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## **The Causes and Consequences of Feminist Consciousness among Western European Women**

CLYDE WILCOX

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Using data from the 1983 Euro-Barometer survey, this article examines the extent, determinants, and consequences of feminist consciousness among Western European women. The results indicate a surprising degree of feminist consciousness in Western Europe, with more than a third of women classified as feminists. The extent of feminism varies across countries, with nearly half of women in France and Italy but only a quarter of women in Britain classified as feminists. Age, education, religiosity, and ideology are the strongest predictors of feminism, although there is meaningful cross-national variation in the determinants of feminism. Finally, feminist consciousness is associated with more liberal positions on most political issues, particularly those that involve sympathy for the disadvantaged, and with the willingness to consider supporting a leftist party.

## THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG WESTERN EUROPEAN WOMEN

CLYDE WILCOX  
Georgetown University

**D**uring the past decade, a small but growing literature has developed on feminist organizations and attitudes in Western Europe. Most of this research has focused on the history, ideology, and behavior of feminist organizations. Scholars have discussed Western European feminist organizations in general (Jensen, 1985; Katzenstein, 1987; Lovenduski, 1986; Randall, 1987) and in specific countries (Beckwith, 1985; Briet, Landermans, & Kroon, 1987; Dahlerup, 1986; Ferree, 1987; Gelb, 1986,

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1987; Hellman, 1987; Northcutt & Flaitz, 1985). Others have studied the relationship between feminist organizations and political parties and other interest groups in various countries (Beckwith, 1985; Ergas, 1982; Hellman, 1987; Norris, 1985; Northcutt & Flaitz, 1985; Ruggie, 1987).

Many of these studies have speculated about the extent of public support for feminism among Western European women, but there has been little empirical research on feminist attitudes. A few studies have focused on the gender gap in Western European public opinion (Norris, 1988; Welch & Thomas, 1988), but these studies have not fully explored the extent or determinants of feminist attitudes among women. Some important preliminary work on feminist consciousness in Europe has been done by Klein (1987), but there remain many unanswered questions.

The past decade has also produced an enormous volume of research on feminism in the United States, and a good deal of this research has focused on the levels and determinants of gender or feminist consciousness. The concept of feminist consciousness is central to understanding popular support for feminist organizations and goals (Cook, 1989; Klein, 1984). Many feminist organizations in the United States and Western Europe attempted during the 1970s and 1980s to expand the sense of common identity and destiny among women and to politicize that group identification into support for collective action. These "consciousness raising" groups attempted to spread group consciousness among women.

Klein (1984) argued that group consciousness is a prerequisite to political mobilization. She suggested that women who acquire a feminist consciousness must go through three steps. First, they must recognize their membership in a group (women) and that they share a common interest with that group. Second, women must reject society's rationale for the disadvantaged status of the group. Finally, women must recognize the need for collective action. Gurin, Miller, and Gurin (1980) adopted a similar approach, suggesting that group consciousness consists of social-group identification, power discontent, system blaming, and a collectivist orientation. Only when women acquire a feminist consciousness are they ready to be mobilized into political action. Conover (1988) has argued that feminist consciousness may have attitudinal consequences as well. She reported that among American women, a feminist consciousness can serve as a catalyst to develop other values and attitudes, including sympathy for the disadvantaged.

Despite the importance of the concept in studies of U.S. feminism, few studies of European feminism have examined feminist consciousness (but see Klein, 1987). This article will explore the extent of feminist consciousness among Western European women. Three areas will be addressed: (a) How widespread is feminist consciousness among Western European

women, and what is the cross-national variation? (b) What are the determinants of feminist consciousness among Western European women, and how do those determinants differ in each country? (c) What are the consequences of feminist consciousness for political attitudes and behaviors? How do these consequences vary across countries?

## DATA AND MEASURES

The data for this analysis come from the 1983 Euro-Barometer survey, which focused on attitudes toward gender roles and feminism. The survey contained a number of items on gender-role attitudes, perceived discrimination in society, and support for feminism. Based on the results of cluster and factor analyses, items were combined to form several scales.

Central to the inquiry is the measure of feminist consciousness. The 4-point measure is based on the work of Cook (1989) and is constructed from a series of items on goals of the women's movement, support for the movement, and current or potential membership in the movement. The survey contained six items asking whether the respondent agreed with each goal of the women's movement. Factor analysis suggested that four moderate goals formed a single dimension: fighting prejudice against women, obtaining equality between men and women in the workplace, giving women the same chances as men in parties and elections, and ensuring that either the father or mother could stay at home to care for a sick child.

From these items, a four-category feminist consciousness scale was constructed. Those women who do not share at least three of these liberal feminist goals are labeled nonfeminists. Those who support the movement's goals but do not support the women's movement are coded as potential feminists: They may be receptive to a feminist message (Katzenstein, 1987) but have not yet developed a feminist consciousness. Those women who support feminist goals and also support the women's movement are further divided into two groups: those who either support the women's movement strongly or see themselves as current or potential members of that movement are coded as strong feminists, and those who do not meet these criteria are coded as feminists. The scale, therefore, runs from 0 (no feminist consciousness) to 3 (strong feminist consciousness). Cook reported that for American women, a similar measure was strongly related to the various components of group consciousness, including power discontent, system blaming, group identification, and support for collective action.

It might be argued that because many Western European feminists reject the gender-blind equality favored by many American feminists, this measure

would not identify a substantial portion of Western European feminists. Although women in Western Europe might reject marketplace-equity feminism, they may support a more radical feminism or a social feminism. Closer examination suggested that this is not the case. Two other feminist goals — a radical transformation of society and pay for housework — were included in the survey. Nearly all women who supported a radical transformation of society accepted at least three of the four moderate goals, as did nearly all women who supported pay for housework. Indeed, nearly all women who supported the women's movement supported at least three of these four moderate goals. This is not surprising, since these moderate feminist goals seem likely to be acceptable both to feminists who stress equality before the law and those who argue that women have unique needs that society must address. Few feminists in this latter camp have argued against fighting prejudice against women, decreasing discrimination against women in the workplace and in politics, or allowing men or women time off from work to take care of sick children. Indeed, Black (1980) has suggested that items like these constitute a minimum definition of feminism: "What does feminism mean? Although there is a good deal of disagreement, we may say that . . . feminism *at least* means insistence on equality of treatment, particularly equal access to all elements of public life, along with the equal rewards for activities" (p. 92).

