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The Sweep Of The Modern Gender Gap: Is Britain Next?

Maxine Lopes

Introduction

The gender gap has become a growing phenomenon in United States politics, and as of recently, world politics. The change in voting behavior and partisanship as a result of gender has increased significantly over the past three decades. There is an obvious pattern occurring, one which political scientists have analyzed extensively and coined the “gender gap.” The United States and the United Kingdom both have present gender gaps, however it has become abundantly clear that the gaps themselves are complete opposites. The United States has been experiencing what has come to be known as a “modern gender gap,” while Britain has been consistently closer to a “traditional gender gap.” American women are increasingly more liberal than men, as well as more liberal as a whole. British women, on the other hand, are known for voting and behaving more conservatively. However, as feminism rises and gender roles expand, it appears that Britain’s gender gap may be moving in a similar direction to that of the United States. This transition from the traditional to the modern gender gap has swept the United States in the last three decades, and we aim to prove that it is slowly, but surely emerging in Britain. Within the next few decades the gender gap in Britain will begin to look identical to that of the United States.

As we seek to grasp a better understanding of the transition being made, it is necessary to examine the two differing gender gaps and all the influencing variables. By examining the idea of a modern gender gap in comparison to a traditional one, we can further comprehend what each concept entails and how each gender contributes. This in turn will offer further explanation on how the phenomenon has emerged in recent decades and will continue to do so in other countries (specifically Britain), the way it has in the United States. The impact of factors such as the gender-generation gap, the rise of feminism and the changing political attitudes of men will be analyzed. Looking to the historical data on political behavior and attitude in American women will supply insight on why the gender gap closed so drastically, causing it to reverse entirely and create a new gender gap in the process. Following will be an analysis of similar data in regards to Britain and why the gender gap has not yet closed, only narrowed. Comparing and contrasting data on these two countries, as well as analyzing the effects of their differences, may offer a more comprehensive understanding of why women in these two countries have taken opposite political stances.

Feminism, also known as the women's movement, will be defined and explored, allowing for a better comprehension of the rising theory. As the feminist theory has evolved and aimed to shed light on gender inequality, the social roles of women have expanded and progressed. Data will be presented to provide a more in depth understanding on the impact this theory has had on the political attitudes of women. While focusing heavily on voting behavior, there will also be a substantial emphasis on the stances of women on social, cultural and economic issues. When considering the political stances of women in both the United States and the United Kingdom, it is necessary to question which group is benefitting more as a result of their political allegiance. Therefore, the left and right parties of each country will be analyzed in order to determine which, if any, is most beneficial to the values and ideals of women. We will analyze this data empirically, as well as normatively, thus allowing us to better understand which political stance is more beneficial to women. As each of these factors are analyzed and studied, we seek to prove that British women are not nearly as conservative as they were three decades ago. The political beliefs and attitudes of women in Britain have begun to transform the same way they did in the United States after the 1970's. The modern gender gap that swept the United States has slowly begun to sweep many Western European countries, and here we seek to prove that Britain will soon fall victim to it as well.

Modern & Traditional Gender Gaps

Political Scientists have extensively analyzed the gender gap present in political attitudes and voting behavior, this analysis was further expanded when Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris introduced subcategories to the study. These proposed subcategories allow for more comprehensive coverage of the differing gender gaps across the globe. Inglehart and Norris (2000) coined these subcategories as "traditional" and "modern" gender gaps. The traditional gender gap is interpreted as one where women are voting and behaving more conservatively than men, as well as significantly more likely to identify with conservative parties. The traditional gender gap can be seen in the United Kingdom, where the majority of British women have taken conservative stances on social, foreign and economic issues. However, the modern gender gap is interpreted as one where women are significantly more liberal in their political attitudes and beliefs. The modern gender gap can be seen in the United States, as well as other Western European countries such as the Netherlands and Germany (Inglehart and Norris 2000, 449). As the politics of genders have

continued to change over time, as women are becoming increasingly liberal and men increasingly conservative, the modern gender gap has been emerging rapidly in countries all over the globe.

The traditional gender gap, which was once the norm in many countries, has become more rare in recent decades. As women have become more dominant members of society, even the countries where traditional gender gaps remain present have seen the gap narrow significantly. Data proved that women, not only in the United States but also numerous other Western European countries, were becoming much more left wing in the late 1980's, early 1990's, and mid-1990's (Edlund and Pande 2002, 917; Giger 2009, 474; Inglehart & Norris 2000, 442). Giger's (2009) study concluded that between 1974 and 2000, the gender gaps in France, the Netherlands and Germany transitioned from traditional to modern. Many have concluded that this reversal of these gender gaps, this shift from traditional to modern, was likely to occur in most industrial societies that consist of stable economies and progressive societal development. Women in post-communist societies or developing countries have yet to shift their political views and beliefs to become more left wing, and it is unlikely this shift would occur anytime soon (Giger 2009, 475; Inglehart and Norris 2000, 442-445). It can be argued that this is a result of the country itself being more progressive and consisting of more egalitarian ideals, as well as a more modernized approach to gender roles. Inglehart and Norris' (2000) research on the politics of women in varying economies concluded that countries with advanced economies were more likely to be swept by this modern gender gap, as their women are noticeably more left wing. However, while this data proved that many industrialized countries tend to consist of more liberal women, Britain was among the few notable exceptions.

