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# THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF FEMINIST ATTITUDES IN ISRAEL

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*The purpose of the present study was to identify the sources of social support for feminist issues in Israel. Attitudes toward these issues as social problems and toward feminism as a social movement were examined through a questionnaire administered to 2,097 university students studying in the Tel Aviv area in 1985-1986. The study found that Israeli students who considered gender discrimination in promotion and prohibitions against abortion severe social problems were more likely to be on the political left, nonreligious or secular, and generally tolerant of difference and open to change. Support for the perception of violence against women as a social problem was stronger than for the other two issues and cut across the dominant cleavages in Israeli society. Students do not connect violence against women with gender inequality. These findings and their significance for the development of feminism in Israel are discussed within the framework of Gamson and Modigliani's (1987) analysis of the culture of policy issues.*

In December 1975, Israel's Prime Minister established a Commission on the Status of Women to advise the government on the "means to advance equality and partnership between men and women" (Commission on the Status of Women 1978). This action was taken within the framework of the United Nations Decade on Women and in response to pressure exerted by the women's caucus in the Labor Alignment party. The commission addressed a variety of issues that identified as problematic women's status in work, family, legislation, social security, education, mass media, politics, and the defense forces. Reports of the activities of the commission, as well as those of the

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fledgling feminist movement and of similar commissions and feminist movements in other countries created a stream of "news" to the media that increased public discourse on gender issues. "The problem of the status of women" was thus socially constructed and the term was subsequently used in relation to a variety of issues affecting women.

Issues relevant to the status of women had been the subject of public discourse in the past but usually within the context of a more limited and specific agenda, as in the debate over compulsory military service for women or of protective labor legislation enacted in the 1950s. Toward the end of the 1970s, many "women's issues" were in the public arena, symbolically competing for support. Some of these issues have been considerably more successful than others in gaining public support. One study (Israeli and Tabory 1986), for example, found that Israeli university students consider violence against women a relatively important social problem, while they consider discrimination against women in promotion a relatively unimportant problem, and prohibitions against abortion as somewhere between the two in importance.

The purpose of the present study was to identify the sources of social support for feminist issues among young educated Israelis, who are likely to be the country's future leaders and opinion shapers. It examined the characteristics of supporters of feminist issues and the relationship between attitudes toward such issues and attitudes on other political issues.

A review of American research on characteristics of supporters and opponents of feminist goals indicates that positions on general gender issues in the United States overlap with other political cleavages to form an ideological cluster on the liberal-conservative dimension (Arrington and Kyle 1978; Brady and Tedin 1976; Burreis 1983; Huber, Rextroat, and Spitze 1978; Mueller and Dimieri 1982; Singleton and Christiansen 1977; Tavis 1973; Tedin, Brady, Buxton, Gorman, and Thompson 1977; Whitehead and Taves 1976; Worell and Worell 1977). The supporters of feminism generally tend to be less religious or non-church-affiliated, less dogmatic, more autonomous, and more open to new ideas. They are also more likely to be liberal and to identify themselves as closer to the left than to the right politically.

Two important bases for group solidarity and political affiliation in Israel are religiosity and nationalism. These are also the dominant

cleavages within Jewish society in Israel (Lissak 1983). As is usually the case with highly charged ideological positions, each is represented by a plethora of sponsoring groups competing with each other for dominance. The major positions on the religious issues are the Orthodox and the secular: those in favor of closer integration between Orthodox Judaism and the state and those in favor of greater separation of religion and state. The major camps on the nationalism issue are those in favor of retaining the territories occupied in the 1967 war and those who believe that peace with the Arabs can be reached in exchange for territories (Shamir and Sullivan 1983). While there is considerable overlap between pronationalist and Orthodox positions, there are both Orthodox and secular Israelis in the Peace-Now Movement. No one, to date, has examined the relationship between these positions and attitudes toward gender issues.

In this article, student attitudes toward gender issues are analyzed within the social context of contemporary Israeli society, using the assumption that public response to various manifestations of gender inequality depends on the perceived "fit" between any specific issue and other salient ideological bases of self-identification and affiliation. The bases of self-identification and affiliation are manifestations of the culture and structural arrangements through which values and beliefs as well as political interests are articulated. Student attitudes toward gender issues, therefore, need to be understood within the social context of Israeli society.