The other two feminist goals discussed above (radically transforming society and payment for child rearing) did not load on the feminist goal factor. These two items will be used separately in the analysis. Two gender-role items are also discussed separately below. The first asked respondents whether there should be fewer differences in sex roles, and the second asked about the division of labor in an ideal family. Finally, a measure of the salience of women's issues was included in the survey and is also analyzed separately.

Several other scales were constructed as well. Factor analysis identified two distinct sets of items that measured attitudes toward women in politics. The first, called women in the legislature, is constructed of items that ask whether things would go better or worse with more women on the local council, in the national parliament, or in the European Parliament. The second, labeled women in politics, is constructed from items asking whether politics should be left to men, and whether the respondent would have more confidence in a male or female legislator (or equal confidence in each).

Employed women were asked their perceptions of discrimination in jobs, training, and salaries. These items have been combined into a scale. Respondents were asked whether they trusted a man or a woman more (or trusted both equally) in a variety of professions. A scale was formed from several of

these items, including train driver, surgeon, doctor to deliver a baby, and lawyer. Finally, as a measure of family orientations, a scale was constructed from items tapping the sources of happiness. Three sources are included in the scale: a successful marriage, having children, and getting along with a family. This scale will be called the family orientation scale. Respondents had other options as sources of happiness, including doing important things, feeling useful, and being well regarded.

A good deal of research has reported that religiosity is an important constraint on feminism among women and men. The survey did not contain a measure of denominational affiliation, so it is impossible to separate Catholics or evangelicals from other Christians. A measure of religiosity was constructed, however, from items asking whether the respondent considered herself to be religious and to what extent God was important to her life. An additional item asked whether the respondent's religious beliefs influenced her political preferences. This item is treated separately in the analysis below. (For details of scale construction and question wording, see the appendix, or contact the author).

The Euro-Barometer does not survey all Western European countries, and the question wording on some items varies across countries. Luxembourg and Greece were excluded from the analysis<sup>1</sup>, and differences in question wording will be noted as they arise. The data contain fairly large samples from Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and West Germany. For analyses that describe Western European women as a group, the sample was weighted to reflect the population of each country. For analyses that focused on individual countries, however, the sample was not weighted in order to include all respondents.

#### SYSTEM LEVEL DIFFERENCES

Klein (1987) reported some variation across countries in support for gender equality and feminism. The countries in this study vary on several measures that seem likely to affect the level of feminist consciousness among women. These system-level differences may also affect the determinants of feminist consciousness across Western European countries and the relationship between feminist consciousness and other political attitudes and behaviors. It is difficult to derive precise hypotheses about the effects of these variables, since they may produce different effects in different combinations.

First, there are real differences in the level of gender equality. Although when compared to other countries of the world, most Western European countries are relatively egalitarian,<sup>2</sup> there are important cross-national differences. Researchers have pointed to several dimensions of gender equality.

Table 1  
*Gender Equality in Western Europe*

	Education <sup>a</sup>	Labor force <sup>b</sup>	Legislature <sup>c</sup>
Belgium	25 (30)	37	6
Denmark	29 (28)	56	24
France	24 (27)	48	6
Italy	23 (27)	32	8
Ireland	19 (27)	34	
The Netherlands	27 (37)	30	19
The United Kingdom	16 (25)	54	4
West Germany	27 (36)	51	10

a. Percentage of women aged 20-24 engaged in higher education, 1980-82. Male figures in parentheses. Source: Sivard, 1985.

b. Percentage of women aged 15-64 in labor force, 1980. Source: Sivard, 1985.

c. Percentage of women in lower house of parliament. Source: Norris, 1985.

Wolchik (1981) identified three: access to higher education, women in the labor force, and representation in the legislature. Table 1 contains information on each of these variables for each of the countries in the analysis. Although the ordering of countries changes on the three variables, in general Denmark, the Netherlands, and Belgium are among the most egalitarian. The ordering here differs somewhat from that of Christy (1987), who ranked countries on participatory resources available to women and on participatory attitudes. Christy rated Britain as more egalitarian than other Western European countries, although the data in Table 1 place Britain in an intermediate position.

Higher levels of societal equality seem likely to make feminist consciousness socially acceptable but may also decrease the salience of feminist issues for most women (Katzenstein, 1987). Different types of social equality may also affect the determinants of feminist consciousness. For example, in countries with widespread labor force participation by women, employment status may be at best a weak predictor of feminist consciousness. In countries where female labor force participation is still relatively rare, it may be a stronger predictor, as women face discrimination in the workplace.

A second system variable is the nature of the party and interest group system and its relationship to the women's movement. Political institutional arrangements can constitute a political opportunity structure that strongly influences support for social movements. In France and Italy, leftist parties have supported the women's movement, incorporating it into the party system (Ergas, 1982; Hellman, 1987; Katzenstein, 1987). In West Germany, the women's movement has resisted such an alliance (Ferree, 1987), although



recent efforts by the Greens to incorporate feminist goals may be eroding this resistance. In the United Kingdom, the alliance between the women's movement and the Labour party has been largely informal (Gelb, 1987). The implications of these differences in opportunity structures may be important for the determinants and consequences of feminist consciousness. In those countries with strong ties between leftist parties and the women's movement, ideology may be a strong predictor of feminist consciousness. In addition, feminism may be strongly associated with liberal positions on issues stressed by the political parties with which the movement is connected. In countries where such ties do not exist, ideology should be a weaker predictor, and the links between a feminist consciousness and nonfeminist policy preferences may be weaker.