While Giger's (2009) argument regarding the economic state of the country greatly influencing the gender gap is a substantial one, we must recognize that if this were the case the modern gender gap would already be present in the United Kingdom. Therefore, it is important to consider the impact of other contributing factors, such as the progression of society and the polarization of politics. Ideological polarization has become a prominent factor in the widening of the modern gender gap in the United States; as the ideological gap grows, the gender gap follows (Silver 2012). The progression of society has greatly impacted the takeover of the modern gender gap, with women becoming more liberal due to expanding gender roles, increased interest in social issues, and the rise of feminism. Considering the fact that the ideological divide in Britain is not nearly as wide, as well as the fact that British society has remained so traditional in its values, it is

unsurprising that the traditional gender gap has remained present for so long. However, the traditional gender gap is narrowing, and further analysis will assist us in determining whether Britain will be looking at complete reversal in decades to come.

The Gender Gap in the United States

The gender gap in the United States has become an increasingly prominent element of American politics. Unlike other countries, which have just recently been swept by the modern gender gap, the traditional gender gap isn't believed to have ever existed in the United States. The first two elections where exit polls were conducted, the elections of 1972 and 1976, the gender gap was almost non-existent (Silver 2012). It was not until the 1980's Reagan elections that there appeared to be a notable difference in the voting behavior of men and women (Conover 1988, 986; Silver 2012). Even during these elections, women consistently voted less conservative, but not yet extremely liberal. However, the 1996 Clinton/Dole elections resulted in a major shift, one that proved women and men to be taking opposing stances in their voting behaviors and political attitudes. The 2000 Bush/Gore election was the largest gender gap in the history of American politics, with the 20-point gender gap demonstrating how drastically divided the changing politics of genders had become. Women voted extremely left wing during this election, as the majority of female voters supported Democratic candidate Bill Clinton; the majority of men chose to support the opposition, backing Republican candidate George W. Bush. The 2012 election between Barack Obama and John McCain offered similar results, with an 18-point gender gap. As the pattern has continued, it has become evident that the United States was definitely conforming to the predictions of the modern gender gap. Silver's (2012) research on the gender gap in presidential elections from 1972 until 2012 proved how consistent American women had been in voting for the Democratic Party in the past two decades, as well as men for the Republican Party. While it is worth noting that men did see a shift in voting patterns during the 2008 election, it was not a substantial change, nor did it persist in the following election.

When considering why this shift in the political attitudes of specific genders occurred so drastically, as well as progressed so quickly, we must note how polarized American politics have become. Many who have analyzed the gender gap in the United States have speculated that its existence is a result of party polarization, as well as the highly polarized politics on social issues within the country (Inglehart and Norris 2000, 458; Giger 2009, 474). Silver (2012) considers this modern gender gap to be a result of the dramatic differences in party ideology and how far apart

the two major parties are and continue to become. Unlike the United Kingdom, the two major political parties in the United States have made a point of placing themselves on complete opposite ends of the political spectrum. The Republican Party is seen as being to the far right, while the Democratic Party has taken position on the far left, in turn erasing the possibility of center-left and center-right parties. Although a moderate party does exist, the United States' two-party system has made it unlikely that the Independent Party will ever exert much influence.

Although the ideological gap does not explain why men and women are taking these significantly different stances, it is an influential factor as to why this pattern has increased at alarmingly high rates. As Republican candidates continue to take strong conservative stances and Democratic candidates continue to take strong liberal stances, men and women appear to further conform to the beliefs of these parties. Even the politicians representing these parties are finding themselves abandoning any beliefs that make them appear too moderate, in turn adopting policies that make them appear more aligned with the radical ideals of their parties. This was a common occurrence during the 2012 Romney/Obama election as Romney neglected the moderate stances he took as Governor of Massachusetts, and Obama made a point of reversing his stance on the highly controversial issue of same-sex marriage (Silver 2012). The high polarization of political parties is forcing candidates to completely abandon the possibility of taking moderate stances, which in turn just increases polarization even more. This has become an ongoing cycle and the continuous growth of the ideological gap is only resulting in an overall escalation of the modern gender gap (Diekman and Schneider 2010; Pew Research Center 2012; Silver 2012).

The increasing relevance of social issues in the United States is believed by many to be the fundamental basis of the changing politics of women (Kaufmann 2006, 447). It is a common misconception that the voting behavior and political attitudes of American women is solely a result of their liberal stances on controversial social issues. Studies have shown that women are notably more left wing on issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, gun control, education, etc. (Pew Research Center 2012). Many of those controversial issues, especially abortion and gun control, are not major issues in British politics. However, this would suggest that women lack interest in economic and foreign policies, which is not the case. While women are increasingly liberal on social issues, they still list war, national security and the economy among their top priorities when voting (Kaufmann 2006, 449). The increasingly liberal politics of female voters in the United

States, combined with the fact that party politics are less polarized in the United Kingdom, could offer a possible explanation as to why the gender gaps in the two countries differ so greatly.