At the time of our research in 1985-1986, student attitudes reflected, more than they contributed to, the construction of the social context. Over time, however, as these students leave academia to take positions in various spheres of Israeli society, and through their involvement in public life, they will shape future social contexts. Whether their attitudes will remain the same as their life situation changes is material for future research.

## METHODOLOGY

The data were gathered in December, 1985, and January, 1986. With the permission of the respective professors, the researchers distributed questionnaires in a wide variety of classrooms on different days and at different hours and requested students to complete them on the spot. Less than 0.5 percent of the students refused to participate in the study.

### Sample

The sample consisted of 2,097 Israeli university students (884 men and 1,213 women), 90 percent of whom were enrolled in two universities in the Tel Aviv area. These institutions account for 46 percent of Israeli university students. Women constitute over 48 percent of the university students in Israel (Central Bureau of Statistics 1986, Table A), and so the data in the analyses were weighted to represent the gender distribution in the population while preserving the original sample size. Data weights are 1.23 for women and .83 for men.

In all, 80 percent of the students were registered in an undergraduate program, 16 percent in a graduate program, and 4 percent did not specify their academic level. Nationally, 76 percent of Israeli students are registered in an undergraduate program (Central Bureau of Statistics 1986, Table 3). The average age was 27.7 years for men and 24.3 years for women. Students generally begin university following army service. Since women serve for only two years compared to three for men, and since approximately 35 percent of each female cohort is exempt from compulsory service, the women in our study were, on the average, younger than the men. With regard to religiosity, 56.6 percent identified themselves as secular, 23.6 percent as traditional, and 19.8 percent as Orthodox. Although respondents were not questioned about their religious affiliation, non-Jews constitute less than 3 percent of the university student body, and the majority attend universities outside Tel Aviv.

While not necessarily representative of the universities studied, or of the Israeli student population, our sample, which was selected from a wide variety of academic specializations, does provide a diverse population for the exploration of the factors studied here.

### Variables

Respondents were requested to rate the severity or importance of 15 items commonly defined as social problems in Israel on a scale from 1 (not at all a social problem) to 9 (a very severe social problem). Four items relating to gender—"inequality between the sexes," a general feminist theme, and three more specific feminist issues: "violence against women," "discrimination against women in promotion," and "prohibitions against abortion"—constituted the criterion variables of this study. The four gender items were dispersed

throughout a list that included unemployment, kidnapping, traffic accidents, political morality, crime, ethnic inequality, emigration, insufficient immigration, racism among Jews, civil rights, and religious coercion.

A seven-item dogmatism scale (Rokeach 1960) was used to measure psychological security (Shamir and Sullivan 1983), open-mindedness, or readiness for change (Worell and Worell 1977). To measure political ideology, respondents were asked to locate themselves on a left-to-right scale. Israelis are familiar with the use of the terms left-right, and the overwhelming majority of respondents to survey research comply with requests to identify themselves in these political terms (Dominguez 1984). The distinction refers primarily to the nationalism dimension and its derivative, the Arab-Israeli conflict (Arian and Shamir 1982; Shamir and Sullivan 1983). A five-item feminism scale was constructed to measure identification with feminist ideology and the feminist movement (see Appendix).

## FINDINGS

As can be seen from Table 1, the women students rated each of the four items as more important than did the men students. The men attributed greater salience to abortion than to promotion, while the women rated them approximately equal in salience. Both women and men attributed significantly greater importance to the problem of violence against women than to any of the other three issues. Discrimination in promotion, however, was the only issue that correlated highly with inequality between the sexes. In other words, while all the issues were seen as social problems, only discrimination in promotion was seen as a gender issue.

As in the United States, among Israeli university students position on gender issues such as discrimination in promotion, abortion, and inequality between the sexes tends to overlap with other political cleavages to form an ideological cluster on the liberal-conservative continuum. Attribution of importance to gender issues was greater from students on the left than on the right, from the secular than from the religious students, and from the pro-feminist and less dogmatic students (see Table 2). Less religious and more liberal women felt more strongly about the right to abortion than their male counterparts, but the differences were not statistically significant.