Third, the ideology of the feminist movement itself may influence the extent of feminist consciousness in a given country. Feminist movements are often characterized as liberal, socialist, or radical. Liberal movements, typified by the U.S.'s National Organization for Women, seek equality under law. Socialist movements seek equality within a socialist framework, although this usually involves a critique of Marxist orthodoxy. Radical feminists see the oppression of women as the root of all oppression and see a fundamental conflict of interest between women and men. Although liberal feminism has predominated in the United States, in West Germany radical feminism is stronger (Ferree, 1987), in Britain the socialist tradition is dominant (Randall, 1987), and in the Netherlands, both the socialist and radical traditions are present (Briet, Landermans, & Kroon, 1987). Regardless of the merits of these positions, it seems that liberal feminism is the most likely to attract widespread public support, and radical feminism the least likely. Moreover, the ideology of these movements should affect the types of women that support them. Although liberal feminism may attract women across demographic and political lines, socialist feminism may draw primarily from the political left and be associated with leftist positions on economic and foreign policy issues. Feminist consciousness in countries with a strong radical feminist tradition may be concentrated among young, well-educated, single women and may be more strongly associated with support for egalitarian family roles.

The women's movements in Western Europe differ in history as well. In Scandinavia, "first-wave" feminist groups (women's groups in the late 1800s and early 1900s) were quite successful and did not disband, allowing for a continuous tradition of feminist activity. In the other countries, the organizations of the early 1900s disbanded long before the second wave of activity in the 1960s and 1970s, while in parts of Catholic Europe, (notably Italy and Belgium), first-wave feminism never gained momentum (Lovenduski,



1986). In those countries with continuous traditions of feminist organizations, feminist consciousness may be more widespread, and age may be a weaker predictor of feminist consciousness.

Finally, political and religious culture may influence variations across nations. Many religious organizations, including the Catholic church and evangelical denominations, have opposed feminist demands. Women tend to be more religious than men and may be deterred from feminist positions by their religious beliefs (Wilcox, 1989; Wilcox & Cook, 1989). Some have argued that religious affiliation has been an important limiter of feminism in Europe (Mayer & Smith, 1985), although the Italian women's movement is often described as the largest and most effective in spite of any influence of Catholicism (Randall, 1987). In Catholic countries and countries with a strong evangelical tradition, religiosity may be a strong negative predictor of feminist consciousness.

#### GENDER ROLE ATTITUDES

Table 2 presents the mean values of the gender role scales, along with the range for each scale. Research has generally shown that gender role attitudes are influenced by demographic variables, and cross-national differences may be due to differences in these variables. For this reason, a set of adjusted means is presented, holding constant the effects of education, income, labor force participation, marital and parental status, religiosity, the connection between religion and politics, and ideology.<sup>3</sup> These adjusted means are best interpreted as representing the predicted gender role attitudes if all women in Western Europe were the same on these demographic variables. Tests for the significance of cross-national differences were conducted with dummy variable regressions, with Belgium (most frequently the median country on the various scales) as the base country. Regression coefficients depend on the distribution of the item as well as the correlations, so that relatively larger coefficients for countries with smaller numbers of cases may not be statistically significant, while smaller coefficients for countries with larger samples are significant.

Western European women generally favor fewer sex-role differences in society and support liberal feminist goals. In each country, the mean position is that politics would be better with more women in the legislature, and there is a fair degree of support for equality in politics. There is less support for equal roles in the family, however, and for radically transforming society. Moreover, in nearly every country, women are somewhat less likely to trust women than to trust men in occupations that have traditionally been dominated by men.

Table 2  
*Gender Role Attitudes in Western Europe*

	Fewer differences in roles		Salience – women's problems	
	Observed	Adjusted	Observed	Adjusted
Belgium	1.71	1.74	5.70	6.08
Denmark	1.74	1.73	5.49	5.61
France	1.81**	1.81	6.72**	6.60*
Italy <sup>a</sup>	—	—	7.46**	7.54**
Ireland	1.76	1.81	6.09	6.69
The Netherlands	1.69	1.67	4.91**	4.78**
United Kingdom	1.60**	1.60**	5.36	5.59*
West Germany	1.77	1.77	6.07	6.05
RANGE	1-2		1-11	
	Women in legislatures		Women in politics	
Belgium	2.21	2.05	2.63	2.65
Denmark	2.38*	2.40*	3.00**	3.04**
France	2.19	2.19	2.82**	2.79*
Italy	2.14	2.19	2.72*	2.84**
Ireland	2.42*	2.42*	2.80*	2.89*
The Netherlands	2.09*	2.07*	2.92**	2.84**
United Kingdom	2.32*	2.35*	2.80**	2.91**
West Germany	2.27	2.29	2.63	2.68
RANGE	1-3		1-4	
	Trust women		Discrimination in workplace	
Belgium	1.81	1.86	2.43	2.46
Denmark	1.94**	1.94	2.57	2.56
France	1.86*	1.86	2.56*	2.53
Italy	1.76*	1.75**	2.35	2.36
Ireland	1.76	1.81	2.33	2.31
The Netherlands	1.92**	1.90	2.47	2.45
United Kingdom	1.78	1.82	2.26**	2.30*
West Germany	1.84	1.84	2.64**	2.66**
RANGE	1-3		1-3	
	Liberal feminist goals		Goal – radical transformation	
Belgium	3.11	3.21	2.03	2.19
Denmark	3.14	3.20	1.71*	1.73**
France	3.25*	3.2	1.81**	1.87**
Italy	3.12	3.17	1.71*	1.83**
Ireland	3.06	3.09	2.14	2.30
The Netherlands	2.95	2.93**	1.49**	1.45**
United Kingdom	2.88**	2.96*	1.82**	1.88**
West Germany	3.25*	3.28	1.81**	1.88**
RANGE	1-4		1-4	

(continued)

