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PREDICTING SOCIAL TOLERANCE: RACE, GENDER OR ETHGENDER?

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This study seeks to examine the effects of race, gender, and interactive ethgender identities on attitudes concerning legal abortion and social tolerance of various. The data come from the combined 1972-1990 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center. Contrary to arguments that race is declining in significance and that race and gender identities are interactive, the results show that racial identity is still the most important factor in predicting the attitudes of black females. In comparisons of the four racial-gender groups, black females were more similar to black males than to white females or white males on all issues and an interaction term reflecting their ethgender position was not a statistically significant predictor of social tolerance.

No other social or moral issue, except perhaps the civil rights movement, has generated as much controversy as the abortion question. Since the 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*, the abortion issue has produced strong political positions because it involves legal and moral questions as well as physical and mental health consequences. To the proponents of legal abortion, it also represents a woman's right to choose what to do with her own body.

Numerous studies have examined race differences or race and class differences in abortion attitudes. Luker (1984), for example, found that working class women attached more symbolic significance to motherhood and valued traditional family roles more than middle class women. However, very few have explored both race and gender differences. Those studies which found black/white differences in tolerance for legal abortion generally found blacks to be less tolerant than whites, either because of greater religiosity and other social demographic traits (Welch and Combs, 1982), region of the country (Secret, 1987), or cultural and political differences (Hall and Ferree, 1986).

Most of these studies used race and gender separately as control variables. Two studies examining abortion attitudes have noted gender differences among blacks (Hall and Ferree, 1986; Wilcox 1990). Hall and Ferree (1986), using data from the 1982 General Social Surveys, reported a gender gap among blacks, with black men being significantly less tolerant of legal abortion than black women.

Wilcox (1990), using General Social Surveys' data through 1988, found statistically significant race/gender differences with black men less supportive of

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legal abortion than white men while black women were more supportive than white women. In his conclusion, Wilcox suggests that the difference between black and white men may be explained by political reasons stemming from black males' fear of genocide, while the black and white female differences may be for more practical considerations.

This second suggestion was explored in a recent study by Duggar (1991). Using data from the Roper Organization's Virginia Slim's American Women's Opinion Poll to compare the correlates of black and white women's attitudes toward legal abortion, Duggar (1991) found that the most important determinant of black women's support for legal abortion was indeed a practical consideration, i.e., whether or not they believed women were discriminated against in education and the job market. Thus, according to Duggar (1991) black and white women differ in their abortion attitudes mainly because of differences in their belief systems, i.e., while abortion is a symbolic issue for white females because it represents their beliefs about the meaning of family, motherhood, and womanhood, it is of greater practical importance to black females because they recognize the consequences of unwanted pregnancies.

To what extent are attitudes toward abortion unique? Are individuals who are tolerant of abortion also tolerant of those who are victims of discrimination? Another social tolerance issue that produces strong stances is granting civil liberties to people taking extremist positions. This type of social tolerance has been defined as "the willingness to allow the expression of divergent ideas and to treat others according to universalistic criteria independent of value differences" (Wilson, 1991: 117). Stouffer (1955) first developed items to measure this willingness to extend civil liberties to certain groups whose ideas are considered bad or dangerous. His original research included three groups: communists, socialists, and atheists. Since 1972, the General Social Surveys (GSS) of the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) have included several of his questions and have added three other groups to the list: racists, militarists, and homosexuals (Mueller, 1988).

In subsequent studies using the NORC data, variables such as urbanism, education, religion, and age have all been associated with levels of tolerance (Wilcox, 1990; Wilson, 1985, 1991; Sullivan, Pierson, and Marcus, 1979). Other analyses indicate that Americans have become more tolerant since 1954 (Mueller, 1988).

Again, just as in the studies of abortion attitudes, most of these studies used race and gender control variables. However, while male and female or black and white differences were assessed, in general, few of these studies test for interaction effects between race and gender. The purpose of this paper is to examine the effect of race and gender interaction on abortion and other social tolerance issues.

Theoretical Background

In the literature on stratification there is an underlying assumption that ascribed characteristics such as race, class, or gender can predict attitudes of

individuals. Yet research on the relative importance of race versus class is inconclusive. Some argue that race is declining in significance (Wilson, 1978, 1987) while others argue that race and class are interactive (Gilliam and Whitby, 1989). Few studies, however, have examined the relative importance of race versus gender nor have they asked whether race and gender are interactive in shaping attitudes. Even though some scholars argue that race and gender identities are intertwined and thus inseparable, this paper attempts to assess the relative influences of race, gender, and the ethgender identity on individual levels of social tolerance.

