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# The Spouse in the House: What Explains the Marriage Gap in Canada?

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Many traditional vote choice studies have focused on the so-called gender gap, which refers to the persistent difference in partisan preferences between men and women (see, among others, Abzug and Kelber, 1984; Conover, 1988; Mueller, 1991; Chaney, Alvarez and Nagler, 1998). A less examined phenomenon, but one of perhaps equal consequence, at least for parties of the political right who seek to satisfy core constituencies, concerns what has been called the 'marriage gap.' Since it was first identified by Plissner (1983) in the context of American presidential elections, a small literature has emerged documenting the relationship between marital status and support for conservative parties and candidates in the United States. Perhaps understandably, given the relative paucity of literature even in the American case, there have been no published studies considering the impact of marriage on political attitudes and vote choice in other industrial democracies.

As discussed below, hypotheses that seek to explain the marriage gap typically focus on two explanatory clusters: socio-demographic and attitudinal. We suspect that both are relevant, but that more nuance can be introduced into the broad dichotomy that characterizes the small extant literature. There is some evidence that the marriage gap is a product of antecedent socio-demographic factors. Flowing from this, there is controversy as to whether these socio-demographic factors generate attitudinal differences, or whether attitudinal differences are part of the general conservatism produced by family life. Herbert F. Weisberg (1987), for example, suggests that the marriage gap is merely an artifact of demographics. He finds that, from 1972 to 1984, most of the 10 to 15 per cent

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marriage gap in the United States is explained through two socio-demographic variables: race and income. Simply put, married people are most likely to be white and well off, and thus to vote Republican. Similarly, Eric Plissner (1983, 53) speculates that “married people are more likely to own property and to worry about protecting it...” Hence, they are expected to be more likely to vote for parties of the right and centre-right, traditionally more friendly to the property-owning classes.

Paul William Kingston and Steven E. Finkel’s (1987) examination of the 1984 presidential election, however, finds that the interaction of marriage and home ownership has no impact apart from the additive effects of either component variable. Put differently, mortgage payments apparently do not drive the marriage gap. Instead, their multivariate analysis indicates that the marriage gap is driven by attitudinal factors that may not be grounded in socio-demographics. Married people self-identified as slightly more conservative than either singles or those who had been previously married. Similarly, they took slightly more conservative positions on selected policies—government aid to minorities, government responsibility for job creation and living standards, civil rights enforcement and individual responsibility. The differences were statistically significant, but slight. Indeed, Kingston and Finkel conclude that the differences were possibly a function of the peculiarities of the 1984 election (see also Plutzer and McBurnett, 1991). Thus, most existing research has not conclusively identified a discrete set of issues driving the marriage gap.

Kathleen Gerson (1987), however, implies that the attitudinal differences among the married and unmarried may be more robust, especially if family-related issues are examined. Gerson suggests that a dichotomy exists between women motivated to pursue domestic responsibilities and those committed to careers in the paid workforce. Divergent lifestyle choices produce different voting patterns as the political battle lines become more entrenched. Put differently, as the traditional family structure comes under threat, family values become more politicized. In Gerson’s words:

No one group now holds the ideological hegemony homemakers once enjoyed. Instead, the contest over social legitimacy and structural support places domestic and nondomestic women on a political collision course such that a victory for one side is typically viewed as a defeat by the other. (1987: 217)

Gerson’s work is the first to hint that if the marriage gap is both attitudinal and robust, it is grounded in a more discrete set of issues than merely a generalized conservatism. However, there remains an important problem: her research on the marriage gap is gender-specific. That is, as she portrays it, the marriage gap is grounded in defensiveness among traditionally oriented women in the face of what many perceive as a

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**Abstract.** A literature has emerged in American voting studies noting a “marriage gap”—the propensity for married voters to support the Republican party. Using Canadian Election Study data, we establish the existence of a significant marriage gap in Canada. We also seek to determine if the marriage gap is driven by socio-demographic factors or attitudinal ones. We find that while socio-demographic factors contribute to the marriage gap, they explain relatively little variance. In probing the attitudinal basis of the marriage gap further, we find that married Canadians differ from the unwed very strongly on issues of moral traditionalism, but much less so on other issues that measure generalized conservatism.