There was a greater consensus on attitudes toward violence against women than on other issues. Irrespective of their position on other

TABLE 1  
Correlations of Attribution of Importance of Gender Issues  
for Israeli Men and Women University Students

|                                      | <i>Gender Issues<sup>a</sup></i>      |              |                                               |              |                                        |              |                                         |              |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------|
|                                      | <i>Violence<br/>Against<br/>Women</i> |              | <i>Prohibitions<br/>Against<br/>Abortions</i> |              | <i>Discrimination<br/>in Promotion</i> |              | <i>Inequality<br/>Between<br/>Sexes</i> |              |
|                                      | <i>Men</i>                            | <i>Women</i> | <i>Men</i>                                    | <i>Women</i> | <i>Men</i>                             | <i>Women</i> | <i>Men</i>                              | <i>Women</i> |
| Prohibitions<br>against<br>abortions | .20                                   | .23          | —                                             | —            | —                                      | —            |                                         |              |
| Discrimination<br>in promotion       | .34                                   | .38          | .22                                           | .29          | —                                      | —            |                                         |              |
| Inequality<br>between<br>sexes       | .23                                   | .32          | .26                                           | .34          | .60                                    | .62          | —                                       | —            |
| Mean                                 | 6.6                                   | 7.1          | 5.7                                           | 5.9          | 5.0                                    | 6.0          | 5.0                                     | 5.8          |
| SD                                   | 2.0                                   | 1.8          | 2.4                                           | 2.4          | 2.0                                    | 2.0          | 2.2                                     | 2.2          |

a. 1 = not at all a problem; 9 = very severe problem.

ideological dimensions, Israeli university students, at the time of the study, believed that violence against women was a more important social problem than gender inequality, gender discrimination in promotion, and abortion rights. A series of factor analyses (not presented here) showed that, except for strong supporters of feminism, Israeli university students think of violence against women as a problem similar to kidnapping and car accidents and not as a feminist issue. Only among strong supporters of feminism did violence against women load on the same factor as abortion rights, discrimination in promotion, and gender inequality to form a single cluster.

The contribution of the ideological variables to explaining the variance in attitudes toward women's issues varied with the specific issue (see Table 3). Religiosity was the best predictor of attitudes on abortion rights, alone explaining 10 percent of the variance. Feminism was the best predictor of attitudes toward both gender inequality and discrimination in promotion, contributing 17 percent of the explained variance. None of the ideological variables predicted attitudes toward violence against women, confirming the consensus among all students on this issue.

TABLE 2  
 Correlations of Attribution of Importance of Gender Issues with  
 Political Orientation for Israeli Men and Women University Students

| Political<br>Orientation | Gender Issues                |       |                                      |        |                                |        |                                |        |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------|--------------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------|--------|
|                          | Violence<br>Against<br>Women |       | Prohibitions<br>Against<br>Abortions |        | Discrimination<br>in Promotion |        | Inequality<br>Between<br>Sexes |        |
|                          | Men                          | Women | Men                                  | Women  | Men                            | Women  | Men                            | Women  |
| Left-Right <sup>a</sup>  | -.08*                        | 0     | -.17**                               | -.27** | -.21**                         | -.15** | -.24**                         | -.24** |
| Religiosity <sup>b</sup> | -.06*                        | -.01  | -.26**                               | -.37** | -.15**                         | -.22** | -.23**                         | -.28** |
| Feminism <sup>c</sup>    | .07*                         | .12** | .14**                                | .18**  | .30**                          | .32**  | .38**                          | .42**  |
| Dogmatism <sup>d</sup>   | .01                          | -.01  | -.13**                               | -.15** | -.12**                         | -.15** | -.15**                         | -.18** |

a. 1 = left; 7 = right. Mean = 4.2, SD = 1.4.  
 b. 1 = secular; 2 = traditional; 3 = Orthodox.  
 c. 1 = most positive attitude; 5 = most positive attitude. Mean = 2.2, SD = .56, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  = .73.  
 d. 1 = low; 5 = high. Mean = 2.4, SD = .55, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  = .60.  
 \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01.

When the effects of the other variables were controlled, none of the sociodemographic variables, except for gender, affected attitudes toward gender issues. The effect of gender was greatest for the promotion issue.

### POLITICAL CONTEXT OF GENDER ISSUES IN ISRAEL

These differences in the sources of support for respective gender issues, and in the way they are perceived, reflect the political context of gender issues in Israel and have important ramifications for feminism as a social movement in that country.

Educated young adults in Israel do not associate violence against women with gender differences in status and power, nor do they connect wife battering and rape with gender inequality. Rather, they seem to view violence against women as they do traffic accidents and kidnapping, that is, as an act explainable in terms of the psychology or circumstance of the individual offender.