The Gender Gap in Britain

While the gender gap in the United States has been studied heavily due to its dramatic and apparent shift, Britain's slow paced transition has gathered less attention. Staying true to the traditional gender gap, female voters in Britain were exceedingly more conservative for the majority of the 20th century (Giger 2009, 475; Norris 1986, 121).). Norris and Lovenduski's (1993) data on voting behavior between 1963 and 1992 proved that women were more likely to vote than expected, although it was shown that they were also more likely to vote conservative. Up until the 1997 election, women were still being seen as the "backbone of the Conservative Party" (Norris and Lovenduski 1993, 57; Norris 1986, 120). This 1997 election between Tony Blair and John Major was the first instance since 1945 where the majority of women voted for the Labour Party. During this election, support from women rose 10% for the Labour Party and dropped 12% for the Conservative Party (Kellner 1997, 616). Giger's (2009) comparison of voting results from 1974 and 2001 proved that while the majority of women in 1974 were conservative, by 2000 female voters were more likely to vote and identify with the Labour Party. The common belief that British women are consistently more conservative has begun to fade out. The traditional gender gap is narrowing and Britain appears to be following in the footsteps of many other Western European countries that have been swept by the modern gender gap.

Seeing as the United Kingdom is not nearly as affected by issues of party polarization or specific policy preferences the way the United States is, it has become increasingly more difficult for researchers to understand why these women are becoming more liberal. It has been considered that the rise of feminism in the past few decades has played a significant role in the changing politics of women, leading them to sway towards left wing parties (Conover 1988, 1001; Hayes 1997, 211). The Labour Party has come to be known as the more beneficial party in regards to women, often taking more action than the Conservative Party. Scholars argued that the Conservative Party lacked feminist elements and appeared disinterested in expanding their platforms, in turn making left wing parties all the more attractive to female voters (Hayes 1997; Norris and Lovenduski 1993). These scholars also concluded that the Labour Party was the more beneficial option for women if they were seeking a more egalitarian form of representation, and British women were slowly beginning to make that realization as well.

The Labour Party has become the more attractive political party for British women for a plethora of reasons, however the most prominent would be that they have taken action in favor of women and gender equality, while the Conservative Party has not. As the feminist movement rose, the Conservative Party chose to focus on traditional values, which resulted in decreased support from women and increased support from men. By doing this they attempted to exhibit “neutral politics,” however many considered this stance and the resulting policies to be gender blind rather than neutral (Lovenduski 1996, 4). Even with a conservative woman in power during Margaret Thatcher’s terms, there was still evidence of heavy male dominance in British politics. The lack of female representation in Parliament caught the attention of women following Thatcher’s resignation, once the female Prime Minister resigned it became clear how immensely dominated Parliament was by male MPs. This in turn caused a drastic increase in the amount of elected female MPs in the following election. In 1997 there was a record 120 female MPs elected (commonly referred to as Blair’s babes), 102 of those female MPs coming from the Labour Party (Norris 1999). The Labour Party also used all-women shortlists (AWS), which was used to increase the percentage of female representation in Parliament; the Conservative Party however, had quickly refused the idea of AWS, suggesting that this concept gave women an unfair advantage. Regardless of whether or not that argument was valid, the acceptance of AWS by the Labour Party attracted female voters. Today there is double the amount of female MPs from the Labour Party than from the Conservative Party, with only 16% of Conservative MPs and 32% of Labour MPs being women (The Economist 2014). The Labour Party not only advocates for female equality, but also has a higher percentage of female political representation. This in turn has helped the Labour Party consistently gain the support of female voters over time.

For as long as the gender gap has been relevant, scholars have tended to approach the concept from the perspective of women rather than men. However, data from British elections in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s proves that the politics of men have changed more drastically than those of women. With that being said, it is necessary to consider that men may be the source of the gender gap. Women were indeed becoming more liberal over time, however the narrowing of this traditional gender gap in Britain appeared to be more a result of the changing political views of men. While the majority of women were still voting conservative in 1983, the percentage of men voting conservative that year surpassed the percentage of women doing so (Norris 1986, 120). Men appeared to begin leaning towards the Conservative Party far before women began leaning

towards the Labour Party. The possible basis for the change in political attitudes of British women can be speculated, however scholars have been unable to pinpoint the precise reasoning. The possibilities can range from the rise of feminism to changing policy preferences to the changing politics of men; but regardless of the precise reasoning, it has become abundantly clear that British women are slowly beginning to identify and align their beliefs with the Labour Party. While the reason may be unknown, the data clearly shows that women are not nearly as conservative as they were three decades ago (Hayes 1997, 204; Norris 1986, 126-128).

Men: The Source of the Gender Gap?