Table 2 continued

	Fewer differences in roles		Salience—women's problems	
	Observed	Adjusted	Observed	Adjusted
	Goal—pay for housewives		Equality of family rules	
Belgium	3.04	3.05	2.00	2.05
Denmark	2.46**	2.36**	2.34**	2.27*
France	3.24	3.21	2.19**	2.12
Italy	2.82*	2.96	2.23**	2.32**
Ireland	2.72	2.70	1.95	1.96
The Netherlands	1.91**	1.88**	2.11	2.01
United Kingdom	2.50**	2.45**	2.13	2.15
West Germany	2.75**	2.95	1.96*	2.07
RANGE	1-4		1-3	

*Note.* Observed and adjusted mean values for each scale (see appendix for descriptions) for women in each country. Adjusted means hold constant education, income, age, urbanization, marital status, parenthood, religiosity, the connection between religion and politics, and labor-force participation. High scores indicate more feminist positions.

a. In Italy, wording of the question on differences in sex roles differed substantially from other countries, and so data are omitted.

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ . (Belgium is base country against which cross-national differences are tested.)

There are important differences across countries and some intransitivity in country orderings. The patterns in these data suggest the complexity of gender role attitudes and feminism among Western European women. In general, women in Denmark are most egalitarian and those in the United Kingdom the least egalitarian. Scores on these scales are probably a function not only of feminist orientations but also of system differences in equality. For example, the belief that increasing the number of women in the legislature is desirable is probably influenced by the current level of women in the legislature: Women who live in countries with substantial numbers of women in the lower house may be less likely to feel that increased numbers of women would improve politics. Thus, although Denmark is the most supportive of increased representation of women in the legislature, the United Kingdom and Ireland (with few women in the legislature) are close behind. Dutch women are quite supportive of equality in politics, but the high proportion of women in their national legislature probably decreases their belief that additional women would change politics. Similarly, although the women of Denmark consistently have the most egalitarian attitudes, they are among those least likely to believe that women's issues are highly salient, perhaps because of the greater gender equality in Danish society.

Table 3  
*Feminist Consciousness in Western Europe*

	Nonfeminist	Potential feminist	Feminist	Strong feminist
Belgium	38%	15%	30%	17%
Denmark	29%	29%	23%	18%
France	27%	24%	37%	12%
Italy	35%	16%	30%	19%
Ireland	39%	25%	6%	30%
The Netherlands	34%	26%	25%	15%
United Kingdom	42%	32%	12%	14%
West Germany	41%	21%	19%	19%

*Note.* Feminist consciousness was determined by agreement with liberal feminist goals and membership in approval of the women's movement (see appendix).

A few national patterns are notable. Irish women are among the most supportive of general gender equality, of equality in politics and increased numbers of women in the legislatures, and of the goal of radically transforming society. After controls for demographic variables, they are more likely than others to find women's issues salient. Yet they are the least likely to favor equality in the family and among the least likely to trust women in nontraditional professions. Although British women are generally the least egalitarian, they are much more supportive of political equality and increased numbers of women in the legislatures. Dutch women are generally low on equality scales but are among the most supportive of political equality and most trusting of women in nontraditional occupations. These patterns suggest a rich complexity of gender-role attitudes in Western Europe.

#### FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG WESTERN EUROPEAN WOMEN

Women in Western Europe display a fairly substantial level of feminist consciousness. The data are presented in Table 3. Between 25% and 49% in different countries fall into the feminist or strong feminist categories, while between 27% and 46% are classified as nonfeminists because they do not share basic feminist goals.

Feminist consciousness is most widespread in Italy, which confirms the widespread perception that the Italian movement is the most vital in Western Europe (Randall, 1987), and is weakest in the United Kingdom, a finding consistent with the reports of Gelb (1986, 1987). Somewhat surprisingly, feminist consciousness in Denmark is not especially widespread. Katzenstein

Table 4  
*Feminist Consciousness with Controls for Demographic and Attitudinal Variables*

	Mean	Controls for demographics	Controls for attitudes
Belgium	1.15	1.52	1.64
Denmark	1.24	1.46	1.45
France	1.34	1.44	1.45**
Italy	1.33	1.45	1.55*
Ireland	1.21	1.54	1.44
The Netherlands	1.21	1.16**	1.46*
United Kingdom	.96**	1.16**	1.21**
West Germany	1.05	1.32*	1.54**

*Note.* Mean values on feminist consciousness scale (see appendix), and after multivariate controls. First set of controls includes demographic variables and ideology, second set includes all of first set plus gender role attitudes. High scores indicate more feminist consciousness. \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ . (Belgium is base country for tests of cross-national differences.)

(1987) offers one possible explanation, noting that in Scandinavia, the record of employment and wage reform, coupled with attention to equity issues, has robbed the women's movement of its organizational rationale.

More interesting is the case of Ireland. Fully 30% of Irish women can be termed strong feminists, by far the highest percentage among the countries in this study. Yet only 6% are weak feminists, and Ireland ranks third among the nine countries in nonfeminists.

System-level differences in feminist consciousness may be due to differences in education levels, labor force participation, and other demographic variables. Table 4 presents first the observed mean for each country on the feminist consciousness scale, then adjusts that mean for differences in education, income, labor force participation, religiosity, the subjective connection between religion and politics<sup>4</sup>, urbanization, age, marital status, parenthood, and general ideology. These adjusted figures should be interpreted as the predicted levels of feminist consciousness if all women in Western Europe had identical levels of education, religiosity, and other demographic variables, and had identical ideologies.<sup>5</sup>

To test the statistical significance of cross-national differences, a series of regression equations were estimated, with dummy variables for each country. Dummy-variable regression can only be conducted if one country is used as the base: In these equations as in those to follow, Belgium was used as a base. The regression analysis indicates that feminist consciousness in Britain is significantly lower than in Belgium.

The adjusted means indicate that feminist consciousness in Italy, Denmark, and Belgium is higher than might be predicted from these

countries' demographic and ideological profiles. The level of feminist consciousness in the Netherlands, conversely, is lower than would be predicted from demographic and ideological variables. The regression analysis revealed that when demographic and ideological variables are controlled, the level of feminist consciousness in the Netherlands, West Germany, and the United Kingdom is significantly lower than in Belgium.