This perception, which is held by women as well as by men, is supported by the Israeli media. They generally portray violence against women as the act of men who are emotionally imbalanced, sexually perverted, or otherwise deviant, or who grew up in problematic families or broken homes. For example, a newspaper



TABLE 3  
Regression of Gender Issues on Ideological and Demographic Variables for Israeli University Students

|                                             | Gender Issues             |                           |                                  |                           |                                |                           |                             |                           |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
|                                             | Violence<br>Against Women |                           | Prohibitions<br>Against Abortion |                           | Discrimination<br>in Promotion |                           | Inequality<br>Between Sexes |                           |
|                                             | Beta                      | Zero-Order<br>Correlation | Beta                             | Zero-Order<br>Correlation | Beta                           | Zero-Order<br>Correlation | Beta                        | Zero-Order<br>Correlation |
| Ideological variables                       |                           |                           |                                  |                           |                                |                           |                             |                           |
| feminism                                    | .09**                     | .11                       | .05                              | .16                       | .25**                          | .33                       | .33**                       | .41                       |
| dogmatism                                   | .03                       | 0                         | -.05                             | -.14                      | -.03                           | -.12                      | -.02                        | -.15                      |
| left-right                                  | -.02                      | -.05                      | -.08**                           | -.21                      | -.06*                          | -.18                      | -.08**                      | -.24                      |
| religiosity                                 | -.02                      | -.03                      | -.27**                           | -.31                      | -.07*                          | -.16                      | -.11**                      | -.23                      |
| R <sup>2</sup> all ideological<br>variables |                           | .01                       |                                  | .11                       |                                | .12                       |                             | .19                       |
| Demographic variables                       |                           |                           |                                  |                           |                                |                           |                             |                           |
| sex                                         | .10**                     | .13                       | .02                              | .03                       | .21**                          | .24                       | .12**                       | .17                       |
| age                                         | -.05                      | -.08                      | -.06*                            | -.02                      | .02                            | -.02                      | .03                         | 0                         |
| marital status                              | 0                         | -.05                      | -.01                             | -.04                      | .01                            | -.01                      | -.03                        | -.03                      |
| ethnicity                                   | -.01                      | -.01                      | 0                                | .05                       | .02                            | .06                       | .03                         | .09                       |
| R <sup>2</sup> all demographic<br>variables |                           | .02                       |                                  | .01                       |                                | .04                       |                             | .02                       |

\*p < .05; \*\*p < .01.

(*Ha'aretz* 1986) discussed "the typical family profile of the battering husband." Defined as a problem of women needing protection from such men or, more often, needing care following exposure to them, violence against women is detached from a specific feminist context.

Gamson and Modigliani's (1987) theory of the changing culture of policy issues provides an analytical tool for understanding the differences in sources as well as intensity of support for the three issues discussed in this article. The symbolic elements of policy issues, they contend, are organized into more or less harmonious packages whose parts mutually support and reinforce each other. The culture of a policy issue is the set of packages available for thinking and talking about it. "Packages ebb and flow in prominence" (Gamson and Modigliani 1987, p. 143), and one explanation for the vicissitudes in the careers of various packages centers on their sponsorship and how they resonate with larger cultural themes.

According to Gamson and Modigliani, "Much of the changing culture [of a policy issue] is the product of enterprise" (1987, p. 165). Issues are made visible and win public support through the activities of sponsors. Sponsors are more likely to have an impact, however, when the issues they promote are congruent with existing values and beliefs that enjoy widespread support among the general public. "Certain packages have a natural advantage because their ideas and language resonate with larger cultural themes. . . . Those who respond to the larger cultural theme will find it easier to respond to a package with the same sonorities" (Gamson and Modigliani 1987, p. 169). The resource-mobilization perspective (McCarthy and Zald 1977) similarly endorses the congruence principle, putting greater emphasis, however, on "fit" with political interests. It suggests that groups working on issues congruent with the priorities of established institutions are more likely to obtain support from outside sources for action on a social problem (Tierney 1982).

Sponsors—those groups and organizations who advocate on behalf of specific packages—bring about public awareness and shared definitions through their activities. Public awareness and shared definitions of social conditions are critical ingredients for the emergence of a social problem and for its transition to the stage where it is deemed objectionable and in need of correction (Hubbard, DeFleur, and DeFleur 1975). For example, the claims-making activities (Spector and Kitsuse 1977) of feminist groups in the United States were instrumental in socially constructing the problem of women as victims of violence and discrimination (Rose 1977; Tierney 1982).

