

**WHAT'S IN A LABEL?**  
***The Relationship between Feminist***  
***Self-Identification and "Feminist"***  
***Attitudes among U.S. Women and Men***

JANICE McCABE  
Indiana University

*Although scholars and media critics have suspected a disconnect between feminist self-identification and attitudes among the U.S. public, little is known empirically about this relationship. This article examines the relationships between feminist self-identification, sociodemographics, political orientation, and a range of gender-related attitudes using data from the 1996 General Society Survey. Results suggest that feminists are most likely to be highly educated, urban women who self-identify as liberals and Democrats. Feminist self-identification significantly relates to views about the impact of the women's movement and to core causes of gender inequality. It links less well, particularly for women, to more specific causes and attitudes about what should be (e.g., those implicating working mothers, biology, and God's will). This suggests the importance of analyzing clusters of attitudes regarding ideal gender arrangements and of examining and differentiating between other attitude clusters. These findings point to more multifaceted and heterogeneous meanings of feminist identity among the U.S. public than most research acknowledges.*

**Keywords:** *feminist identity; feminist self-identification; gender attitudes; political attitudes; public support*

Since the first widespread usage of the term "feminist" in the United States in the 1910s, it has been a highly contentious term. Theorists and historians have argued that the word "feminism" is similar to "liberalism" in the range of understandings and distortions it encompasses (Cott 1987). Many theorists and researchers have noted that although Americans, especially American women, exhibit widespread

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: *I wish to thank Clem Brooks, Donna Eder, Emily Fairchild, J. Scott Long, Sandi Kawecka Nenga, Bernice A. Pescosolido, Brian Powell, Jason Schnittker, Sarah A. Smith, and the anonymous reviewers and editors for their insightful and helpful comments. Earlier versions of this article were presented at the 2002 annual meeting of the American Sociological Association and the 2001 annual meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society and received a 2002 North Central Sociological Association Graduate Student Paper Competition Award.*

GENDER & SOCIETY, Vol. 19 No. 4, August 2005 480-505  
DOI: 10.1177/0891243204273498  
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support for the goals of feminism, they often reject self-identification with the term “feminist.”

For both self-identified feminists and those individuals who do not identify with the term, this weak relationship may be due to the confusion surrounding exactly what it means to be a feminist (Budgeon 2001; Kamen 1991; Liss, Hoffner, and Crawford 2000; Misciagno 1997; Weiss 1998). In addition to its ambiguity, the term is not value neutral, and the epithets associated with it—such as “feminazi,” “man hating,” and “lesbian”—may deter individuals with more nontraditional gender-related attitudes from self-labeling (Kamen 1991; Weiss 1998; Williams and Wittig 1997). The backlash against feminism in the media and the relatively extreme positions taken by the more outspoken representatives of the feminist movement may have resulted in feminism’s being equated with “radical” or “militant” for much of the U.S. public (Kamen 1991; Misciagno 1997; Weiss 1998). In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that individuals, particularly young women, do not see the feminist movement as relevant to their lives and therefore do not see the need to self-identify with the term (Bellefante 1998; but see Hall and Salupo Rodriguez 2003). All of these factors may have differential impacts on women’s and men’s willingness to self-label as feminists. While there are many explanations for this weak link between feminist self-identification and attitudes, some scholars have suggested that it would be surprising if we did not find that feminists have distinctive values and issue preferences because “the very nature of political ideologies and social identities suggest that people who identify with a particular movement should adopt those values and issue preferences associated with it” (Johnston Conover 1988, 1000). If feminist self-identification does not relate to holding these feminist attitudes, this would imply that there are no or few differences in the attitudes held by feminists and nonfeminists. If so, then the question that follows is, What’s in a label?

Despite myriad concerns about the disconnect between feminist self-identification and attitudes among the U.S. public, we know little empirically about this relationship. The 1996 General Social Survey (GSS), however, provides the tools for disentangling this relationship as well as examining the predictors of feminist self-identification and a series of gender-related attitudes for women and men.

### RESEARCH ON ASPECTS OF FEMINIST IDENTITY

Feminist identity has been widely researched since the second wave of the modern U.S. women’s movement in the 1970s. Much research in this area has worked to identify the antecedents (mostly sociodemographic predictors) of feminist identity. Feminist identity is a multidimensional concept that encompasses feminist self-

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REPRINT REQUESTS: *Janice McCabe, Department of Sociology, Indiana University, Ballantine Hall 744, 1020 East Kirkwood Ave., Bloomington, IN 47405-7103; phone: 812-855-2924; e-mail: jamccabe@indiana.edu.*

identification, feminist consciousness, and gender-role attitudes. Much previous research, particularly quantitative work, has not paid sufficient attention to this multidimensionality, often treating these aspects as if they were interchangeable. In addition, and perhaps more important, by examining a limited set of gender-related attitudes, existing research may have underestimated (or overestimated) the role of feminist self-identification.

Much research initially focused on explaining who is a feminist through examining the sociodemographic predictors of feminist consciousness and gender-related attitudes (or what were previously referred to as gender-role attitudes) among women. More recent research has begun to explore feminist self-identification, but this is most often examined in smaller, nonrepresentative samples (Peltola, Milkie, and Presser 2004 and Schnittker, Freese, and Powell 2003 are two recent exceptions). The research on feminist identity typically is presented as showing that feminists are likely to be women with higher levels of education, with smaller families, and who live in an urban area (Cook 1989; Klein 1984; Plutzer 1988). Liberalism and Democratic political party self-identification, when included in the models, typically also show a strong relationship to feminism (Cowan, Mestlin, and Masek 1992; Reingold and Foust 1998). Family and work experiences—such as marital and employment status—yield significant relationships to feminism in some studies (Klein 1984; Thornton and Freedman 1979) but not in others (Reingold and Foust 1998). Less consistent findings also include race, age, income, and region of residence—usually operationalized as residence in the southern United States (e.g., compare Cook 1989; Davis and Robinson 1991; and Plutzer 1988). For example, if it is significant, the direction of the relationship between race and feminist identity is inconsistent; some suggest feminism's history and/or current concerns as primarily white and middle class may deter people of color from feminism (Henderson-King and Stewart 1994), while others suggest people of color's consciousness for racial inequality predisposes them toward other movements for equality, such as feminism (Hunter and Sellers 1998; Kane 2000).