Race, Gender or Ethgender. In the past, many attitudinal researchers assumed that racial experience takes precedence over other social identities because race is a master status in American society (Hughes, 1945). Certainly, most blacks, regardless of gender or social position, are subject to some forms of discrimination even if those forms are subtle and covert (Feagin and Feagin, 1986; Feagin, 1991). Shared indignities and other consequences of racial inequality create a common racial identity between black men and women and foster similar strategies for surviving in a racist society (Lykes, 1983). Central dimensions of this survivalist racial identity are valuing tolerance as part of the effort to make the black condition better (Duggar, 1991). On the other hand, one could also raise economic, religious, and social reasons why black males and females are less approving of abortion. Given their lower income levels, blacks have been less able to afford abortions. They also have a more conservative religious heritage. Finally, because out-of-wedlock children have never been considered a stigma in the black community, because extended kin networks insure some form of family foster care, and because of a continuing fear of black genocide, blacks as a group tend not to view any child as unwanted and thus feel less inclined to abort a baby for any reason.

From the perspective that race is the most important predictor, then, one would expect black males and females to hold similar views on social issues such as opposition to abortion but tolerance toward others who might be targets of discrimination.

A second perspective suggests that racial identity may have dominated in the past, but a lessening of overt racial discrimination and the resultant upward mobility for many blacks has allowed black women to now concentrate more fully on their gender identity. Thus, those writing from this perspective seem to suggest that gender could now be considered the overriding trait that pervades all interactions (Kanter, 1977; Yoder, 1991; Martin, 1992). Consequently, along with their acknowledged differences from white women, more recently black women have also been able to find some commonalities between themselves and white women (Joseph and Lewis, 1981; Cole, 1986:). Among the commonalities are the fact that both black and white women suffer discrimination in America's major institutions, particularly in the economic sphere where both groups have lower representation in the prestigious occupations and earn less than males (Blood, Tuttle, and Lakey, 1992). Further, women of both races are severely underrepresented in the political arena both in

terms of elective office and as influential policy-makers (Ward, Orazem, and Schmidt, 1992; Moore, 1992). Certainly, as women, both groups would bear the consequences fostered by any abortion policies because, "women are more affected by child rearing both biologically and socially" (Scott and Schuman, 1988: 789). Most relevant for this study is the research showing increased support for feminist positions among women in general when controlling for demographic differences (Ransford and Miller, 1983). These feminist positions include support for legal abortion, which is closely identified with the struggle for women's rights and increased tolerance for victims of discrimination (Scott and Schuman, 1988). From this perspective, emphasizing the common experiences of black and white women, one would anticipate that gender, rather than race, would predict attitudes and values.

Finally, the ethgender perspective suggests that because black women are both black and female, these two characteristics are inseparable (Hooks, 1982; Geschwender, 1992). When black women are perceived as black, they are also perceived as female. The two form a distinctive identity that is uniquely more than the sum of its parts and which isolates them from others who do not share it. While certain circumstances may lead them to identify with black males or with white females, for the most part, their marginalization and alienation from both groups inspires separate feelings and promotes unique attitudes. For one thing, although they share a racial identity with black males, they have also suffered sexual discrimination from black men (Hooks, 1981, 1984, 1992). In the same manner, while experiencing a common gender identity with white females, they must also be cognizant of the racial discrimination they experience from white females (Collins, 1989).

Black females must also try to balance their loyalties to two groups which are sometimes in conflict. They need to be assured that women's rights will not interfere with or in any way circumscribe black civil rights, or in fact the rights of all people. This last often leads to a separate stance of fighting for "human rights" (Andersen and Collins, 1992). Engaging in this universal human rights fight, made necessary by their unique interactive identities, would override both racial and gender considerations.

The idea of a unique identity formed by the intersection of two defining characteristics was first formulated by Milton Gordon (1964) in his concept of the ethclass. Gordon maintains that neither class nor ethnic/racial identity alone can predict values and behaviors but that it is only with other members of our ethclass position that we can share a consciousness of kind in terms of values and behavior. While Gordon suggested that this ethclass identity was formed by the intersection of one's ethnicity/race and class position, Jeffries and Ransford (1980) and Ransford and Miller (1983) extended the formulation by proposing the concept of ethgender: the social identity formed by the intersection of one's ethnicity/race and gender. The ethgender group by definition has a unique history of social experiences because of its intersecting positions on two major status hierarchies.