In Israel, the feminist movement toward the mid-1970s was the first to claim that wife battering and rape were more prevalent than had been thought or that people then were willing to believe. Although only a small group without financial support or professional staff, the movement's take-to-the-streets tactics attracted media attention. In 1973, its leader Marcia Friedman, was elected to the Knesset on a civil rights minor party ticket headed by Shulamit Aloni. The party became a sponsor for the problems of violence against women and access to abortion as both civil rights and feminist issues.

As public responses toward violence against women shifted from ridicule and disbelief to outrage and support, various government departments and the more conservative women's organizations sponsored programs to help the victims of violence. These organizations opened shelters for battered women and developed other related services similar to those provided by the feminist movement, but the major difference was that their approach was not political (Amir and Amir 1979). However, although the sponsors of the different "women-as-victims packages" competed for visibility and media attention, they were aware of having similar goals.

In contrast, the sponsors of the various "access-to-abortion packages" were in opposition. The religious establishment is the major proponent of the antiabortion stance, the secular Israelis and feminists of the proabortion view. Of the three policy issues considered in this article, only abortion has official sponsors for both the supporting and the opposing stances.

While violence against women as a social problem has gathered support from sponsors with different views on its cause and solution, and abortion has strong pro and con sponsors, the issue of equal opportunity in employment, until recently, has been ignored by all groups, even by the feminist movement. There have been virtually no occupationally based organizations of women or efforts for desegregation or affirmative action. For example, despite the fact that there is not one tenured woman on the academic track in university departments or schools of social work in all of Israel, the one attempt, in 1980, to organize women academic staff members of university social work departments failed. The status of women at work had received attention by the Commission on the Status of Women (1978). Its report to the prime minister included data on gender discrimination and the recommendation that an equal opportunity in employment law be enacted. Opposition to such a law and to antidiscriminatory employment policies came primarily from the Israel Manufacturers' Association.

When the right-wing Likud government came to power in 1977 after 29 years of Labor Party rule, its only woman Knesset member sponsored a private-member bill for equal opportunity in employment. This initiative dismayed the eight women members of the Labor Party, who considered women's welfare their exclusive turf. Three competing bills were presented, all by women. The lack of cooperation among the women politicians from the different parties contributed to a watered-down version of the Equal Opportunity in Employment law of 1981, and it made no reference to gender discrimination in job assignment or promotion. A tripartite council of representatives of government, labor, and manufacturers was made responsible for monitoring the implementation of the law. Its potential influence, however, was neutralized by the law's failure to provide for an effective enforcement apparatus, the council's own lack of resources, and the intransigence of the manufacturers' representatives. As an indication of the law's limited impact on public opinion, only 24 percent of those surveyed in a national poll almost two years after the Equal Opportunity in Employment law came into effect could say they knew for certain that such a law existed (Zemach and Peled 1983).

The Israeli public responded sympathetically to the issue of wife-battering and rape because the culture emphasizes the primacy of motherhood and the stability and centrality of the family (Bar Yosef, Bloom, and Levy 1977; Peres and Katz 1984). These values, around which there are organized interests, are deeply embedded in traditional Jewish culture and evoke strong, solidaristic group commitments to the protection of women. For example, Parents Against Silence, one of the two major antiwar movements that demanded the immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon in 1983-1984, came to be popularly known as Mothers Against Silence because the great majority of the members and virtually all the leaders were women. They insisted that they were protesting as mothers concerned for the safety of their sons and that they were not feminists (Bareli and Benski 1987).

Although the problem of violence against women was brought to public attention by the feminist movement, it soon received support from those of the left and of the right, and from religious and secular Israelis. It was depoliticized and legitimated by traditional Jewish values, as was the 1978 law that defined forceful sexual relations by the husband as rape.

In contrast, abortion taps a basic cleavage in Israeli society on both

the religious and the nationalistic dimensions. In the period prior to 1967, abortion was not an issue on the public agenda. While Israeli law forbade abortion except under specific circumstances, such as danger to life of mother or in the case of an unmarried woman, it was nevertheless widely available at a reasonable price. Although illegal, it was generally tolerated by law enforcement agencies (Ziegler 1980, p. 61). After the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, abortion became a public issue because the growth of the Arab population living within Israel's expanded borders pushed the demographic problem, namely, the fear that the Arab population would eventually outnumber the Jewish population, to center stage.

