (New York: Free Press, 1968), p. 80.

[34] Ibid., p. 81.

[35] Tamotsu Shibutani, "Reference Groups as Perspectives," in *Readings in Reference Group Theory and Research,* ed. Hyman and Singer, p. 106.

the definition of "undesirable" or the standards upon which people base their reactions to change, it is likely that reference groups with a tie to the future are at least as important as those based in the present. As Newcomb points out, "one's attitude toward something is not only a resultant of one's previous traffic with one's environment but also a determinant of selective response to present and future environments."[36] Although Newcomb was trying to explain resistance to change, his observation is useful for explaining acceptance of change. Prior traffic with the environment suggests we can expect slow, but nevertheless inevitable change toward equalization of the sexes. The motive to avoid being left behind or worse, the motive to avoid being undesirable, might lead one to enter into a process of anticipatory socialization. Thus, a group that may serve as a comparative reference group today may become the normative reference group of tomorrow.

In conclusion, the speculation offered here presents a vision of mixed blessing for the future of equalization of the sexes. Evidence of mass-based social conflict, an essential ingredient for even evolutionary progress toward equality of women and men, exists. We can also argue that the public is prepared in some sense for a future of more equality. On the other hand, the perception of the generational nature of the conflict suggests strong motives for public resistance to planned change, or at best, motives for passively awaiting future equality. In either case there will be a struggle to achieve any more than incremental change.

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[36] Theodore Newcomb, "Persistence and Regression of Changed Attitudes," in *Readings in Reference Group Theory and Research,* ed. Hyman and Singer, p. 258.