Finally, Table 4 includes the mean value on the feminist consciousness scale adjusted for demographic variables and for gender role attitudes. These coefficients may be interpreted as indicating the efficiency of the women's movement in each country in developing feminist consciousness, given the gender-role attitudes of that country's women. Belgium exhibits the highest levels of feminist consciousness given the generally lower levels of gender-equality attitudes there, and Denmark also has a higher level of feminist consciousness than might be predicted by demographic and attitudinal variables. Irish support, on the other hand, is explained by the strong support for women's issues among Irish women, so controls for gender role attitudes reduce the adjusted level of feminism in Ireland.

## THE DETERMINANTS OF FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS

Scholars who have investigated the sources of feminist consciousness in the United States have generally found that the strongest predictors are education, labor force participation, income, youth, ideology, and weaker religious attachments (Cook, 1989).<sup>6</sup> For Western European women in general and for women in each country, these variables, along with urbanization, income, marital status, and parenthood were regressed on the feminist consciousness scale. The results are presented in Table 5.

Among Western European women, these variables explain approximately 13% of the variance in feminist consciousness. Age and ideology are by far the strongest predictors, followed by education and religiosity. Labor force attachment was a positive predictor of feminist consciousness, as was income.

The equation for all Western European women contained many more cases than the equations for individual countries, allowing relatively modest coefficients to achieve statistical significance. An unstandardized regression coefficient of .08 is statistically significant in the equation for all European women, but similar or larger coefficients are not significant for equations in Belgium, Denmark, France, and Italy. This same problem occurs across equations: An unstandardized coefficient of .05 for education is not significant in Ireland because the equation contains only 218 cases, but a smaller

Table 5  
*Determinants of Feminist Consciousness*

	Western Europe	Belgium	Denmark
Education	.04 (.10)**	-.04 (-.11)	.07 (.20)**
Income	.04 (.04)*	.00 (.00)	.09 (.09)
Age	-.01 (-.20)**	-.02 (-.34)**	-.00 (-.03)
Labor force	.07 (.04)*	.52 (.21)**	.02 (.01)
Married	-.07 (-.03)	-.07 (-.03)	.09 (.04)
Children at home	-.06 (-.03)	-.30 (-.13)*	.04 (.02)
Urban	.01 (.02)	-.00 (-.01)	-.06 (-.09)
Religiosity	-.08 (-.06)**	-.13 (-.08)	-.12 (-.09)
Religion and politics	-.03 (-.01)	-.06 (-.02)	-.10 (.03)
Ideology	-.08 (.14)**	-.03 (-.06)	-.12 (-.21)**
N	2890	279	288
R <sup>2</sup>	.14	.15	.16
	France	Italy	Ireland
Education	.00 (.01)	.04 (.11)*	.05 (.10)
Income	.05 (.05)	.05 (.05)	.02 (.02)
Age	-.01 (-.10)	-.02 (-.24)**	-.01 (-.13)*
Labor force	-.13 (-.06)	.19 (.10)*	.51 (.19)**
Married	.18 (.08)	-.16 (-.07)	.24 (.10)
Children at home	.04 (.02)	.01 (.00)	-.04 (-.01)
Urban	.01 (.02)	.00 (.00)	.15 (.16)*
Religiosity	-.08 (-.07)	-.08 (-.05)	.00 (.00)
Religion and politics	-.00 (-.00)	-.16 (-.06)	-.03 (-.01)
Ideology	-.05 (-.11)*	-.10 (-.18)**	-.03 (-.05)
N	357	344	215
R <sup>2</sup>	.03	.21	.13
	Netherlands	United Kingdom	West Germany
Education	.05 (.14)**	.08 (.21)**	.06 (.14)*
Income	.04 (.04)	.03 (.03)	-.08 (-.07)
Age	-.01 (-.12)*	-.01 (-.13)*	-.01 (-.13)*
Labor force	-.03 (-.01)	.11 (.05)	.12 (.05)
Married	.02 (.01)	.02 (.01)	-.07 (-.03)
Children at home	-.12 (-.06)	-.12 (-.06)	-.10 (-.04)
Urban	-.01 (-.01)	-.02 (-.03)	.05 (.12)*
Religiosity	-.01 (-.01)	-.18 (-.15)*	-.01 (-.01)
Religion and politics	-.14 (-.06)	-.08 (-.03)	-.28 (-.09)
Ideology	-.16 (-.32)**	-.02 (-.04)	-.07 (-.12)*
N	394	397	262
R <sup>2</sup>	.20	.14	.12

Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients, with betas in parentheses.

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ .



coefficient is significant in the Italian equation. For this reason, it is useful not only to examine statistically significant coefficients, but also to compare the magnitudes of unstandardized coefficients across countries.

Labor force participation is a significant predictor in countries with relatively low levels of women in the work force (Belgium, Ireland, Italy, but not the Netherlands). Ideology is a significant predictor in those countries where there is an established link between leftist parties and the women's movement (Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands) and in West Germany, where the Green party has attempted to establish ties with feminist organizations.

Age is a significant predictor in every country except Denmark and France. In Denmark, the first-wave feminist organizations were quite successful and never completely died out, and some first-wave movements survived in France, as well. While the first-wave organizations disappeared in other countries, they remained active in Denmark, raising the consciousness of successive generations of women. In addition, in Denmark the second wave of feminism, which recruited younger women in other Western European countries, did not flourish in the generally egalitarian culture. The first-wave organizations also survived in the Netherlands, where the relationship between age and feminist consciousness is rather modest, but the Dutch second-wave organizations were somewhat more successful. Age is a particularly strong predictor of feminist consciousness in Italy and Belgium, where first-wave feminism never took hold, and where second-wave feminism is strong. (For a discussion of first- and second-wave feminist organizations, see Randall [1987] and Lovenduski [1986].)