**Résumé.** Des travaux sont apparus dans les études américaines sur le vote remarquant l’existence d’un “écart mariage” (marriage gap) – la tendance des électeurs mariés à soutenir le parti républicain. Utilisant des données sur les élections nationales canadiennes, nous établissons l’existence d’un écart significatif au Canada. Nous cherchons aussi à déterminer si ce phénomène est poussé par les facteurs socio-démographiques ou les facteurs d’attitude. Nous constatons que bien que les facteurs socio-démographiques contribuent à cet écart, ils n’expliquent que relativement peu de variation. En recherchant davantage la base attitudinale, nous constatons que les canadiens mariés diffèrent très fortement de ceux qui ne sont pas mariés sur les questions de traditionalisme moral, mais cependant beaucoup moins sur les questions de conservatisme général.

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feminist cultural onslaught. This is a plausible explanation, but it would be instructive to determine if the marriage gap is equally robust among men. Indeed, there is no reason to believe that women prize the institution of marriage any more highly than do their husbands. In other words, perhaps the set of attitudes driving the marriage gap is not quite as limited as Gerson suggests, and instead extends to a broader group of issues that are popularly conceptualized under the rubric of “family values.”

Of course, regardless of the basis of the marriage gap in the United States, it is critically important to determine if the marriage gap is an uniquely American phenomenon. One promising avenue is to extend analysis to another similarly situated post-industrial society that features stark ideological polarization between political parties. Canada represents an excellent choice. On the one hand, English Canada is broadly similar, demographically and economically, to the United States.<sup>1</sup> Thus, it presents a good opportunity to compare the effects of socio-demographic factors on the marriage gap. On the other hand, there are important social and political differences between the two countries. An obvious example is the socio-political salience of race. At the very least, we can test whether race is driving the marriage gap in the United States: if the gap persists in Canada, our confidence in the race hypothesis is undermined. Similarly, we might tentatively speculate that language in Canada would have some influence on the marriage gap. Until the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, the Roman Catholic Church held enormous cultural power in Quebec, especially among francophones. Since then, however, francophone Quebecers have become more accepting than other Canadians of common-law relationships. Thus, any ‘marriage gap’ in Canada could conceivably be an artifact of ethnicity.

With respect to attitudinal factors, Canada also represents an ideal opportunity to test nascent hypotheses generated in a literature that is, to date, US-specific. A study conducted by the Angus Reid Group (1996) on behalf of the Pew Charitable Trusts found that Canadians and Americans differed significantly with respect to attitudes on traditional values, especially those pertaining to religion and the family (see also Reimer, 1995; Corelli, 1996; Hoover et al., 2002).<sup>2</sup> As a result, it is logical to conclude that if Gerson (1987) is correct, traditional views on the family in Canada are under even more threat than they are in the United States. Thus if, as we suspect following Gerson, the attitudinal component of the marriage gap is driven by a set of factors pertaining to traditional views of the family, the Canadian case allows us to test this hypothesis. It also allows us to determine, if there is an attitudinal dimension to the marriage gap, whether it is grounded in a generalized conservatism, a form of anti-feminist backlash specific to women (as Gerson suggests), or a more particularistic conservatism, pertaining to both men and women, revolving around the role of the family.

### **Data and Results**

In our examination of the marriage gap in Canadian politics, we employ data from the 1993, 1997 and 2000 Canadian Election Studies (CES). In those years, five major parties contested the election: the incumbent Liberals, the nationalist Bloc Québécois (BQ), the Reform party (an upstart party of the right that would become known as the Canadian Alliance), the leftist New Democratic party (NDP), and Canada's moderate party of the right, the Progressive Conservatives (PC).

Until 1993, with the brief exception of the rise of the Progressive party during the 1920s, Canada had maintained a stable two-party system that actually pre-dated the country's founding in 1867. The Liberals and Conservatives (later Progressive Conservatives) featured fairly regular alternation as the governing party and party of the Loyal Opposition, albeit with the Liberals winning the lion's share of the elections. A third, minor party, which came to be known as the NDP, has contested elections since the mid-1930s. This stable alignment broke down during the 1990s, with the emergence of a new right party (the Reform party, later the Canadian Alliance)<sup>3</sup> and a Quebec nationalist party (the Bloc Québécois, BQ), both of which have contested each national election since 1993, and both of which have served as the official opposition party.