The research on feminist identity yields inconsistent and contradictory findings primarily, I contend, because the research uses different measures and different conceptions of feminist identity and because it tends to rely on a limited set of gender-related attitude items. In addition, some studies include only women while others include women and men. As one illustration of the tendency of research in this area, particularly survey-based research, to fail to attend to the multiple aspects of feminist identity, Plutzer (1988) used four attitudinal measures to represent feminism (he referred to them as "support of feminist positions" and "support of feminism") despite his brief qualification (see p. 642). This research, without a critical examination of what constitutes a "feminist position" and, more important, the differences between feminist attitudes and feminist self-identification, has been widely influential (Banaszak and Plutzer 1993; Davis and Robinson 1991; Huddy, Neely, and Lafay 2000; Kroska 2000; Reingold and Foust 1998; Tamney et al. 1992; Togeby 1995). When researchers gloss over the multidimensionality of

feminist identity, conceptual ambiguities are created that make it difficult to identify the predictors of the various aspects of feminist identity.

Some scholarship, particularly qualitative research and theoretical work, has noted the complexity and multidimensionality of feminist identity. For example, in researching the postpartum self-help movement, Taylor (1996) noted a disconnect for many women between the feminist label and their attitudes about gender issues and policies. Like some other researchers (Aronson 2003; Cowan, Mestlin, and Masek 1992), Taylor placed women on a continuum from those who embrace the label to those who "explicitly reject feminism." In her study of how the public—primarily women—view gender relations, Sigel (1996) also found ambivalence toward feminism and the women's movement among women. She discussed some incongruities between women's attitudes about gender issues and their views of the effect the women's movement has had on specific groups. While this and other qualitative research makes important inroads by pointing to the multidimensionality and complexity of feminist identity, it leaves unanswered questions about these relationships among the U.S. public both because the issue of feminist identity has not been the focus of these projects and because studies have not been conducted at a national scale, including both women and men. Another way that scholars have made progress studying the complexity of this identity has been by theoretically and historically investigating components of feminist identity. Misciagno (1997), for example, theorized about the relationship between feminist self-identification, attitudes, actions, and the feminist movement for women. Her research offers many insights into why feminist self-identification is riddled with ambivalence and can be so divisive. This is a path that more recent scholarship has followed, often focusing on the complex relationship between feminist self-identification and attitudes among young women (Aronson 2003; Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004). What is still needed is an empirical investigation focused on differentiating between and measuring multiple components of feminist identity among the U.S. public—women and men.

In contrast to the many quantitative studies on feminist consciousness and attitudes, few studies have examined the factors that influence feminist self-identification—whether an individual considers himself or herself a feminist—or the link between feminist self-identification and gender-related attitudes. Until recently, large, nationally representative data sets, such as the GSS or the American National Election Study, have not included a question about feminist self-identification; previous research has used the questions these studies do include, such as "feminist" or gender-role attitudes (Plutzer 1988), feminist opinion (Rhodebeck 1996), feminist consciousness (Reingold and Foust 1998), or "an index of closeness to women" as well as a feeling thermometer, rating either "the women's movement" or "feminists" (Cook 1989; Rhodebeck 1996). This limited set of questions about gender-related attitudes and policies often has been used as a proxy for feminist self-identification. When studies have examined feminist self-labeling, they have used questionnaires or conducted interviews with small samples of particular groups such as college students, academics at women's studies

conferences, or active participants in the feminist movement (Cowan, Mestlin, and Masek 1992; Henderson-King and Stewart 1994; Levonian Morgan 1996; Myaskovsky and Wittig 1997; for exceptions, see Peltola, Milkie, and Presser 2004; Schnittker, Freese, and Powell 2003). While these studies have produced rich and important findings, there is still much we do not know about the relationship between considering oneself a feminist and holding attitudes about a range of gender-related issues for women and men.

One empirical exploration of the relationship between gender-related attitudes and feminist self-identification concluded that "feminist opinion" (composed of attitudes toward gender roles and abortion) and feminist consciousness (which the author termed "feminist identity") are separate yet related constructs (Rhodebeck 1996). This conclusion supports closer examinations of the broader aspects of feminism that transcend reactions to specific policies, such as the Equal Rights Amendment, affirmative action, or abortion rights. Other studies find that the link between feminist self-identification and attitudes is stronger for second-wave men and women (born between 1936 and 1955) or baby boom women (born between 1946 and 1959) than among younger or older women (Peltola, Milkie, and Presser 2004; Schnittker, Freese, and Powell 2003). This article explores the relationships between feminist self-identification and a broader range of gender-related attitudes to further disentangle these aspects of feminist identity.

In sum, past quantitative literature has explored the sociodemographic predictors of gender-related attitudes and feminist consciousness in national samples. While some recent research has begun to explore the antecedents of feminist self-identification for women and men in national samples, inconsistent and contradictory findings remain. In addition, the tendency by researchers to gloss over the multidimensionality of feminist identity and to examine a limited range of gender-related attitude items leaves unanswered questions about the relationship between feminist self-identification and attitudes. Here, I attempt to fill the gaps in our understanding of the relationship between feminist self-identification and feminist attitudes by exploring two questions: First, what sociodemographic and political factors are linked to feminist self-identification? and Second, how well does feminist self-identification link to attitudes regarding gender?

## DATA AND METHOD

To answer these questions, I use data from the 1996 GSS, a national survey of approximately 3,000 adults that is conducted by the National Opinion Research Center. The GSS is an area-probability, personal interview sample of noninstitutionalized, English-speaking adults in households in the continental United States. Full details regarding the sampling strategy, sample, questions, and procedures for the GSS are available in Davis and Smith (1996). In 1996, a Topical Module on Gender ( $N = 1,460$ ), including a question about feminist self-labeling and other

gender-related items, was administered to one of the two representative subsamples of the GSS.