Somewhat surprisingly, personal religiosity is a significant predictor only in Britain, although religiosity is nearly statistically significant in Catholic Belgium. Despite the frequent discussion of Catholicism as a barrier to feminism in Europe, religiosity is not a significant predictor of feminist consciousness in Italy, nor is the connection between religion and politics. Unfortunately, the Euro-Barometer survey did not contain a measure of religious affiliation, and it is possible that better religious measures would uncover a relationship.

Also worthy of note is the low proportion of variance in feminist consciousness in France explained by these variables. Only ideology is a significant predictor of French feminist consciousness, and only 6% of the total variance is explained by these 10 predictors. The French women's movement is generally described as small and riven with internal disputes (Randall, 1987), although the data here reveal a high level of feminist consciousness in France. The reason for the poor fit for this equation is not immediately clear.

### FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES

If feminist consciousness is to have political meaning, it should be linked to other political attitudes. This linkage may be due to reciprocal causation: A developed feminist consciousness may lead women to more liberal positions on some issues, and liberal women may be most likely to develop a feminist consciousness. Table 6 presents partial correlations (controlling for demographic variables and ideology) between feminist consciousness and gender-role attitudes, attitudes toward other political issues, and partisan attitudes.

Strong correlations between gender-role attitudes and feminist consciousness seem likely, although most research in mass attitudes suggests that few citizens exhibit constrained political attitudes (see Converse, 1964). Thus, although the four liberal feminist goals that are part of the feminist consciousness index seem logically linked to the other gender-role scales, these links may not be evident to the mass public. The data in Table 6 suggest that feminists perceive the link: In every country, gender-role attitudes are strongly correlated with the feminist consciousness measure. The correlations are lower in Belgium but elsewhere are generally of similar magnitude. One interesting pattern emerges from these correlations, however, that is explainable by the characteristics of the women's movements. Feminism in West Germany is more strongly correlated with the goal of a radical transformation of society, and more negatively correlated with a family orientation, than in other Western European countries. The strength of the radical feminist faction in West Germany, stressing the essential conflict between the sexes and the need for radical restructuring of social relationships, seems a likely explanation for this relationship. Similarly, the correlation in Germany between feminism and the goal of pay for housework is higher than elsewhere in Europe, doubtlessly because this issue has been a central part of the West German feminist platform.

More interesting is the relationship between feminist consciousness and other political attitudes. Cook (1987) reported that American feminists are more liberal than other women on a range of economic, social, and foreign policy issues. Conover (1988) has argued that in the United States, feminist women are more liberal because feminist consciousness serves as the catalyst that helps women recognize their underlying "female" values. Scholars in recent years have reported evidence of a growing gender gap across a range of political issues (Fite, Genest, & Wilcox, 1989; Norris, 1988; Welch & Thomas, 1988), particularly on issues related to sympathy for the disadvantaged and war and peace. Conover argues that this gender gap is due to the growing awareness among feminist women of their nurturant values, which

Table 6  
*Feminist Consciousness and Political Attitudes*

	Western Europe	Belgium	Denmark	France	Ireland
<i>Gender attitudes</i>					
Saliency	.29**	.13**	.27**	.27**	.12
Fewer sex roles	.25**	.11	.20**	.27**	.14
Equal roles in family	.22**	.10	.20**	.19**	.14
Family orientation	-.08**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-.12
Women in nontraditional jobs	.15**	.14**	.12**	.15**	.29**
Women in legislature	.27**	.16**	.28**	.29**	.22**
Equality in politics	.34**	.17**	.41**	.28**	.25**
Radically transform society	.32**	.22**	.36**	.47**	.41**
Pay for housewives	.19**	n.s.	n.s.	.10	.25**
<i>Other political attitudes</i>					
Greater income equality	.21**	.17**	.24**	.16**	.11
Nationalize industry	.08**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.32**
More government in economy	.05**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Protect environment	.14**	n.s.	n.s.	.12	n.s.
Less nuclear energy	.03	-.13	.21**	n.s.	n.s.
Less regional autonomy	.09**	.19**	n.s.	.16	n.s.
Aid to Third World	.16**	.17**	.35**	.12	.25
Decreased defense	.05	n.s.	.28**	-.16**	n.s.
Citizen of Europe	.12**	.21**	.15**	n.s.	.26**
Peace most important	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Less severe on terrorism	.05	n.s.	.14	n.s.	n.s.
Expected vote (left)	.06**	n.s.	.14	.14**	n.s.
Consider vote (right)	n.s.	n.s.	NA	n.s.	NA
Consider vote (left)	.18**	n.s.	NA	.18**	NA
	Italy <sup>a</sup>	The Netherlands	United Kingdom	West Germany	
<i>Gender attitudes</i>					
Saliency	.30**	.26**	.14**	.35**	
Fewer sex roles		.29**	.33**	.31**	
Equal roles in family	.29**	.34**	.19**	.19**	
Family orientation	n.s.	n.s.	-.14**	-.21**	
Women in nontraditional jobs	.14**	.16**	.14**	.27**	
Women in legislature	.27**	.28**	.30**	.28**	
Equality in politics	.40**	.36**	.25**	.40**	
Radically transform society	.30**	.30**	.27**	.45**	
Pay for housewives	.19**	.22**	.14**	.31**	

(continued)

Table 6 continued

	Italy <sup>a</sup>	The Netherlands	United Kingdom	West Germany
Other political attitudes				
Greater income equality	.24**	.11	n.s.	.32**
Nationalize industry	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.18**
More government in economy	n.s.	.11	-.15**	n.s.
Protect environment	.12	n.s.	n.s.	.31**
Less nuclear energy	-.10	n.s.	n.s.	.15**
Less regional autonomy	.13	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Aid to Third World	n.s.	.13	n.s.	.42**
Decreased defense	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.26**
Citizen of Europe	.09	.10	.13	.14**
Peace most important	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.13
Less severe on terrorism	n.s.	.24**	.16**	.24**
Expected vote (left)	.09	n.s.	n.s.	.14
Consider vote (right)	n.s.	n.s.	NA	n.s.
Consider vote (left)	.09	.26**	NA	.32**

*Note.* Entries are partial correlation coefficients, controlling for education, income, age, urbanization, marital and parental status, labor-force participation, religiosity, the connection between religion and politics, and ideology. NA indicates question not asked to respondents from this country.

a. In Italy, wording of the question on differences in sex roles differed substantially from other countries, so data are omitted.