In contrast to researchers who separate race and gender identities and treat their effects on attitudes and values as cumulative, researchers from the interactive perspective suggest that the influences of ethnic or racial identity and gender are interactive rather than additive (Adams, 1983; King, 1988; Gerschwender, 1992). In their view racial and gender identities are inseparable such that power and discrimination are based on both statuses acting together. Research in this area would simply employ an interactive race/gender variable.

In this paper I assess these arguments by examining whether the social tolerance attitudes of black females are similar to those of black males (race), white females (gender), or are uniquely distinguished from both groups (ethgender). Social tolerance issues include attitudes toward legal abortion and the willingness to grant civil liberties to atheists, socialists, racists, communists, militarists, and homosexuals. If black females have values and attitudes distinct from both black males and white females, then this suggests they constitute an ethgender group, a conclusion that has important theoretical and political implications. On the other hand, if either race or gender proves to be the most salient predictor of attitudes and values of black females, then this research will support the view that race or gender is the dominant status trait.

The literature review suggests that when both race and gender are considered, of the four racial - gender groups, black females have distinct positions in terms of legal abortion. Assuming that the same relationships hold for extending civil liberties, there are three possibilities when comparing black females to black males and white females: if race is the most important characteristic they will be most similar to black males; if gender has become the most important identity then black and white females will have the most similar views; and finally, if ethgender is more important than either race or gender identity, then black females should view these social tolerance issues differently from both black males and white females.

Methodology

Sample and Data. My analysis uses data from the combined 1972-1990 General Social Surveys administered by the National Opinion Research Center, although no surveys were conducted in 1979 and 1981. These surveys provide data from representative samples of the total noninstitutionalized English-speaking population of the United States, 18 years or older. The 1972 - 1990 period was chosen in order to have a relatively large group of blacks in the analysis so that subgroup differences could be examined.

In both 1982 and 1987, the National Science Foundation provided funding for an oversample of black respondents. Normally about 11% of the sample is black, representing the black proportion of the population. With the addition of the black oversamples, the 1987 survey contained responses from 544 blacks (210 males and 334 females) and the 1982 sample included 510 black respondents (311 females and 199 males).¹ The combined surveys used in the analyses includes 2177 black females, 12251 white females, 1433 black males,

and 10404 white males. (See Appendix A for a yearly breakdown of the four race and gender groups).

Measurement of Tolerance for Legal Abortion. Tolerance for legal abortion is measured using yes or no responses to whether or not it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion for seven specific reasons. The original question wording is, "Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion....:"

- *if there is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby?
- *if she is married and does not want any more children?
- *if her health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy?
- *if the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children?
- *if she became pregnant as a result of rape?
- *if she is not married and does not want to marry the man?
- *if the woman wants it for any reason?

The original coding for these variables was [1] yes and [2] no. In addition to separate analyses on each of the seven reasons, I present regression analyses of these seven items combined into an additive index, ABORT, with an underlying continuum ranging from tolerant (those who responded "yes" to all items) to intolerant (those who responded "no" to all items).

Measurement of Tolerance for Extending Civil Liberties. The measure of tolerance for extending civil liberties to certain target groups is based on 18 dichotomous items, patterned after those developed by Stouffer (1955). The items ask whether or not the respondent is willing to extend civil liberties (allow them to make a speech, allow them to teach in a college, or whether or not to remove their authored book from the public library) to persons holding deviant religious or political views. There are six target groups about whom the questions are asked: atheists, socialists, racists, communists, militarists, and homosexuals. Similar to Wilson (1985:119), my purpose here is to "tap respondents" willingness to allow expression of various ideas rather than support for the idea or the persons holding them." The exact question wording for atheists is as follows:

"There are always some people whose ideas are considered bad or dangerous by other people. For instance, somebody who is against all churches and religions [ATHEIST]...

- A. If such a person wanted to make a speech in your (city/town/community) against churches and religion, should he be allowed to speak or not?
- B. Should such a person be allowed to teach in a college or university, or not?
- C. If some people in your community suggested that a book he wrote against churches and religion should be taken out of your public library, would you favor removing this book, or not?