My first research question uses a binary dependent variable constructed from the feminist self-identification question. Respondents were asked, “Do you think of yourself as a feminist or not?” Approximately 21 percent of GSS respondents self-identified as a feminist. The approximately 5 percent who responded “don’t know” were dropped; supplementary analyses show that categories cannot be combined.<sup>1</sup> To separate the effects of the different types of background variables included in extant research, independent variables are added to the models in four steps: first, basic demographic variables (gender, race, age, education, and income<sup>2</sup>); second, work and family life variables (marital status, number of children, and work status—indicating if the respondent worked full-time, part-time, or not at all<sup>3</sup> during the last week); third, community size<sup>4</sup> and region<sup>5</sup> variables; and fourth, political orientation, operationalized by a political views scale ranging from 1 (*extremely liberal*) to 7 (*extremely conservative*), with 4 as a *moderate* category,<sup>6</sup> and political party—Republican, Independent/other party, and Democrat.<sup>7</sup>

If past research suggests that different forms of these independent variables may be linked to feminist identity, variables were transformed accordingly and included in regressions. For example, results presented here use age measured in decades; however, age was also estimated using the age and generational cohorts of Schnittker, Freese, and Powell (2003) and the cohorts of Peltola, Milkie, and Presser (2004). (Results are available from the author on request.) These different age groupings did not significantly change the patterns of relationships between feminist self-identification and attitudes, which is the focus of this article; for ease of presentation, age in decades is used throughout this article. Similarly, throughout this article, education is included in models measured as years; however, dummy variables representing levels of education and degrees earned were used in alternative models and are discussed only when results differ significantly. To assess whether the independent variables operate differently for men and women, interactions between the respondent’s gender and each independent variable were introduced into the model. Since none of the interactions in models linking feminist self-identification and demographics were statistically significant, these results are not presented. Descriptive statistics are included in Appendix A.

The second part of my study addresses the second research question: How strongly does feminist self-identification link to gender-related attitudes? The first set of gender-related attitude items are constructed from eight questions that represent the feminist attitudes typically included in research that uses the GSS; these questions tap people’s opinions about ideal gender arrangements for men and women in the family, paid labor, and politics.<sup>8</sup> These questions are included in Appendix B. Exploratory factor analysis, which identifies the factors or latent variables that underlie these measures, yields three factors: women and politics; women, work, and career; and working mothers. Analysis begins with a bivariate regression of each of the three factor scores on feminist self-identification. Then, the sociodemographics are added in four steps (corresponding to the groups of

independent variables discussed above) to determine if feminist self-labeling affects attitudes and then to see if this effect persists when the sociodemographics and political orientation variables are added. Because the most dramatic differences are found when the political orientation variables are added to the models, tables presented here introduce the first three steps together. To assess whether feminist self-identification operates differently for men and women, interactions between the respondent's gender and feminist self-identification were introduced into the model; significant gender differences are shown, and models are estimated separately for men and women.

Existing research on the relationship between feminist self-identification and attitudes has been limited to a narrow set of gender-related attitudes, often including the eight attitudes above as well as attitudes toward specific policies, namely, abortion and affirmative action. While the range and depth of questions on gender-related issues in the GSS does not compare to those asked in most qualitative studies on feminist identity, the 1996 Module on Gender is unusual among large-scale, representative surveys in the wealth of questions it asks about gender-related issues. This information about gender-related issues, along with the attitude and sociodemographic questions on the GSS core, is useful for disentangling the relationship between feminist self-identification and attitudes (see Appendix B for gender-related attitudes included in analyses). Questions regarding explanations for gender inequality and the influence of the women's movement are particularly interesting for these purposes. Explanations for gender inequality included in the 1996 GSS range from those implicating "the way society is set up" to biology, childhood teachings, and "God's will," thereby representing a broad array of reasons women are more likely to take care of children and earn less money than do men. Similarly, questions about the influence of the women's movement ask about the effect it has had on many types of people in society including children, men, full-time homemakers, women with working-class jobs, women with management or professional jobs, and "you, yourself."

All measures were recoded, as necessary, so that higher values are consistent with more egalitarian (or nontraditional) gender-related attitudes. Attitude measures were factor analyzed and transformed into factor scores in Mplus when appropriate (Muthen and Muthen 1998-2003). The exploratory, robust, weighted least squares factor analysis of the eight explanations for gender inequality in work, pay, and child care yields two factors: specific and broad societal explanations for gender inequality. These factor scores are used as outcomes in the regressions presented below. As discussed above with regard to attitudes about ideal gender arrangements, interactions between the respondent's gender and feminist self-identification were introduced into the model, and models were estimated separately for women and men to assess whether feminist self-identification operates differently for men and women. Significant gender differences in the results are shown and discussed.

The cross-sectional nature of my data places certain limitations on this analysis. I have assumed that causality runs from sociodemographic and political factors to

feminist self-identification and from feminist self-identification to holding specific attitudes. Previous research has made the same assumptions (Johnston Conover 1988). However, it is conceivable that some personal experiences—such as marital status, number of children, and conservativeness of political views—may be influenced by feminist self-identification. In addition, it is likely that the relationship between claiming the feminist label and holding specific attitudes is more complex than a simple causal relationship in only one direction.<sup>9</sup>

## RESULTS

### What Sociodemographic and Political Factors Are Linked to Feminist Self-Identification?

To answer the question of who are most likely to be feminists, Table 1 presents estimates of the effect of these sociodemographic factors on feminist self-identification using logistic regression. Entering the variables in stages shows that in general, the effects persist when additional sociodemographics are added. Accordingly, my discussion focuses on the results from model 4 in Table 1. Consistent with the gender differences expected, women are significantly more likely to self-identify as feminists than are men. Nearly 29 percent of women, compared to 12 percent of men, self-identify as feminists.<sup>10</sup> In addition, corresponding with previous research, as years of education increase, the predicted probability of feminist self-labeling also increases. However, when dummy variables representing degrees earned are substituted for years of education, only holding a graduate degree (compared to less than a high school education) is significant. As Schnittker, Freese, and Powell (2003) noted, only extreme differences in education make a difference. Model 1 reveals a marginally significant effect of age, which does not persist when controlling for other sociodemographics. Neither race nor income is significantly correlated with feminist self-identification in any of the four models.