\*\* $p \leq .01$ ; n.s. = coefficient not statistically significant. For all other coefficients,  $p \leq .05$ .

have been described by a number of feminist theorists (Gilligan, 1982; Ruddick, 1980).

If Conover is correct, we should expect to find substantial correlations between feminist consciousness attitudes and issues involving sympathy for the disadvantaged or war and peace. The data in Table 6 provide partial confirmation of this hypothesis. There are significant correlations between feminist consciousness and support for greater income equality (which benefits the disadvantaged) in every country except Denmark. These correlations are not due to general liberalism, since ideology (along with demographic variables) is controlled in these partial correlations. Moreover, they do not indicate a generally leftist approach to the economy: The correlations between feminism and support for greater nationalization of industry are significant only in Ireland and West Germany, and the correlations are generally not significant between feminism and support for greater government involvement in the economy.

There is less support on foreign policy attitudes, however. Although there is a significant correlation between feminism and support for expanded aid for the Third World in most countries, feminism is significantly correlated with support for a smaller defense budget only in Denmark and West Germany. Although feminists are more likely than other women to think of themselves as citizens of Europe, only in West Germany are they significantly more likely to believe that peace is the most important foreign policy goal. The failure of feminist consciousness to correlate strongly with an emphasis on peace is in part an artifact, however. Women in Western Europe in general are strongly committed to peace, and the variable is quite skewed, preventing a high correlation from emerging.

The correlations between feminism and environmentalism and opposition to nuclear energy are also highest in West Germany, indicating possible ties between feminism and the Green party. Feminist women in Denmark, the Netherlands, Britain, and West Germany are less likely than other women to favor harsh treatment of terrorists.

In Europe overall, then, feminist consciousness is significantly correlated with liberal positions on nearly every issue, but these correlations are stronger on attitudes that relate to sympathy for the disadvantaged at home or abroad. This provides partial support for Conover's (1988) suggestion that a feminist consciousness crystallizes women's values. Moreover, feminist women are more likely to favor decreased defense spending and to reject nationalism in favor of a European identity, providing tentative support for Conover's finding that feminism leads to less hawkish policy preferences.

The ultimate import of feminist consciousness, however, is not in political attitudes but in political *behavior*. Although women have increasingly supported Democratic candidates in the United States in greater numbers than their male counterparts, the trend toward greater support of leftist parties has not been duplicated in Western Europe. Recent studies have reported no gender gap in voter preference in Europe (Mayer & Smith, 1985; Welch & Thomas, 1988), although this represents a change from earlier studies that had reported that women were more likely to support conservative parties.

Mayer and Smith (1985) further argued that feminists did not constitute a voting bloc in Western European countries, although they had no direct measure of feminism. Their proxy measure (youth, university-educated, single heads of households) was perhaps the best available in their data but quite imprecise. In this study, the impact of feminist consciousness on political behavior was tested in two ways. First, the Euro-Barometer contained a question that asked respondents which party they would support if the election were held today. This measure was recoded into a dichotomous variable, with leftist parties coded 1 and other parties coded 0. The correla-

tions between expected vote and feminist consciousness were generally quite weak, achieving statistical significance in only France, Italy, and West Germany — countries in which there are established or growing ties between leftist parties and feminist organizations. The correlation in West Germany understates the feminist connection with the Green party, however. Although potential and not-strong feminists were no more likely than nonfeminists to choose the Greens as their likely preference, nearly half of strong feminists preferred the Greens.

Expected votes are influenced by long-standing party loyalties, which may decay slowly over time. Two indices were therefore constructed from items asking respondents whether they would consider supporting a variety of parties from the left and right. There is no correlation between feminist consciousness and a possible vote for rightist parties, but there are substantial correlations with a possible vote for leftist parties. This suggests the potential for organized feminists to sway votes in future elections, although the bonds of party loyalties may preclude a unified feminist bloc.

## CONCLUSIONS

Feminist consciousness is fairly widespread among Western European women, where between 25% and 50% of women in each country examined can be termed feminists. This does not translate into widespread support for the entire feminist agenda or for total gender equality, but it does indicate that women's consciousness has been raised in most countries more than the most pessimistic accounts have indicated.

In most countries, feminist consciousness is associated with youth, more education, less religiosity, and liberal ideology. The pattern of determinants of feminist consciousness varies in ways that may be explained by differences in gender equality, in the ideology of the feminist movement, and in political institutions and arrangements. Feminist consciousness is more strongly associated with a measure of traditional ideology in countries with strong ties between the women's movement and political parties, and it is not related to ideology in countries with strong radical feminist movements or weak ties to parties. Feminist consciousness is associated with labor force participation in those countries where that participation is less common. Feminist consciousness is weakly associated with age in countries with strong first-wave movements, where older women exhibit higher levels of feminism, and it is strongly associated with age in those Catholic countries that did not experience first-wave movements.

Feminist consciousness has consequences for other political attitudes as well. This extends beyond the predictable gender-role attitudes: Even after controls for general ideology, feminists are more liberal on a range of political issues. This association is strongest for issues that involve sympathy for the disadvantaged both at home and abroad, but it also includes defense-related issues, environmental issues, and even issues of regional autonomy. Here again, there are system-level differences. Feminist consciousness is more strongly associated with support for radical transformation of society and for pay for housework in West Germany, where radical feminist organizations have stressed such issues. Feminism is also more strongly associated with environmentalism and opposition to nuclear energy in West Germany, presumably because of the growing ties between feminism and the Green party.