Measurement of Race and Gender. Race was a self-report measure in response to the question, "What race do you consider yourself?" Whereas [1] White, [2] Black, and [3] Other were the possible response categories, for this analyses only the black and white respondents were employed and the responses were recoded to [0] white and [1] black. Gender was interviewer coded as [1] male or [2] female and recoded to [0] male and [1] female. For the one-way analysis of variance and Scheffe procedure for group difference the race/sex questions were combined into four race and gender groups. For the OLS regression, I calculated the multiplicative RACESEX dummy variable, [0] all others and [1] black females.

Other Variables. Other variables suggested by the literature review and used as controls in the analyses are as follows:

YEAR	GSS year for respondent	72 - 90
AGE	age of respondent	18 - 89
EDUC ²	highest year of school	0 - 20
MARITAL	marital status	[0] not married [1] married
REGION	region of interview	[0] non-South [1] South
ATTEND	church attendance	[0] less than weekly [1] weekly+

Analysis. I begin by describing race and gender differences in the percentages of respondents who choose the liberal or tolerant response on each of the abortion and civil liberties issues.

Following an examination of the percentages, analysis of variance is used to obtain mean scores and to measure any significant differences between black females and the other groups. In order to employ the ANOVA procedure, I assumed the responses represented a continuum from tolerant to intolerant.

Finally, to test for the relative influence of race, gender, and the interaction of race and gender while controlling for year of the study and selected demographic variables (age, education, marital status, region of the country, and level of church attendance) on tolerant versus intolerant responses to abortion and civil liberties issues, I employ OLS regression analysis on the abortion and tolerance indices.

RESULTS

TABLE 1 shows the percentage of each race-gender group responding "yes," a woman should be able to obtain a legal abortion for the reason given. On this apparently gender-related question, black females were more similar in outlook to black males than to white females. Perhaps the most surprising finding in TABLE 1 is that white males appear to be the most liberal on the question of legal abortion. White males had the highest percentage responding that a woman should be able to obtain a legal abortion for each of the seven reasons.

TABLE 1

Percentages of those responding "YES" a woman should be able to obtain a legal abortion for the reason given by race and gender, 1972-1990 (N in parentheses)

Reason	Race and Gender			
	BLACK FEMALE	BLACK MALE	WHITE FEMALE	WHITE MALE
Defect in baby	70.7 (1863)	68.1 (1209)	83.3* (10509)	83.8* (8525)
Doesn't want more	37.3 (1863)	37.8 (1226)	42.4* (10428)	47.6* (8477)
Health endangered	84.2 (1891)	84.4 (1228)	90.1 (10517)	92.2 (8587)
Low income	40.9 (1860)	43.1 (1219)	48.8* (10403)	51.7* (8453)
Mother raped	72.8 (1853)	71.9 (1201)	83.8* (10393)	85.3* (8472)
Mother single	33.0 (1874)	35.0 (1225)	45.7* (10363)	48.7* (8422)
Any reason	34.6 (1402)	31.6 (817)	37.6 (7039)	40.3* (5482)

*different from black females at $p < .05$ level by Scheffe test for group differences

SOURCE: General Social Surveys: 1972-1990

TABLE 2 shows the percentages of those willing to grant civil liberties to certain target groups. The overall pattern in TABLE 1 is similarly evident in these results: black females and males are more similar than black and white females. Examining the entire table, it appears that black females are the least tolerant of the four race-gender groups.

TABLE 2

Percentages of those willing to allow specific groups to make a public speech, teach in a university, or have an authored book in the public library, by race and gender, 1972-1990

Person	Race and Gender			
	BLACK FEMALE	BLACK MALE	WHITE FEMALE	WHITE MALE
ATHEIST				
SPEAK	55.4	62.8*	65.2*	71.8*
TEACH	39.9	43.9	42.9	49.9*
BOOK	52.7	56.3	62.8*	67.7*
SOCIALIST				
SPEAK	74.1	79.5	80.9	79.4
TEACH	63.2	62.7	59.5	60.5
BOOK	61.9	64.3	75.0*	74.5*
RACIST				
SPEAK	48.9	56.2*	58.4*	67.8*
TEACH	31.8	35.3	42.0*	49.7*
BOOK	48.2	51.9	64.1*	68.8*
COMMUNIST				
SPEAK	55.0	60.7*	55.7	63.9*
TEACH	48.9	48.2	41.6*	48.4
BOOK	53.5	55.4	58.5*	63.9*
MILITARIST				
SPEAK	49.1	51.0	57.2*	58.2*
TEACH	35.8	35.7	39.3	43.1*
BOOK	49.3	49.6	59.9*	61.3*
HOMOSEXUAL				
SPEAK	63.8	67.0	69.4*	68.8*
TEACH	56.3	57.0	57.7	56.9
BOOK	53.1	55.7	59.6*	60.1*