Virtually none of the family and work life variables have a significant estimated effect on feminist self-identification, as Table 1 shows. The lack of significance for marital status, except for widows, in explaining feminist self-identification is an interesting departure from findings in some existing studies.<sup>11</sup> The other traditional lifestyle variable, number of children, also is not statistically significant. Work status previously has been found to influence individuals', especially women's (Andersen and Cook 1985; Banaszak and Plutzer 1993), political opinions and involvement; however, neither part-time nor full-time work status is significant in any of the models. Testing simultaneously that none of the work status variables are significant ( $\chi^2 = .16, df = 2, p = .92$ ) confirms these results. Community size, however, is a significant predictor of feminist self-labeling. Individuals living in rural areas or medium-sized communities (i.e., populations between 2,500 and 350,000) are significantly less likely to self-identify as feminists than are those residing in urban areas. Urban communities may offer increased opportunities for nontradi-

**TABLE 1: Logistic Regression of Feminist Self-Identification on Sociodemographic Variables (1996 General Social Survey, N = 1,362)**

<i>Independent Variables<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
<b>Basic demographics</b>				
Female	1.05** (6.71)	1.03** (6.38)	1.04** (6.42)	1.01** (6.08)
Nonwhite	0.29 (1.67)	0.26 (1.43)	0.17 (0.92)	0.04 (0.22)
Age (in decades)	0.09* (2.08)	0.07 (1.36)	0.08 (1.39)	0.09 (1.56)
Education	0.08** (2.88)	0.08** (2.81)	0.07** (2.47)	0.08** (2.65)
Respondent's income	0.02 (0.40)	0.04 (0.85)	0.04 (0.78)	0.04 (0.69)
<b>Work and family life</b>				
<b>Marital status (compared to single)</b>				
Never married		0.34 (1.66)	0.28 (1.36)	0.15 (0.71)
Divorced or separated		0.16 (0.89)	0.11 (0.57)	-0.03 (-0.15)
Widowed		0.69** (2.82)	0.66* (2.66)	0.61* (2.44)
Children		-0.06 (-1.22)	-0.05 (-0.98)	-0.03 (-0.65)
<b>Work status (compared to not employed)</b>				
Full-time		-0.07 (-0.43)	-0.06 (-0.32)	-0.09 (-0.51)
Part-time		-0.01 (-0.04)	0.02 (0.09)	-0.02 (-0.06)

Community size and region				
Size (compared to urban)				
Rural	-0.77**	(-2.82)	-0.69*	(2.46)
Midsize	-0.57**	(3.12)	-0.52**	(-2.76)
South	-0.11	(-0.72)	-0.04	(-0.28)
Political orientation				
Political ideology			-0.26**	(4.62)
Political party (compared to Democrat)				
Republican			-0.74**	(-3.40)
Other party			-0.04	(-0.26)
Constant	-3.53		-2.91	-1.76
-2 log likelihood	-672.88	-3.56	-659.57	-632.37

NOTE: z scores are in parentheses.

a. Referent categories for independent variables are currently married (marital status), not currently employed (work status), urban residence (community size), and Democrat (political party).

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$  (two-tailed tests).

tional experiences and lifestyles than smaller communities. In contrast to previous studies that have shown regional differences in "support for feminism" using gender role attitudes (Plutzer 1988), Southern residence is not significantly related to feminist self-identification.

As expected, political ideology is associated with feminist self-identification, with more conservative respondents less likely to claim the feminist label. And as expected, respondents identifying as Republican, compared to Democrat, are significantly less likely to claim the feminist label. Respondents identifying with no political party or another party such as Independent, compared to Democrat, do not differ on feminist self-labeling. However, causal interpretations of the observed associations between feminist self-identification and political ideology and political party must be made with caution since these variables may be mutually reinforcing and jointly determined (Lye and Waldron 1997; Sniderman et al. 1991).

Another way to illustrate these patterns is by using ideal types (Long 1997). A single, white, urban woman who is a liberal and a Democrat has a .62 probability of self-identifying as a feminist compared to .37 for a similar man. In contrast, a single, white, urban woman who is a moderate and a Republican has a .26 probability of self-identifying as a feminist while a comparable man has only a .11 probability. Living in a rural area also dramatically reduces an individual's predicted probability of self-identifying as a feminist. For example, compare the probabilities above to the .08 probability of a single, white, rural woman who is conservative and a Republican identifying as a feminist and the .03 probability for a similar man. Gender, urban residence, liberal political views, and political party affiliation are the strongest predictors of feminist self-identification. Other sociodemographics are of little relevance to understanding variation in the tendency to self-identify as a feminist.

#### **How Well Does Feminist Self-Identification Link to Attitudes?**

To explore the extent to which feminists and nonfeminists differ in their attitudes regarding gender, first, I turn to the gender-related attitudes typically included in research on feminist identity. Table 2 presents regression results of the three gender-related factors: (1) women and politics; (2) women, work, and career; and (3) working mothers. Table 2 shows only the coefficients for feminist self-identification; the three models differ by adding first sociodemographics and then political orientation to the model with feminist self-identification.