When analyzing the gender gap it has become the norm to consider women the root of the issue, however we must consider that perhaps the changing politics of men has had a major impact on these gender gaps. On a few rare occasions, researchers have considered that the political behaviors and attitudes of male voters may have affected the political attitudes of female voters. Kaufmann and Petrocik (1999), as well as Edlund and Pande (2002), considered this possibility, further analyzing the strength of the impact made by male voters on the gender gap.

In both the United States and the United Kingdom the voting behavior of men began to change much earlier than that of woman, which supports the argument that perhaps the voting behavior of women is simply a result of that of men. Men taking strong conservative stances that allow them more dominant positions in politics have caused women to take opposing stances. While men have come to prefer a traditional political system, women have come to believe that progression is more beneficial for overall equality.

In the United States, male voting behavior and party identification have become increasingly conservative since the mid-1960's (Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999, 865). Considering that the changing politics of men in the United States occurred nearly twenty years before that of females, it can be argued that the political behaviors and attitudes of women did not change much at all. Data proved that American women were relatively consistent in their party identification, with the majority identifying with the Democratic Party since the late 1940's (Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999, 867). While the exit polls proved that the voting behavior of women swayed during the 1980's, their party identification had remained unchanged for decades. It was men, whose overall politics shifted following the Reagan election, in turn making the gender gap appear to be "largely a product of the changing politics of men" (Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999, 865). By the 1980's male party identification with the Democratic Party was plummeting, while the percentage

of men identifying with the Republican Party had significantly increased. Kaufmann and Petrocik 's (1999) research on the party identification of specific genders from 1952 to 1996 concluded that the politics of female voters in the United States had barely wavered, while the changing politics of male voters had become substantial in the second half of the 20th century. The party identifications of female voters were stable, while those of men were going through an erratic transition.

Norris' (1986) data supports the possibility of men being the source of the gender gap in Britain as well. While British males were significantly more liberal than American males, during the late 1970's and early 1980's, male support for the Conservative Party slowly began to rise (Norris 1986, 120; Norris and Lovenduski 1996, 39). This occurred over a decade before the politics of female voters began changing, which could support the possibility of this occurring as a result of male behavior. While it was not until the 1997 election that female support for the Labour Party increased, it was 1983 when males of all ages began expressing their preference for the Conservative Party. Male voters believed that the representation of the Conservative Party was both stronger and imposed better policies; surprisingly enough, this came for the first time under the leadership of Conservative Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher (Norris 1986, 121). The politics of males and females appeared to align for a short period during that decade, as the majority of women were also favoring the Conservative Party. It may have been the first time the Conservatives gained more male support than female support, however the female support was still relatively secure prior to Tony Blair's 1997 election.

It has been speculated that the primary force behind political attitudes in specific genders is the extreme influence of gender roles (Diekman and Schneider 2010, 486-87). Diekman and Schneider (2010) constructed a social framework that suggested the political preferences of each gender were merely a product of social roles, psychological processes and the resulting attitudes. For example, one's occupation, along with stereotypical expectations, influences one's political preferences and beliefs. Therefore, men who work in fields where they are viewed as superior exhibit "masculine" behaviors and align with parties that are more beneficial to the gender role they have filled. Just the same, women conform to the expectations which come with their social roles as "mothers" and "caregivers," thus causing them to align with parties that support more liberal policies (Diekman and Schneider 2012, 491-93). Males are much more likely to support capital punishment and oppose gun control as a result of their social development, while females

are likely to take opposing stances for the same reason. The politics of specific genders have become subjective to the gender roles in which they fill, therefore the expansion of gender roles in progressive societies has resulted in this transition from the traditional to modern gender gap.

Incorporated into the idea of gender roles are also the value differences of genders. Specific roles in families, occupations, and other social settings directly affect the values of the gender filling such roles. This in turn explains why the political beliefs of men aligned with the conservative parties much sooner, while the political attitudes of women only began to shift as their gender roles in society expanded. It was the overt dominance of men in the political sphere, combined with the lack of equality, which essentially led to the shift in the political attitudes of females. It was not until women in the United States and the United Kingdom began to leave behind the traditional values they shared with men that they began to vote differently. Evidently, as men stuck their traditional politics, women aligned their political beliefs to better reflect their progressively liberal stances.

Social Issues: Not as Influential as We Think

The most common misconception when considering the changing politics of women is the belief that the political attitudes and behaviors of female voters have become subjective to policy preferences on social issues. In the United States, it is frequently assumed that women vote primarily on their interest in controversial social issues such as abortion or same-sex marriage. To the same extent, British women are assumed to vote based on interest in education and the National Health Service. Many studies have considered the heavy female support for left wing policy regarding social issues to be the driving force behind the increasingly liberal politics of women (Conover 1988, 987; Diekmann and Schneider 2010; Inglehart and Norris 2000, 447). However, women's interest in politics expands beyond social issues, seeing as in both Britain and the United States women have listed the state of the economy, warfare, immigration and taxation to be among their top priorities when voting (Campbell 2004, 24; Diekmann and Schneider 2010, 490; Norris 1986, 127-28). To assume that a woman's political beliefs do not expand passed mainstream issues would be to suggest that female voters have not taken any stance on economic issues and foreign policy, which is evidently not the case. Women are not basing their entire political identification on a few controversial topics, nor are they limiting their interest to such issues. The extensively liberal politics of women have extended to all areas of the political sphere.