*different from black females at $p < .05$ level by Scheffe test for group differences

SOURCE: General Social Surveys: 1972-1990

TABLE 3 shows the results of the multiple regression analyses which included the interaction effects between race and gender. The race-gender interaction term was not significant in either the equation for tolerance for legal abortion or for the willingness to grant civil liberties to certain groups. Similarly, sex was not a significant predictor of either of the tolerance issues. Race was important in tolerance for legal abortion ($p < .01$) but not in the willingness to grant civil liberties.

TABLE 3
Unstandardized Multivariate OLS Regression Coefficients (and standard errors) for Relationship Between Abortion and Civil Liberties Indices for Four Race-Gender Groups, 1972-1990

Independent Variables	<u>ABORTION</u>	<u>CIVIL LIBERTIES</u>
AGE (18-89)	-.01* (.001)	.04* (.002)
EDUCATION (0-20)	-.19* (.006)	-.44* (.012)
MARITAL STATUS (1-4)	.20* (.039)	.27* (.076)
RACE (0=white; 1=black)	.45* (.086)	-.26 (.160)
SEX (0=white; 1=black)	-.07 (.041)	.04 (.079)
ATTEND (0=less than weekly; 1=weekly)	1.70* (.040)	1.20* (.077)
REGION (0=non-South; 1=South)	.25* (.040)	1.30* (.078)
YEAR (72-90)	.03* (.005)	.33* (.066)
RACE BY SEX	-.19 (.108)	.01 (.206)
Constant	9.34* (.399)	-5.10* (.525)
R Squared	.19 F=339.3*	.25 F=651.4*

* $p < .01$

SOURCE: General Social Surveys, 1972-1990

Two other findings from TABLE 3 are interesting. The effects of region and church attendance are consistent with previous research (Combs and Welch, 1982; Hall and Ferree, 1986; Wilcox, 1990). Whether or not a person was from the South was a significant factor in tolerance for legal abortion and in the willingness to extend civil liberties to target groups. Similarly, church attendance was a statistically significant factor in these two forms of social tolerance.

Additionally, the effects of education are large and highly significant for both the abortion and civil liberties indexes. This may account for many of the race effects in Tables 1 and 2.

Discussion

Research undertaken on the important characteristics in American society has revealed ascribed statuses such as race, class, and gender are significant criteria. Some argue that race is declining in significance while class is gaining more relevance. Other research documents that the interactive effect of race and class is more meaningful than either race or class acting alone. This study sought to determine the extent to which race and gender or their interaction significantly influence social tolerance attitudes.

Beginning with the assumption that black women are a distinct ethgender group, I hypothesized that they would be different from both black males and white females on social tolerance issues. I also hypothesized that the interaction between their race and gender, the ethgender position, of black females would be more important than either race or gender in these areas. Overall, the results of the study suggest that black females were more similar to black males than to white females on all issues. In addition, their ethgender position was not a significant factor in either of these views.

These findings suggest that race is still the most important predictor of social tolerance views among black females. The observed patterns are surprising given the arguments that the interactive effects of race and gender are inseparable factors in the life experiences of black females. This was not found in reference to the social tolerance attitudes of black females.

These findings negate the argument that gender is now the defining characteristic for all women and that black females form an ethgender group with race and gender identities that are interactive and inseparable. This is not true for black females.

Moreover, these findings suggest that attitudes toward abortion are not unique, but rather, are parallel to the level of sympathy for possible victims of discrimination. Individuals who are more tolerant of legal abortion are also more tolerant of those who are victims of discrimination. Surprisingly, black females, who experience both race and gender discrimination, are the least tolerant of legal abortion and the least willing to grant civil liberties to certain possible victims of discrimination. Perhaps black women feel it is their job to maintain standards and values in the black community. Further research might examine the levels of tolerance for each of the groups used in this study. In that

manner, we would be able to ascertain whether black females are more intolerant of racist as opposed to atheist, for example.

ENDNOTES

1. For details on sampling procedures see Davis and Smith, 1991.
2. Education is being used as an indicator of social class.

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