As shown in Table 2, among men, all three attitudinal measures are significantly related to feminist self-identification in all model specifications. In contrast, among women, there are no strong, significant relationships between feminist self-identification and attitudes about ideal gender arrangements. One factor, work and career, is significantly related to feminist self-identification in the bivariate model, and the relationship becomes nonsignificant once the political orientation variables are added. Table 2 also shows a borderline significant relationship between feminist self-identification and the women and politics factor among women ( $t =$

**TABLE 2: Ordinary Least Squares Regression of Gender-Related Attitudes on Feminist Self-Identification for Men and Women (1996 General Social Survey, N = 795)**

Dependent Variable	Only Feminist Self-Identification		Coefficient for Feminist Self-Identification after Controlling for Sociodemographic Variables <sup>a</sup>		Coefficient for Feminist Self-Identification after Controlling for Sociodemographic and Political Variables <sup>b</sup>		Test of Gender Difference <sup>c</sup>
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	
Attitudes about ideal gender arrangements in politics, work, and family life							
Women and politics	0.12 (1.57)	0.51** (4.45)	0.11* (1.66)	0.43** (4.01)	0.04 (0.60)	0.32** (2.96)	*
Women, work, and career	0.13* (1.86)	0.42** (3.98)	0.13* (1.92)	0.35** (3.61)	0.05 (0.68)	0.26** (2.63)	*
Working mothers	0.05 (0.83)	0.29** (3.06)	0.04 (0.64)	0.25** (2.75)	-0.03 (-0.45)	0.18* (1.90)	*

NOTE: T-scores are in parentheses.  
a. Model adds gender, race, age, education, respondent's income, marital status, number of children, work status, community size, and Southern residence to feminist self-identification.  
b. Model adds political ideology and political party to sociodemographic variables.  
c. Significant gender differences at  $p < .05$  (two-tailed tests).  
\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$  (one-tailed tests).

1.66,  $p = .49$  for a one-tailed test). There are significant gender differences in all of the models, except when political variables are added to the model with the work and career factor. Results with women and men in the same model (not presented) show that the standardized coefficient for gender is the largest for each factor, and it is much larger than feminist self-identification, which suggests that knowing a person's gender is more important than feminist self-identification in predicting attitudes toward these gender-related issues.<sup>12</sup> Although research in this area often measures only the gender-related attitudes of women, my research shows that the attitudes commonly explored are linked with self-identification among men, but not among women, a point I will return to in the Discussion.

Expanding beyond the narrow set of attitudes typically explored in this area, Table 3 presents the ordinary least squares regression results for two additional sets of gender-related attitudes: first, individuals' beliefs in broad and specific explanations for gender inequality in work, pay, and child care, and second, individuals' beliefs about the impact of the women's movement on the lives of specific groups. Results show that individuals' beliefs in broad societal explanations for gender inequality are significantly linked to self-identifying as a feminist. In contrast, the specific explanations (e.g., those focusing on biology, childhood teachings, and God's will) are not significantly related to feminist self-identification, although there are significant gender differences in all but the bivariate model, which suggests that these specific explanations link to feminist self-identification differently for men and women. For example, among men, the specific explanations link to feminist self-identification until the final model where political party and political views are added (results not shown). This suggests that political party and political views are more strongly connected to specific explanations for gender inequality for men than for women. While specific explanations for gender inequality do not differentiate between feminists and nonfeminists, beliefs in broader and more general societal-level explanations link with feminist self-identification.

The attitude-labeling question is further explored through an examination of beliefs about how the women's movement has affected specific groups' lives (including homemakers, working-class women, professional women, men, children, and "yourself"). As shown in Table 3, all of the attitudes about how the women's movement affects these groups, except those about professional women's lives, significantly distinguish between feminists and nonfeminists.<sup>13</sup> Unlike many of the previous gender-related attitudes, there are no significant gender differences in the impact of feminist self-identification.

Results not presented show that when examined individually, very few of these gender-related attitudes are significantly related to feminist self-identification. However, once these attitudes are factor analyzed and turned into scales, most clusters of attitudes (e.g., about women and politics or broad societal explanations for gender inequality) are significantly linked to feminist self-identification. This suggests that although feminist self-identification may not significantly relate to specific attitudes (e.g., voting for a woman president), it does link with clusters of

**TABLE 3: Ordinary Least Squares Regression Results of Additional Attitudes Related to Gender and Feminism on Feminist Self-Identification (1996 General Social Survey)**

<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<i>Only Feminist Self-Identification</i>	<i>Coefficient for Feminist Self-Identification after Controlling for Sociodemographic Variables<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Coefficient for Feminist Self-Identification after Controlling for Sociodemographic and Political Variables<sup>b</sup></i>
Explanations for gender inequality in work, pay, and child care ( <i>N</i> = 1,187)			
Broad societal explanations for gender inequality	0.27** (4.92)	0.22** (3.97)	0.19** (3.38)
Specific explanations for gender inequality	0.06 (1.01)	-0.01 <sup>c</sup> (-0.19)	-0.06 <sup>c</sup> (-1.07)
Attitudes about effect of women's movement on specific groups ( <i>N</i> = 1,103)			
Women's movement benefits professional women	0.06 (1.61)	0.04 (1.03)	0.03 (0.84)
Women's movement benefits working-class women	0.14** (3.48)	0.15** (3.77)	0.14** (3.43)
Women's movement benefits full-time homemakers	0.29** (5.30)	0.32** (5.65)	0.26** (4.61)
Women's movement benefits men	0.25** (4.34)	0.26** (4.47)	0.21** (3.53)
Women's movement benefits children	0.41** (6.86)	0.38** (6.14)	0.30** (4.84)
Women's movement benefits you, yourself	0.40** (10.11)	0.34** (8.65)	0.30** (7.58)

NOTE: *T*-scores are in parentheses.

a. Model adds gender, race, age, education, respondent's income, marital status, number of children, work status, community size, and Southern residence to feminist self-identification.

b. Model adds political ideology and political party to sociodemographic variables.

c. Significant gender differences (interaction effect, Feminist × Female), *p* < .05 (two-tailed tests).  
\*\* *p* < .01 (one-tailed tests).

attitudes regarding gender and social issues, even when controlling for socio-demographics and political orientation.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Returning to my first research question, these analyses suggest that women and individuals with higher levels of education, living in an urban area, holding liberal political views, and self-identifying as Democrats have an increased likelihood of self-identifying as feminists. While these patterns may not seem surprising, it is (at least somewhat) surprising that other demographic factors, particularly race, family life, and work status, do not significantly predict self-identification as a feminist. These findings stand in contrast to the concerns of the critics of feminism and many groups and individuals involved in the women's movement about its representation as a narrow, primarily white, middle-class (or upper-middle-class) movement (Collins 1991; hooks 1984, 2000; Nelson 2001). In addition, they stand in contrast to some previous studies using gender-role attitudes—and some studies of feminist self-labeling that do not use a national sample—that also found significant effects for race, marital status, number of children, employment status, and living in the South. These patterns may reflect differences between representations of feminists and characteristics of feminist women and men in the United States. It also is possible that these differences are due to the differential relationship between sociodemographics and feminist self-labeling compared to attitudes about gender-related issues or feminist movement participation.