Women worldwide have been known to take similar stances on social issues, therefore if social issues were the only priority of female voters then the politics of British women would not have remained conservative for so long. While the politics of both males and females could essentially be subject to the country itself, we must note that one's political beliefs often regard international politics as well. It can be argued that extreme party polarization in the United States and the absence of specific social issues in Britain could explain why the politics of these women have been slow to align. Norris' (1986) study on British elections offered extensive data on the opinions of women on the economy, foreign affairs, immigration and war. Women are not lacking opinions in other political areas, nor are they failing to express such opinions in their voting behavior. In fact, as the feminist identity has become a prominent element in the changing politics of women, female voters have become increasingly more involved in issues they previously lacked interest in. Norris (1986) and Hayes (1997) both argued that if the only political focus of women were policy issues then the gender gaps in the United States and Britain would not have been so drastically different. Further research has also shown that variables such as occupation, race, female roles in marriage and families, and religion to have a very small but notable impact on women's voting behavior (Diekman and Schneider 2010; Edlund and Pande 2002; Giger 2009; Hayes 1997; Inglehart and Norris 2000; Norris 1986; Pew Research Center 2012). The impact of these variables, combined with ample interest on social issues, is merely a foundation for the extensive shift that occurred as a result of the emerging feminist theory. The rise of feminism, which is becoming increasingly present in younger generations, is the source of the changing politics of women. Younger generations have been exposed to modern ideas of equality and feminism, resulting in the genders of these generations taking more liberal stances in politics and playing into Norris' (1999) theory of a gender-generation gap.

Gender- Generation Gap

Age remains one of the most influential factors in the gender gap and the shifting political stances of women in both the US and UK. Younger generations have become progressively more liberal and older generations more conservative; while this is not limited to gender, it is more apparent in women than men (Campbell 2004, 36; Inglehart & Norris 2000, 455; Norris 1999). Therefore, as more women continue to vote, and emerging generations of female voters become increasingly more liberal, the percentage of women voting for left parties rises. As these young women are born into generations where feminism is becoming significantly more prominent and

women's issues are accumulating extensive amounts of attention, they have aligned themselves with the less traditional, more progressive left wing parties. In the United States, younger women are more inclined to vote for the Democratic Party, seeing as they share corresponding values and priorities on female-related issues. Women in Britain are more inclined to vote for the Labour Party, considering this is the party with the heaviest feminist elements, as well as female representation. During the Labour Party's historical 1997 win, over half of their voters were under forty-five years of age, while only one-third of Conservative voters were under forty-five. In fact, the only age group that the Conservative Party led in this election was those over sixty-five (Kellner 1997, 617). This can be considered a result of older women taking more traditional, rather than progressive stances. Also worth noting is that it is very rare for a voter of any gender to change their political identification after the first quarter of their lives, which makes it unlikely for older generations of women to abandon their conservative beliefs. That becomes a problem with partisanship, seeing as while many women may recognize that the opposition party is possibly more beneficial, they have formed a loyalty to their party that they are unwilling to break.

The historical events one has lived through and experienced due to the generation they were born into also impacts voting behaviors. For British women, whether they experienced the interwar years or the post-war depression may have played a prominent role in why they remained conservative (Norris 1999). As for the United States, women who experienced Reagan's hostility towards abortion and the feminist movement were likely to begin rethinking their political beliefs and become apprehensive of the Republican Party (Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999, 872). Even today, specific policy preferences and the feminist movement are controversial topics in which women and liberal parties tend to share common ethical stances. We can look at this from a historical vs. modern perspective of politics when it comes to specific age groups of women. Older women had become accustomed to what they knew and experienced, as a result steering clear of modernized policies and preserving their conventional understanding of politics. Younger generations of women, who were exposed to the social revolution caused by feminism in the late 1980's, adopt more modern political stances. Generational differences have impacted attitudes on gender equality, roles in the workforce and families, health care policies, immigration, etc. (Norris 1999).

As we discussed earlier, gender and societal roles have expanded over time, which has ultimately altered the voting behaviors of women. Women in both Britain and the United States

have become more progressive and more dominant members of society, which has led to their values and policies becoming more progressive as well. Numerous scholars have argued that women's political values are essentially dependent on whether they take on a feminist identity, something younger generations of women are more likely to do than older ones (Conover 1988, 989). However, Norris (1999) argued that the gender-generation gap could also be a result of one's "life-cycle," which refers to the change in priorities of an individual as they age. This poses the question of whether older women are more conservative because of the generation they were born to, or due to the experiences and commitments that come with aging. Many have considered how these commitments, such as marriage, children, and work are influential to the political values of women (Edlund and Pande 2002, 919; Kaufmann 2006, 3; Kellner 1997, 618; Norris 1999) It is worth noting that these experiences and commitments vary in women, as does the age at which women take on these specific priorities. Therefore, while these variables have been extensively researched and applied over time, they do not appear to impact women's politics enough to be considered a part of the driving force behind the gender gap. It is unlikely that the gender-generation gap is a result of the life-cycle, primarily because in that case, the percentage of conservative and liberal women would have remained consistent over time. Women are becoming significantly more liberal as a whole, and as the decades pass the percentage of middle-aged and older women voting liberally is rising. Regardless of the overall reasoning behind the gender-generation gap, it has become a prominent subcategory of the modern gender gap in both Britain and the United States.