Although it is always dangerous to seek to assign a starting point to such events, the breakdown of Canada's stable partisan alignment appears to have begun under the Progressive Conservative administration of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (1984–1993). A number of factors

compete for explanatory purchase. One is that Mulroney, anxious to overcome his party's traditional station on the opposition benches, engaged in a dangerous game of regional politics. Specifically, in an attempt to court electoral support in the Liberal stronghold of Quebec, Mulroney alienated his own core constituency in Western Canada, most prominently through two failed constitutional accords, while failing to earn lasting support in Quebec (see Nevitte et al., 2000; Laycock, 2002).<sup>4</sup> A second explanation is that the Progressive Conservatives failed to distinguish themselves from the Liberal party on economic issues (see Clarke and Kornberg, 1992; Laycock, 1994; Laycock, 2002). Finally, and in our view most persuasive, is the hypothesis that the Reform party/Canadian Alliance appealed to a socially conservative portion of the Canadian electorate that felt under-represented in the putative party of the right (Lusztig and Wilson, 2005) and dissatisfied with the prevailing "liberal consensus" (Herman, 1994) among Canadian parties on moral and cultural questions.

In any event, the PC party has lost significant support on the right to the Reform party/Canadian Alliance. It is too early to say if this phenomenon constitutes a permanent realignment (see Carty, Cross and Young, 2002). Indeed, the PC and Reform parties earned a roughly equal share of the popular vote in the 1993 and 1997 elections.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the Reform party/Canadian Alliance has won more seats than the PCs in each of the past three elections, with the Conservatives seemingly unable to recover from their precipitous decline between 1988 and 1993, when their seat total fell from 169 to two. In advance of the 2004 election, the Progressive Conservatives actually merged with the Canadian Alliance, ending their long history as an independent political force and forming the Conservative Party of Canada, which now seeks to compete with the governing Liberals on even electoral terms. Whatever the ultimate effects of the instability in Canadian partisan politics, however, the emergence of a clear right-wing party with a socially conservative agenda affords an excellent opportunity to examine the marriage gap in Canada.

In partisan terms, we examine the marriage gap in two ways. First, we seek to determine if married Canadians are more likely to support one of the two conservative parties. Second, we want to know if any such gap is particularly prevalent in support for the socially conservative Reform party/Canadian Alliance. Upon establishing the basis of a Canadian marriage gap, we are in a position to examine its roots. It seems unlikely that socio-demographic factors are wholly irrelevant. Logically, married people are differently situated than the unwed, and this should affect their vote choice. But do such factors explain all of the observed variance in vote choice between married and unwed Canadians? While Weisberg (1987) focused on income and race, we broaden

the investigation to test for a range of potential socio-demographic explanations, including language, region, gender, age and religious affiliation.

Assuming, as we do, that a marriage gap persists even after controlling for a wide range of socio-demographic variables, we are in a position to explore its attitudinal basis. Here, as noted, three hypotheses compete for explanatory purchase. First, the marriage gap may be driven by a generalized conservatism on the part of married folk. The basis of this hypothesis is that married people take a more 'sensible shoes' view of life, which extends across a wide range of issues. These issues include those pertaining to fiscal matters, of course, but also may well extend to post-material ones (such as the environment), constitutional ones (attitudes towards Quebec), and standard conservative biases that might be reflected in attitudes towards immigration. The second attitudinal hypothesis, broadly consistent with the work of Gerson (1987), is that the attitudinal basis of the marriage gap is far more particularistic, grounded in an anti-feminist backlash on the part of women for whom traditional family values are still highly prized. Finally, the third attitudinal hypothesis charts a middle course, suggesting that the marriage gap is not driven by a generalized conservatism, but neither is it limited to defensiveness regarding traditional gender roles on the part of women. Instead, this family values hypothesis suggests that married folk, both men and women, are politically receptive to the moral message implicit in traditional conceptions of the family unit.

Table 1 allows us to realize our first two objectives rather easily. That is, it determines the existence of a marriage gap, and identifies the partisan locus of that gap. In Table 1 we divide respondents into two simple categories: married and unmarried. This dichotomy collapses five more detailed categories presented in the CES: currently wed, widowed, never been married, divorced or separated, and living with a partner. Our marital status variable classifies as married those who are currently wed, and as unmarried all others.