Political party and liberal-conservative political views may be powerful influences on feminist self-labeling and attitudes. Feminist self-identification may be a specific form of liberal political views. In their research on "New Racism," Sniderman et al. (1991, 442) found that "a person's ideological orientation supplies an immediately relevant basis for deciding his or her own stand." Future research could apply this to feminist self-identification by exploring if political ideology acts as a shortcut when individuals decide to adopt the feminist label and in forming or expressing attitudes about gender- and non-gender-related issues.

The results from the analyses addressing my second research question regarding the link between attitudes and self-identification suggest that meanings of the feminist label and the relationship between self-labeling and attitudes are more complex than most survey-based research acknowledges. These findings highlight the importance of including and differentiating between individuals' attitudes regarding ideal gender arrangements, the causes of gender inequality, and the impact of the women's movement. Research typically focuses on this first aspect of gender-related attitudes. Furthermore, these results point to the importance of examining these attitudes as clusters rather than as individual items. Looking at single-issue attitudes may underestimate the influence of feminist self-identification. When this range of gender-related attitudes is explored, some interesting differences emerge. The attitudes typically examined, particularly those related to politics and

to working mothers, are not significantly related to feminist self-identification among women. In addition, gender is at least as good a predictor, and in most cases a much better predictor, of a person's gender-related attitudes than is feminist self-labeling. It is instructive that some of the gender-related attitudes commonly used as proxies for feminist self-identification do not significantly link with feminist self-identification, particularly among women and when controlling for political orientation.

The tendency of most surveys to measure only one type of feminism—liberal feminism—may also help explain these findings. Not all feminists agree about the causes of gender inequality. For example, liberal and cultural feminists may differ on some gender-related attitudes, particularly those about working mothers, as they may have different views of women's and men's roles with regard to parenting. In addition, liberal and radical feminists, for example, may differ in the extent to which they believe biology makes women better suited than men to care for children, with radical feminists' recognizing greater differences between women and men in their ability to care for children. These differences among feminists with regard to specific explanations for gender inequality may explain, in part, why these specific explanations do not differentiate between feminists and nonfeminists. The closed-ended wording of the GSS feminist self-identification question does not allow distinctions to be made either in the degree to which a respondent self-identifies or in the respondent's definition of feminism. Moreover, the feminist or egalitarian gender-related attitude items typically included in this research primarily measure liberal feminist attitudes. Perhaps the inclusion of other types of feminist attitudes in nationally representative data sets would reveal a different relationship to feminist self-identification (Henley et al. 1998).

Future research should focus on the meanings of the term "feminist" to the U.S. public—women and men—as this may explain, in part, the lack of relationship between feminist self-identification and specific gender-related attitudes as well as the gender differences in the link between attitudes and self-labeling. Regardless, the analyses presented here do not suggest as diverse meanings of feminism as some critics suggest. Results show that feminists can be distinguished from nonfeminists on the basis of their attitudes about broad societal explanations for gender inequality. Where there is more heterogeneity—and where feminist self-identification does not significantly link with attitudes—is in the more specific causes of gender inequality (such as those implicating working mothers, biological factors, and God's will). It is possible that attitudes about what gender arrangements should look like and specific causes of gender inequality were linked to feminist self-identification in the past, but currently these attitudes have become so normative, particularly among women, that they no longer distinguish between feminists and nonfeminists. On the other hand, it is possible that these attitudes were never linked to self-identification among women. Longitudinal data on women and men, however, are needed to test these suppositions. Even if these attitudes have become so normative over time among women, it seems that among

men—at least in 1996—these attitudes have yet to become normative and therefore still differentiate between feminists and nonfeminists.

Gender differences as well as similarities are apparent in the links between feminist self-identification and attitudes throughout this article. Results reveal a tighter connection between attitudes about ideal gender arrangements, which are the attitudes most commonly examined in survey-based research on feminist identity, and self-labeling among men than among women. On the other hand, among women, there is not a significant relationship between self-identification and attitudes regarding ideal gender arrangements. Women and men also differ in how self-identification and beliefs about specific explanations for gender inequality are linked. In contrast, there are no significant gender differences for broad societal explanations for gender inequality or for attitudes about the effects of the women's movement on any groups. Differences in the meaning of the term "feminist" to women and to men, as well as differential media stereotypes of women and men who self-identify with the term, likely play a role in these relationships. Data on the meaning of the feminist label to individuals, which is not available in the 1996 GSS, would be useful in further explaining these relationships. In addition, it is possible that group-based interests play a role in shaping the relationships between attitudes and self-identification differently according to gender (Kane and Kyyro 2001). However, if men's and women's attitudes correspond to group-based interests, one would expect to see significant gender differences in women's and men's assessments of how the women's movement has affected specific groups, particularly men. Results from these analyses, however, show no significant gender differences in any of these questions. Consequently, this group-based interest theory does not hold when applied to the questions regarding the influence of the feminist movement.

Because feminism is not only an attitude and an identity but also a movement, behavior may be another mediating factor in the link between feminist self-identification and attitudes. One measure of a behavior related to women's issues is how frequently people report paying attention to issues in the news that especially affect women. Additional analyses (not presented here) show that this behavior is significantly related to feminist self-identification for both men and women, even after controlling for sociodemographics and political orientation, and there are no significant gender differences in this relationship. Given this tentative finding about the link between feminist self-identification and behavior, future survey research should incorporate a range of measures of behaviors along with self-identification and attitudes.