More importantly, feminist consciousness has consequences for expected and potential vote choice. In some countries, feminist consciousness is associated with vote preference — most notably in those countries with strong formal ties between leftist parties and feminist organizations. In nearly every country, feminism is associated with a willingness to consider voting for a leftist party. Although this probably does not presage immediate electoral change, it does indicate the potential for shifting alignments based on feminist concerns.



## APPENDIX

### Scale Construction and Question Wording

#### ITEMS COMPRISING THE FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS SCALE:

There are many different movements and associations concerned with the situation of women, and they vary in their aims. For each of the following, would you tell me if you yourself agree completely, agree to some extent, disagree to some extent, or disagree completely with this aim?

1. Fight against prejudiced people who would like to keep women in a subordinate role to men both in the family and in society.
2. Obtain true equality between men and women in their work and careers.
3. Persuade the political parties to give women the same chances as men of reaching responsible positions in the parties, and of becoming candidates for elections.
4. Arrange things so that when a child is unwell, it could be either the father or the mother who stays home to care for it.

NOTE: These four items comprise the liberal feminist goals in Table 2. Alpha = .68.

What is your opinion of the movements which have come about recently and whose aim is the liberation of women?

1. very high opinion
2. quite a good opinion
3. rather poor opinion
4. very bad opinion

Do you belong to such a women's movement, could you see yourself as a member, or are you completely against being a member?

NOTE: Those who do not agree with at least three of the four liberal feminist goals are coded as nonfeminists. Those who agree with three, but have a poor opinion of the women's movement, are coded as potential feminists. Those who agree with three, have quite a good opinion of the women's movement, but are not members, are coded as weak feminists. Those who support at least three goals and either (a) have a very high opinion of the women's movement, or (b) see themselves as members of the women's movement are coded as strong feminists.

#### OTHER ITEMS AND SCALES: FEWER DIFFERENCES IN SEX ROLES

Do you agree or disagree with women who claim that there should be fewer differences between the respective roles of men and women in society?

**SALIENCE, WOMEN'S PROBLEMS**

The situation of women in society, compared with that of men, is often discussed nowadays. In your opinion, is there a problem or not for women in our society? To what extent is this an important problem? 0 means there is no problem, and 10 means there is a very important problem.

**WOMEN IN THE LEGISLATURE**

Would things go better or worse if there were distinctly more women in your

- local council?
- national Parliament?
- the European Parliament?

NOTE: Alpha = .92.

**WOMEN IN POLITICS**

Would you have more confidence in a man or a woman as a member of Parliament? It is sometimes said that "politics should be left to men." How far do you agree with this?

1. agree a lot
2. agree a little
3. disagree a little
4. disagree a lot

NOTE: Gamma = .68.

**DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE**

How would you say that the present situation of women in paid employment around you, compared with that of men, is— somewhat better, or worse, or the same when it comes to:

- the number and range of jobs which are available
- opportunities for further professional training
- salary
- job security
- promotion

NOTE: Alpha = .77.

### TRUST WOMEN IN NONTRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONS

Generally speaking, would you have more confidence in a man or woman as:

- the driver of your bus?
- the surgeon to operate on you?
- a doctor to deliver your baby?
- a lawyer to defend you in court?

NOTE: Alpha = .51.

### OTHER FEMINIST GOALS

For each of the following, would you tell me if you yourself agree completely, agree to some extent, disagree to some extent, or disagree completely with this aim?

- Ensure that women who are not in paid employment and who are bringing up their children should receive payment for this.
- Organize women into an independent movement to achieve a radical transformation of society.

### EQUALITY OF FAMILY ROLES

People also talk about the changing roles of husband and wife in the family. Here are three kinds of families. Which of them corresponds with your ideas about the family?

1. A family where the two partners each have an equally absorbing job and where the housework and the care of the children are equally shared between them.
2. A family where the wife has a less demanding job than her husband and where she does the larger share of housework and caring for children.
3. A family where only the husband has a job and the wife runs the home.

### RELIGIOSITY

Independently of whether you go to church or not, would you say you are.

1. a religious person
2. not a religious person
3. a convinced atheist

To what extent is god important in your life?

NOTE: Items normalized. Gamma = .84.

## THE CONNECTION BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS

Do your religious convictions play a role in your political preferences?

### NOTES

1. Women in Luxembourg were the most likely of women in Europe to support the women's movement, but they generally did not support feminist goals or even greater gender equality. The small number of women from Luxembourg in the survey made further analysis of this anomaly impossible.

2. The Population Crisis Committee has recently produced an analysis of gender equality across nations and across dimensions. On their 20-point scale, Belgium, Denmark, West Germany, and the Netherlands all rated 16.5, with France and the United Kingdom at 14.5. These scores are among the highest in the world. It should be remembered, of course, that there are some pre-industrial and industrializing countries with quite egalitarian gender roles.

3. The adjusted means were produced using analysis of covariance. The technique produces an adjusted mean that holds constant all covariates.

4. The item asked respondents whether their religious preferences influenced their political choices. Previous research has suggested that women who perceive a strong connection between religion and politics are more influenced by their religious beliefs than other women and are less likely to hold feminist positions (Wilcox, 1989). Tests for interaction effects were conducted at each step of the analysis, but no statistically significant interactions were discovered.

5. Analysis of covariance was again used to produce adjusted means for each country. Note that the adjusted means are in each case higher than the observed means. Analysis of covariance excludes those cases missing on any control variable. A number of women were excluded because they were unable to place themselves on the left-right ideology scale. These women were not well educated and were less likely than others to support the feminist movement.

6. Although this analysis assumes that demographic variables influence levels of feminist consciousness, this relationship is probably reciprocal, particularly for marital status, parenthood and labor force participation.

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*Clyde Wilcox is an Assistant Professor of Government at Georgetown University. He has published a number of articles on religion and politics, gender politics, racial differences in political attitudes, and campaign finance.*