Role of Feminism

The rise of feminism in the United States and Britain appears to be the root of the changing politics of women. Feminism and the women's movement began to make waves in the United States in the 1960's-70's, and in Britain during the 1980's, the exact time women's political attitudes began to shift (Conover 1988, 987; Hayes 1997, 207). The women's movement has expanded the societal roles of women over the past four decades in both countries; women have stopped being seen as simply domesticated wives and mothers, instead becoming more prominent members of society. Feminists advocate endlessly for reformation on a number of issues, everything ranging from equal pay to equal occupational opportunities to reproductive rights. This movement allowed women to fight against the oppression they had been subjected to, in turn fighting to break the inferior-superior pattern men and women had fallen into. Women who take

on a feminist identity are more likely to dispose of the traditional values tied to oppression, thus allowing them to recover their most basic values (Conover 1988, 988). Considering the differing fundamental values of men and women, domesticated women had been inclined to align their values to match those of the dominant male society. However, as they rose above the oppression, women were able to embrace their morally superior values and form compatible political attitudes. It was not until women felt they could fully recognize their oppression and embrace these basic values, that they fully incorporated this into their political identities.

As the upcoming generations have become exposed to feminism and the women's movement, women are becoming more likely to have a "women-centered perspective" on society and politics (Conover 1988, 987). This women-centered perspective that Conover (1988) discusses suggests that the values of women are a result of experiences that are limited to their gender. Thus suggesting that the fundamental value differences of men and women, which stem from their individual roles in society, are the cause of the differing political perspectives. This argument can be compared to that of Diekmann and Schneider's (2010) on gender roles that we discussed previously. Women are assumed to be more compassionate and moral, while men are more concerned with laws and justice (Conover 1988, 988). The political attitudes of women, mothers especially, is heavily focused on the growth of future generations. It can be suggested that men are more inclined to take selfish stances on political issues, focusing specifically on what affects them or the society they belong to, while women tend to focus on the greater good of humanity. This is obvious in cases of war, as men are more likely to support a war if it benefits their country, while women are more likely to oppose the idea of using excessive violence regardless of whether it benefits them or not. However, to many the women's perspective appears almost too liberal, while the male perspective appears to be more realistic. The increased presence of the morally superior values of women has become the underlying cause of women straying towards liberal policies and left wing parties.

It must be noted that the feminist identity is not limited to women. Today both men and women have come to advocate for the rights of women, ergo countless men across the globe have come to label themselves "feminists." Cook and Wilcox (1991) conducted a study on both genders, which compared the political attitudes of men and women who considered themselves feminists and non-feminists. This study concluded that men and women who considered themselves feminists were both significantly more liberal than those who did not. Women who did not take

on a feminist identity were just as likely to vote conservative as non-feminist men, and less likely to vote liberal than feminist men. Here we consider whether the increasingly liberal values of females are not directly correlated with gender, but rather the presence of a feminist identity. Hayes (1997) suggested that the idea of feminism was no longer “uniquely feminine,” it has impacted the political behaviors of men who identify with the movement as much as it has women. It is worth noting that there are significantly more female feminists than male, and while there is no direct explanation for why, it could be argued that it is a result of feminism being publicized as a feminine ideal. Even today, female world leaders and politicians have felt the need to stress the fact that feminism is a fight for the equality of all genders, not simply women. Many fail to recognize that feminist values stem from egalitarian values, which leads to apprehension from men regarding the movement. However, more and more women of younger generations have come to identify themselves as feminists and support the movement. In doing so they have found their political beliefs becoming more liberal and their support swaying towards the left-wing parties. The level of feminist consciousness in women has become a prominent element in the growing modern gender gap in the United States, as well as the closing traditional gender gap in Britain (Giger 2009, 485). Liberal parties are much more likely to support and advocate for the rights of women than conservative parties, which has led the Democratic and Labour parties to gain the majority of feminist support in the US and UK.

While variables such as race, marriage, religion, etc. have lacked consistency or even significance when considering the changing politics of women, the role of feminism has become increasingly pivotal over time. The growing interest of women in politics, as well as the growing participation, has arguably come as a result of the women’s movement. During the decades following women’s suffrage but prior to the feminist movement, women were almost entirely absent in politics. The representation of women was a foreign concept and the voting behaviors of women were not reflecting their basic values, but rather the values that aligned with their condensed roles in society. Feminism can also be tied into our earlier argument regarding specific gender gaps being present as a result of the condition of the country. In developing or undeveloped countries, there is low support for feminism, as well as a virtual absence of feminist elements in both left and right parties (Inglehart and Norris 2000, 456). Considering how women in countries where feminism is nearly absent are more conservative, and women in countries where feminism is present are more liberal, we can conclude that the women’s movement and fight for equality has

had a substantial impact. Feminism, combined with the changing politics of growing generations, is arguably the driving force behind the emergence of the modern gender gap.