Possible foci of such research could range from explicitly political ones (e.g., attending a feminist rally) to less explicitly political ones (e.g., attending a women's reading or fiber arts group) that cross the boundaries of types of feminisms. Research should examine the relationships between feminist self-identification, attitudes, and behaviors to, for example, discover whether the strong relationship Ghaffaradli-Doty and Carlson (1979) found between a "liberated attitude" and

self-reported behavior has changed in the past 25 years. Researchers not only should rely on self-reported behavior but also should include multiple methods, particularly qualitative fieldwork and in-depth interviews with women and men. This research should focus on women and men who identify and those who do not identify as feminists as well as those who are involved and those who are not involved in the feminist movement. In addition, future research should explore the impact of institutions, particularly women's studies programs, on feminist self-identification as well as on the relationship between attitudes and self-identification, as recent research highlights the role of such programs on young women's attitudes toward feminism (Aronson 2003). In sum, the research most needed is a large-scale project that will longitudinally explore feminist self-identification and a range of attitudes and behaviors among a diverse group of men and women. This will be a challenging project. However, it is the next step in uniting the rich findings about process from qualitative research with the representativeness and comparability of survey-based research on the various aspects of feminist identity and, therefore, in further disentangling the aspects of feminist identity as well as in identifying the similarities and differences among groups throughout the U.S. public.

While the results presented here provide some additional order to the existing research on the predictors and correlates of the components of feminist identity, they also suggest that the answer to the question, What's in a label? is much more complex than much previous research has acknowledged. They show that it is important to include clusters of attitudes rather than single-issue items, if possible; this was hinted at in recent research where the strongest findings were for scaled items (Schnittker, Freese, and Powell 2003). In addition, they point to the importance of including multiple clusters of attitudes that transcend liberal feminist positions, as their inclusion reveals some interesting complexities in the attitude-labeling link. While there are some disconnects between feminist self-identification and attitudes, these findings show that self-identification may be more important than others concluded when they have used a more limited set of attitude items. In conclusion, this research suggests that to further disentangle the meaning of this relationship, future research must consider the multidimensionality of feminist identity and the heterogeneous definitions of feminism in society through exploring women's as well as men's personal meanings of and identification with feminism, their attitudes about a range of gender- and non-gender-related issues, and the degree to which links between attitudes and self-identification are present or not. Eventually, this will help to determine what factors lead an individual to self-label as a feminist and may offer suggestions regarding the future of the feminist movement in the United States.

**APPENDIX A**  
**Descriptive Statistics for Feminist Self-Identification and**  
**Independent Variables in Analysis: 1996 General Social Survey, N = 1,362**

Name	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Description
Feminist self-identification	0.21	0.41	0	1	1 if a feminist; 0 if not a feminist
Basic demographics					
Female	0.56	0.50	0	1	1 if female; 0 if male
Nonwhite	0.18	0.39	0	1	1 if nonwhite; 0 if white
Age	4.47	1.64	1.8	8.9	Age (in decades)
Education	13.47	2.86	0	20	Years of schooling completed
Respondent's income	2.75	1.81	0	8.25	Respondent's income (in 10,000 dollars)
Work and family life					
Marital status <sup>a</sup>					
Never married	0.23	0.42	0	1	1 if never married; 0 otherwise
Divorced or separated	0.20	0.40	0	1	1 if currently divorced or separated; 0 otherwise
Widowed	0.10	0.30	0	1	1 if widow; 0 otherwise
Children	1.82	1.61	0	8	Total number of children
Work status <sup>b</sup>					
Full-time	0.57	0.50	0	1	1 if working full-time last week; 0 otherwise
Part-time	0.10	0.30	0	1	1 if working part-time last week; 0 otherwise

Community size and region Size <sup>c</sup>					
Rural	0.14	0.34	0	1	1 if rural residence; 0 otherwise
Midsize	0.72	0.45	0	1	1 if not urban or rural; 0 if urban or rural
South	0.34	0.47	0	1	1 if Southern residence; 0 otherwise
Political orientation					
Political ideology	4.17	1.35	1	7	Political views scale <sup>d</sup> from extremely liberal to extremely conservative
Political party <sup>e</sup>					
Republican	0.28	0.45	0	1	1 if self-identified as a Republican; 0 otherwise
Other party	0.38	0.48	0	1	1 if other political party; 0 if Democrat or Republican

a. Referent category for marital status is currently married.

b. Referent category for work status is not currently employed.

c. Referent category for size is urban residence (population greater than 350,000). Rural residence includes populations smaller than 2,500.

d. In the political views scale, 1 = *extremely liberal*, 2 = *liberal*, 3 = *slightly liberal*, 4 = *moderate*, 5 = *slightly conservative*, 6 = *conservative*, 7 = *extremely conservative*.

e. Referent category for political party is Democrat.

**APPENDIX B**  
**General Social Survey Questions for Attitudinal**  
**Measures in Analysis: 1996 General Social Survey**

<i>General Social Survey Question</i>	<i>Responses</i>
Attitudes about ideal gender arrangements in politics, work, and family life ( $n = 795$ , $\chi^2 = 69.29$ , $df = 13$ )	
Women and politics	
"Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Women should take care of running their homes and leave running the country up to men."	Agree; Disagree
"If your party nominated a woman for President, would you vote for her if she were qualified for the job?" (reverse coded)	Yes; No
"Tell me if you agree or disagree with this statement: Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women."	Agree; Disagree
Women, work, and career	
"It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family."	Strongly Agree; Agree; Disagree; Strongly Disagree
"It is more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself."	Strongly Agree; Agree; Disagree; Strongly Disagree
Working mothers	
"Do you approve or disapprove of a married woman earning money in business or industry if she has a husband capable of supporting her?" (reverse coded)	Disagree; Strongly Disagree; Approve; Disapprove
"A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works." (reverse coded)	Strongly Agree; Agree; Disagree; Strongly Disagree
"A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work." (reverse coded)	Strongly Agree; Agree; Disagree; Strongly Disagree