By 1972, Labor supported liberalizing abortion because of its concern for the more vulnerable sectors of the population. From 1973-1977, the small civil rights party and its radical feminist Knesset member, Marcia Friedman, sponsored a feminist abortion law in the Knesset that demanded freedom of abortion as a woman's right.

An abortion law containing what came to be known as "the welfare clause" was passed in 1977, when for a brief interlude, no religious party was a member of the ruling coalition. Abortion was still generally illegal, but the conditions under which it would be permitted were liberalized. These included considerations for the welfare of the mother or her children. In 1978, after the election of a right-wing and ultra-Orthodox coalition, the law was amended to revoke the welfare clause. Of the three women party members in the coalition, two voted in favor of the amendment, and one abstained. The debate, which received much publicity in the media, was between the religious view and the welfare view of abortion. The demographic problem and woman's right to her body were minor themes (Ziegler 1980).

The primacy of motherhood has an impact on public attitudes toward gender discrimination in employment as well. There is widespread ambivalence about women engaging in high-commitment careers at a possible cost to family life. In studies of work values, women attribute greater importance to convenient working hours and to the ability to integrate home and work and less importance to opportunities for advancement than do men (Gafni 1981; Shapira and Etzioni-Halevy 1973). Religious men and women put even greater value on woman's roles as housekeeper and mother and significantly less value on her role as worker outside the home than do secular Israelis (Zemach and Peled 1983). The same poll found that just over 50 percent of those surveyed believed that men are

always or usually given preference in promotion, and approximately 35 percent said they should be given preference. The endorsement of the normativity of gender discrimination was considerably stronger with regard to promotion and advancement than it was with regard to acceptance of either women working outside the home or equal pay.

Attributing importance to the problem of gender discrimination in promotion implies a willingness to change the traditional power and status relations between men and women. Advocating the protection of women from family violence, in contrast, contributes to the preservation of stable families and motherhood.

Developments that took place following the 1967 war, such as the growth in the proportion of women employed outside the home and their increased commitment to the labor force, made politicians in the 1980s more responsive to criticism of traditional public policy regarding women and work. Since the early 1950s, the dominant thrust in this area had been to protect the working mother and assist her to juggle work and family responsibilities. By the early 1980s, the benefits of protective legislation were criticized for perpetuating sexist stereotypes and limiting women's career opportunities.

In 1984, the women doctors at Hadassah Hospital went to court demanding the right to equal pension age, which public organizations had instituted in recent years. The issue was settled out of court. The following year, a senior anthropologist brought a similar claim against the Jewish Agency. The court refused to recognize differential pension age for men and women as discriminatory.

In 1987, the Knesset passed a law equalizing pension age at 65 years, while preserving women's right to retire earlier. The law was supported by the large pension funds of the Labor Federation. The Knesset also amended the Hours of Work and Rest law, and granted employers the right to hire women for night work (previously granted only upon special request), but preserved a woman's right to refuse to work at night. In 1985, the prime minister's adviser on the status of women succeeded in obtaining a cabinet decision in favor of an affirmative action policy for the civil service, the first of its kind in Israel. In February, 1988, the Knesset passed a new Equal Opportunity in Employment Law, which was much more inclusive than the 1981 law it replaced. The new law referred to all aspects of work, transferred the burden of proof to the employer, and defined sexual harassment as discrimination. The right of leave to care for a newborn or sick child, previously granted to mothers only, was now granted to both parents.

The new equal-opportunity package had a powerful sponsor in the person of Member of Knesset Ora Namir, chairperson of the Knesset Work and Welfare Committee that processed the bill, former head of Israel's largest and most powerful women's organization and of the Commission on the Status of Women. In contrast to the situation in 1981, it was supported by all the women Knesset members, irrespective of political party affiliation. As in 1981, however, the law did not provide the administrative machinery necessary for implementation and enforcement. As one woman politician described the situation, "The cat [the Ministry of Work and Welfare] was put in charge of guarding the milk." Every effort had been made to avoid a demand for new public expenditures, a situation the supporters believed would have led the treasury to oppose the bill. In addition, no provision was made for class-action suits.