Why Hasn't the Modern Gender Gap Swept Britain Yet?

The politics of women in the United Kingdom are slowly, but surely beginning to become more liberal. Although the modern gender gap has yet to sweep Britain the way it did the United States and other Western European countries, data shows that the traditional gender gap has narrowed, if not completely closed in Britain. While British women were voting significantly more conservative during the 1970's, this voting pattern had completely reversed in the wake of the 21st century (Giger 2009). Here we question why the modern gender gap has yet to sweep Britain if the changing politics of women has followed the same pattern as that of United States women. Comparing the variables we have discussed throughout this paper (rise of feminism, social issues, ideological gap, voting behavior of men), we seek to further understand why the pace at which the modern gender gap has emerged differed in the United States and Britain.

First, considering Kaufmann and Petrocik's (1999) argument that men are the source of the gender gap, the politics of men had been changing over the course of the 20th century but the majority did not support the Conservative Party until the 2000's. The majority of male voters in Britain remained liberal for almost the entirety of the 20th century, with the majority supporting left-wing parties until the end of Tony Blair's second term. By the 2005 general election, male support for the Labour Party had nearly collapsed and made a drastic shift to the Conservative Party (Mellow-Facer 2006, 73). However, considering how similar the politics of men and women had become until the 2000's, we can conclude that men were not directly influencing the politics of women, nor was the gender gap entirely dependent on their voting behavior.

Next we consider how the differing politics of both countries has affected the transition from a traditional to modern gender gap. To begin, the ideological gap as discussed by Nate Silver (2012), is not nearly as wide in Britain as in the United States. The ideological gap in the United States has grown significantly, almost erasing the possibility of parties being considered "center right" or "center left". This was recently noticeable during the Romney/Obama election; Barack Obama changed his position to support same-sex marriage and gained heavy liberal support; while Mitt Romney changed his views to oppose abortion, thus making himself more marketable to the Republican Party (Silver 2012). While in the United States the Republican and Democrat parties have placed themselves at opposite ends of the political spectrum, this is not the case in Britain. In

fact, the Conservative Party and the Labour Party are considered more center right and center left, not to mention the Liberal Democrats actually manage to gain a considerable amount of support in Britain. The absence of many controversial issues has arguably helped keep the ideological gap in Britain condensed. Although British women are extensively focused on education and the NHS, issues like abortion and same-sex marriage are not issues at all in the UK. The increasing controversy surrounding these issues in the United States has only widened the ideological gap, in turn playing a significant role in the speed at which the modern gender gap swept the US.

The last, and arguably most prominent factor in the slow-paced transition is that the feminist movement did not hit Britain until decades after it hit the United States. Feminism and the fight for equal rights only began making its way to the UK in the 1980's, nearly two decades after it first hit the United States, and even then it didn't become a crucial element in British politics until the 1990's (Norris and Lovenduski 1993, 34). Just as feminism started to really become vital to the changing politics of women in the 1990's, the presence of the traditional gender gap decreased. By 1997 women had almost completely shifted their support to the Labour Party and by 2000 the majority of women were voting for left-wing parties, all following the recent rise of feminism (Giger 2009, 477; Kellner 1997, 616). Considering feminism to be the driving-force behind the modern gender gap, as we have in this paper, could explain why the modern gender gap has been so slow to sweep the United Kingdom.

Is the Modern Gender Gap Emerging?

With the exception of the 2010 election, women in Britain had been voting for left-wing parties since the 1997 election, and men for the right-wing parties as of the early 2000's. During the 2005 Election, 38% of women voted for the Labour Party, 32% for the Conservative Party, and 23% for the Liberal Democrats; while 34% of men voted for the Conservative and Labour Parties respectively, and 22% for the Liberal Democrats (Mellow-Facer 2006, 73). While the voting behavior of women in the 2005 election appeared promising, the political attitudes of the majority of men appeared ambiguous. Cameron's 2010 win reversed this issue, as the majority of men had completely shifted their support to the Conservative Party, while women voted more erratically. The 2010 election broke the pattern of women supporting left-wing parties, with the Conservative Party leader David Cameron gaining major female support by taking relatively liberal stances on child care, equal pay, and other female-driven policies. However, while the Conservative Party gained 36% of female votes during the 2010 election, female support for the Conservative Party

collapsed almost immediately after (The Economist 2014). While this election showed a high percentage of women voting conservative again, the gender gap itself barely existed due to similarity in the voting behaviors of both genders. Women have since returned their support to the Labour Party, where it had rested consistently since 1997. Male support on the other hand, has been steadily drawn to the Conservative Party over the past decade and remained there.