<p>Explanations for gender inequality in work, pay, and child care (<math>n = 1,187</math>, <math>\chi^2 = 2,301.87</math>, <math>df = 15</math>)</p> <p>Broad societal explanations for gender inequality</p> <p>"The way society is set up, women don't have much choice. How important do you think this reason is for explaining why women are more likely to take care of children?" (reverse coded)</p>	<p>Very important; Important; Somewhat important; Not at all important</p> <p>Very important Important; Somewhat important; Not at all important</p> <p>Very important; Important; Somewhat important; Not at all important</p>
<p>"Men have more freedom to do other things. How important do you think this reason is for explaining why women are more likely to take care of children?" (reverse coded)</p>	<p>Very important; Important; Somewhat important; Not at all important</p>
<p>"Employers tend to give men better paying jobs than they give women. How important do you think this reason is for explaining why women earn less?" (reverse coded)</p>	<p>Very important; Important; Somewhat important; Not at all important</p>
<p>Specific explanations for gender inequality</p> <p>"Women are biologically better-suited to care for children. How important do you think this reason is for explaining why women are more likely to take care of children?"</p>	<p>Very important; Important; Somewhat important; Not at all important</p> <p>Very important; Important; Somewhat important; Not at all important</p>
<p>"Women are taught from childhood how to care for children. How important do you think this reason is for explaining why women are more likely to take care of children?" (reverse coded)</p>	<p>Very important; Important; Somewhat important; Not at all important</p>
<p>"It is God's will that women care for children. How important do you think this reason is for explaining why women are more likely to take care of children?"</p>	<p>Very important; Important; Somewhat important; Not at all important</p>
<p>"Men work harder on the job than women do. How important do you think this reason is for explaining why women earn less?"</p>	<p>Very important; Important; Somewhat important; Not at all important</p>

(continued)

**APPENDIX B (continued)**

<i>General Social Survey Question</i>	<i>Responses</i>
<p>"Women's family responsibilities keep them from putting as much time and effort into their jobs as men do. How important do you think this reason is for explaining why women earn less?" (reverse coded)</p>	<p>Very important; Important; Somewhat important; Not at all important</p>
<p>Attitudes about effect of women's movement on specific groups (<math>n = 1,103</math>)            "We'd like your views on how the women's movement has affected certain groups. For each group I name, please tell me whether you think the women's movement has improved their lives, made their lives worse, or had no effect on their lives: full-time homemaker; women with working-class jobs; women with management or professional jobs; men; children; you, yourself."</p>	<p>Made their lives worse; Had no effect on their lives; Improved their lives</p>

## NOTES

1. Supplementary analyses using multinomial logit that included the “don’t know” responses as a third category resulted in patterns quite similar to those presented here. Furthermore, Wald tests for combining outcome categories suggest that the “don’t know” responses cannot be combined with the “yes” or the “no” categories. Therefore, results presented here use the binary feminist self-identification variable.

2. Self-reported income categories were recoded to the midpoints in 10,000 dollar units. Because of a substantial number of missing values for respondent’s income (26.7 percent), missing values were imputed using an equation predicting income including each respondent’s gender, age, race, and education. Models were also estimated using family income and proportion of family income earned by the respondent.

3. This category includes individuals who were unemployed, retired, in school, or “keeping house” and people who indicated they had a job but were not at work because of temporary illness, a vacation, or a strike. Because previous research (see Klein 1984; Plutzer 1988) stressed the importance of work status for women, a separate dummy variable indicating if the respondent was a full-time homemaker was introduced into the models. Neither the homemaker variable nor the interaction term between homemaker and gender were significant at  $p < .05$ , indicating a lack of relationship between feminist self-identification and being a full-time homemaker.

4. Cut-points for determining urban (more than 350,000 residents) and rural (populations less than 2,500) areas are based on the figures used by the U.S. Census Bureau.

5. Southern residence consists of the “South Atlantic,” “East South Central,” and “West South Central” regions in the General Social Survey.

6. Missing values were imputed for political views (4.5 percent) using an equation predicting political ideology including respondent’s gender, age, race, education, income, and political party.

7. Respondents were coded as Democrats if they indicated they were either a “Strong Democrat” or “Not Very Strong Democrat” and coded as Republican if they were a “Strong Republican” or “Not Very Strong Republican.” Respondents were coded as other party if they chose “Independent, close to Democrat,” “Independent, Neither, No Response,” “Independent, close to Republican,” or “Other party, refused to say.” Democrat was the omitted category in the regressions.

8. The eight attitude items are included in each year’s General Social Survey but are asked only to a subset of the full General Social Survey sample. This ballot design reduces the sample size from 1,362 to 795 in addressing the second research question using the eight attitudinal variables most commonly used in survey-based research in this area. Two-thirds of the sample were asked the four binary attitude questions included on the rotating core; five-sixths were asked the four categorical attitude questions. For consistency, the sample size was restricted to respondents who were asked the questions included on the rotating core and the topical module on gender ( $n = 795$ ).

9. Longitudinal data that include questions about feminist self-identification and attitudes are needed to better address these concerns. Longitudinal research on attitudes toward cohabitation and cohabitation behavior suggests a reciprocal and mutually reinforcing relationship (Axinn and Thornton 1993). Therefore, I expect that the direction of causality between attitudes and feminist self-labeling is not a simple unidirectional one either.

10. There were no gender differences in the number of respondents who said that they “don’t know” if they are feminists; approximately 5 percent of women and men responded “don’t know.”

11. Results show that widows have a significantly greater likelihood of self-identifying as feminists than do married individuals. This finding should be interpreted with caution due to the small number of widows in the sample, especially widowers, and the high degree of collinearity with age.

12. Other large  $y$ -standardized coefficients vary slightly depending on the factor but always include working full-time, liberal-conservative political views, Republican party affiliation, and feminist self-identification.

13. Factor analysis of these six questions yields two factors—one for working-class and professional women and another for all other groups (i.e., homemakers, men, children, and “yourself”). Regression

results (available from the author on request) show that feminist self-identification is significantly linked to both factors when controlling for sociodemographics and for working-class and professional women even when controlling for political factors.

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*Janice McCabe is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at Indiana University. Her dissertation explores how students navigate the academic-social divide in college life, focusing on gender, race/ethnicity, and friendship. She also is part of a Kinsey Institute research team that is updating and extending the original Kinsey studies on sexuality.*