It is difficult to assess whether the value of the new law will not be more symbolic than instrumental. In the history of the State of Israel there have been only a handful of charges of discrimination brought to the courts by women. The high cost for the woman plaintiff in terms of money, time, harassment, and emotional discomfort and the low probability of success continue, even under the new law, to be barriers inhibiting women from testing the law in court.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR ISRAELI FEMINISM

Referring to the work of Theodore Lowi, Boneparth (1982) observes that policies perceived as redistributive generally meet with greater resistance than distributive or regulatory policies. In Israel, violence against women is treated primarily as a problem requiring distributive policies, namely, the provision of remedial services to the victims or rehabilitation services to the offenders. Such services are generally staffed and funded by volunteer organizations. There are also a small number of self-defense courses in various cities, a few of which are subsidized by local municipalities. Freedom to choose abortion, similarly, requires primarily legitimating and liberalizing access to hospitals, where most abortions are performed, since some 95 percent of Israelis are covered by the functional equivalent of national health insurance.

Actually eliminating gender discrimination in employment, on the other hand, requires the redistribution of benefits, tangible or intangible, from men to women. In Israel today, there are numerous claims-making groups in the economic and political arenas com-

peting for access to material and other resources. For example, each year, hundreds of relatively young professional army officers retire and seek a second career. They are assisted by a network of specialized agencies as well as by influential acquaintances. Jews originating from Islamic countries, known locally as "Orientals," who constitute approximately 55 percent of the population, have established entitlements to a greater share of the economic and political pie, based on earlier discrimination. They enjoy strong political sponsorship. The claims of such groups to special consideration with regard to promotion and access to high-level positions have considerably greater legitimacy than those of women (Izraeli 1987).

In her analysis of the 1984 elections in Israel, Shamir (1987) reported the intensification of the alignment among religious, nationalistic, and right-wing voters. The present study suggests that attitudes toward gender inequality are not isolated from positions held on other political dimensions but rather form part of a wider cluster of ideological orientations. The intensification of a conservative alignment strengthens the antifeminist forces in Israel. However, feminism as a political ideology has never been an important mobilizing force in Israel. The feminist organizations have only a few hundred members, and the membership has not grown significantly since the 1970s. While the Israel Association for Civil Rights has recently increased its involvement in cases dealing with gender discrimination, the issue has very low priority on the agendas of virtually all left and liberal social movements and organizations with mixed-gender membership. The main potential sources of ideological support for gender equality have to date avoided sponsoring gender issues that carry feminist labels.

The feminist movement, while initially successful in drawing attention to the phenomenon of violence against women, has not been successful thus far in constructing a feminist definition of the problem. While there is considerable public activity in Israel on many aspects of the "status of woman problem," the basic thesis of feminist ideology, namely, that women live in a patriarchal society that oppresses them, is not part of the Israeli political consciousness. In fact, there is strong emotional opposition to the idea, which is why, for example, all official descriptions of the goals of the highly successful women's studies program at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem make no reference to gender inequality despite the fact that the program is run and taught by feminists. Terms such as *patriarchy* and *oppression* are foreign to the vocabulary of public discourse.



While Israeli women leaders may on occasion declare themselves to be feminists, most are quick to disclaim the label. Women of achievement deny experiencing discrimination and explain their small numbers by reference to women's lack of motivation or preference for investments in the domestic role (Hafling 1984). The results of the study of young educated Israelis reported here suggest that unless there are drastic shifts in attitudes, the future for radical feminism in Israel is not promising. At the same time, however, gradual, incremental changes are taking place, without fury or urgency. The initiatives originate primarily among a network of political and academic women able to mobilize public support. The effects seep down and out to wider audiences. A new consciousness appears to be evolving, leading women as individuals to claim greater access to material and tangible benefits while tenaciously guarding what they consider to be their privileged position as women, wives, and mothers.

APPENDIX  
Feminism Scale

| <i>Item</i>                                                                                                                                                        | <i>Profeminist<br/>Direction</i> | <i>Factor<br/>Loading</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| I would not be willing to participate in any petition campaign or demonstration of the feminist movement.                                                          | disagree                         | .77                       |
| In fact, the feminist movement in Israel is creating problems that don't exist in reality.                                                                         | disagree                         | .75                       |
| While I might not approve of all the activities of the feminist movement, I generally agree with its goals. <sup>a</sup>                                           | agree                            | .73                       |
| I consider myself a feminist.                                                                                                                                      | agree                            | .64                       |
| Women who join the feminist movement are generally frustrated and unattractive and feel that they are shortchanged by the prevalent norms of society. <sup>b</sup> | disagree                         | .58                       |

NOTE: Variance explained = .49.

a. Item adapted from Welch (1975).

b. Item adapted from Smith, Ferree, and Miller (1975).

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