Women are no longer the support system of the Conservative Party in Britain, especially as Norris' (1999) gender-generation gap continues to emerge. As the Labour Party continues to hold more feminist elements and the Conservative Party continues to take more 'traditional' stances, women will continue to stray away from the Conservative Party and toward the opposition. Norris (1986) and Hayes (1997) both believed left wing parties to be much more beneficial to British women, and considering the results of 21st century elections, women are coming to agree. Left-wing parties have become increasingly more attractive to women in terms of policies and representation, as the Labour Party continues to use all-women shortlists and has the most elected female MPs in Parliament. The Conservative Party still holds extremely traditional values and has an extremely "masculine" image, two very unattractive elements in the eyes of progressive female voters (The Economist 2014).

While the modern gender gap has yet to sweep Britain the way it did the United States, Giger (2009) argued that the traditional gender gap has completely closed in Britain. The results of the 2005 and 2010 UK general elections support Giger's argument, as these elections appeared to be almost completely absent of any type of gender gap (The Economist 2014; Mellow-Facer 2006, 73). The voting behaviors of men and women in Britain have been steadily changing over the past couple of decades and appear to be progressing further and further away from the traditional gender gap. The voting patterns of men and women in Britain are beginning to look extremely similar to those of the United States in the 1970's. This process may have occurred more slowly due to the elements listed in the previous section of this paper, but the transition is occurring in a similar fashion to the way it did in the United States. If these voting trends continue to progress, if the politics of women continue to become more liberal and the politics of men more conservative, the modern gender gap could emerge in Britain within the next decade.

Conclusion

The modern gender gap emerged in the United States in the 1970's, skyrocketing in the 1990's, and only widening ever since. The data supplied could argue that the traditional gender

gap never existed in the United States; while women may have been voting conservatively prior to the 1970's, they were never voting more conservatively than men. Unlike Britain, more women than men had always identified and voted for the Democratic Party. In the case of Britain, the traditional gender gap had been an ongoing trend for almost the entirety of the 20th century. It was not until the historical 1997 election that the gap narrowed drastically, as a result of the changing politics of both women and men. While the traditional gender gap is near closing, if not entirely closed as Giger (2009) argued, the modern gender gap has yet to emerge. The political attitudes and behaviors of female voters in both Britain and the United States have become increasingly liberal over time, however this occurred quickly in the United States, while Britain appears to just now be in the midst of the shift.

Having analyzed the most influential elements of the changing politics of women, we can conclude that some did not have as much of an impact as we assumed they would, while others could arguably be the source of the gender gap. Opinions on social issues were not nearly as critical to a woman's voting behavior as many had assumed, on the contrary women in both the United States and Britain considered economic policies to be among the most important when voting. Therefore, while feminist issues such as abortion and childcare are commonly mistaken as the only priorities of female voters in these countries, the political interest of women expands beyond that. Also not as critical as many assumed to be is the role of men in the gender gap, which can explain why most research on the gender gap is done from the perspective of women. While the changing politics of men has impacted the gender gap, it appears to have influenced the pace at which the gender gaps grew or narrowed, rather than being the direct source. During the 1992 and 1996 United States elections, it was the female vote that caused the modern gender gap to skyrocket. All the same, in the 1997 British election, it was the collapse of female support for the Conservative Party that triggered the closing of the traditional gender gap. Men may have impacted the gender gaps, but their changing politics have not influenced the gaps nearly enough to be considered the source.

While the gender-generation gap appears to play a vital role, it is the relationship between rising generations and the feminist identity that has had such a significant impact. Younger generations are being exposed to and absorbing feminist elements into their political views, which in turn is guiding them towards the more progressive and egalitarian left parties. Younger generations, of women especially, have become increasingly more liberal than any other group.

Based on the research, we can conclude that of all the variables discussed, the rise of feminism and the women's movement appeared to have the greatest influence on the changing politics of women. As politics of American women became more liberal in the decades following the rise of feminism in the 1960's, the same pattern occurred in Britain two decades later. As the gender roles of women expanded and gender equality became a more prominent issue, left-wing parties became more attractive to female voters, thus gaining their support. Taking on feminist identities and straying away from the male-dominated conservative parties has led women to become more liberal in their political attitudes and behaviors.

Having extensively analyzed the factors that led both American and British women to become more liberal over time, we must question whether our essential hypothesis was correct. We speculated that this modern gender gap, which has present in most developed countries, would emerge in Britain as a result of the changing politics of women. While the political behaviors and attitudes of British women do appear to be aligning with those of American women, the alignment has been slow-paced. We can conclude that the traditional gender gap in the UK has closed; however, considering the 21st century election results, the modern gender gap has not yet developed. Women are definitely no longer the backbone of the Conservative Party in Britain, but their support for the Labour Party has also been erratic during the past two elections. While the 2005 UK general election showed promise for our hypothesis, the 4% difference between the genders was not high enough to be considered a gap. The 2010 UK election showed less promise as the voting behaviors of both men and women that year were consistently conservative. The changing politics of British women has been a relatively recent occurrence and as a result of this, there is not nearly enough data or a drastic enough shift to conclude that the modern gender gap has yet emerged in the UK. Today neither the traditional nor modern gender gaps exist in the United Kingdom, and whether the modern gender gap will emerge is subject to the results of the 2015 UK general election and beyond.

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