Two things are immediately apparent from these data. First, a significant and stable marriage gap exists in Canadian vote choice. In all three election years, the percentage of married respondents supporting right-of-centre parties is at least 9 points higher than the percentage of unmarried respondents. Moreover, the size of the gap increases monotonically over time, growing from 9.6 per cent in 1993 to 14.3 per cent in 2000. Second, it is clear from Table 1 that the Canadian marriage gap is driven overwhelmingly by Reform party/Canadian Alliance supporters.<sup>6</sup> By 2000, the Canadian Alliance vote share among married respondents was nearly twice as large as among unmarried respondents. The marriage gap in PC support, by contrast, is a consistently modest 1 to 2 per cent.

The fact of a large and sustained marriage gap, which exists for supporters of both parties of the right, but which is far more manifest in the Reform party/Canadian Alliance, provides the basis for more analytical

TABLE 1  
The Marriage Gap in Canadian Electoral Politics

1993			
Marital status <sup>9</sup>	% PC vote	% Reform vote	% PC/Reform vote
Married	15.1% (224)	24.0% (355)	39.1% (579)
Unmarried	14.2% (160)	15.3% (172)	29.5% (332)
Overall	14.7% (384)	20.2% (527)	34.9% (932)
Total N = 2609	Married N = 1482	Unmarried N = 1127	
1997			
Marital status	% PC vote	% Reform vote	% PC/Reform vote
Married	19.1% (232)	26.4% (321)	45.4% (553)
Unmarried	16.9% (182)	18.3% (197)	35.1% (379)
Overall	18.0% (414)	22.6% (518)	40.6% (932)
Total N = 2296	Married N = 1217	Unmarried N = 1079	
2000			
Marital status	% PC vote	% Alliance vote	% PC/Reform vote
Married	13.1% (138)	30.2% (319)	43.3% (457)
Unmarried	11.5% (105)	17.5% (160)	29.0% (265)
Overall	12.3% (243)	24.3% (479)	36.7% (722)
Total N = 1969	Married N = 1055	Unmarried N = 914	

investigation. Bivariate figures reported in Table 1 do not allow us to be particularly discriminating in probing the basis of the marriage gap. The results reported in Table 1 could reflect demographic differences, generalized conservatism, traditionalism rooted specifically in social issues, or all three. To probe more deeply, we explore the bases of vote choice among Reform party/Canadian Alliance supporters. Given the locus of the marriage gap in Canadian politics, it makes the most sense to focus on this party. Given that the marriage gap was strongest in the two most recent elections, in the interest of space, we have chosen to focus solely on those. Thus, Table 2 reports probit models of Reform party/Canadian Alliance vote choice for the 1997 and 2000 elections.

The models include items measuring both socio-demographic and attitudinal factors. Socio-demographically, we find that certain characteristics are strongly predictive of Reform party/Canadian Alliance vote choice. Gender and language are highly significant in both 1997 and 2000, with women and francophones being substantially less likely than men and anglophones to vote Reform/Canadian Alliance.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, Protestants (especially evangelicals) and western Canadians are strongly predisposed to support Reform/Canadian Alliance candidates. Finally, we find weaker, less consistent effects for race, education, and age. Interestingly, household income is not a significant predictor of Reform/



TABLE 2  
 Probit Models of Reform/Canadian Alliance Vote Choice

Variable	1997	2000
Constant	-1.21 (0.37)***	-0.49 (0.28)**
Married	0.26 (0.12)**	0.17 (0.10)**
Ideologically conservative	0.17 (0.03)***	0.57 (0.08)***
View of national economy	-0.25 (0.08)***	-0.13 (0.07)**
View of personal finances	0.05 (0.06)	-0.25 (0.07)***
Asian	-0.46 (0.40)	-0.43 (0.32)*
Native	0.28 (0.57)	-0.56 (0.58)
Black	—	-1.19 (0.66)**
Female	-0.30 (0.11)***	-0.45 (0.09)**
Age	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)***
Education	-0.10 (0.03)***	-0.03 (0.02)*
Income	0.00 (0.02)	0.00 (0.12)
Francophone	-1.42 (0.32)***	-0.61 (0.15)***
Western Canada	0.90 (0.12)***	0.66 (0.10)***
Atlantic Canada	0.06 (0.22)	-0.64 (0.16)***
Catholic	-0.07 (0.16)	0.08 (0.13)
Evangelical protestant	1.31 (0.56)***	1.66 (0.33)***
Mainline protestant	0.19 (0.14)*	0.48 (0.12)***
N	899	1306
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.28	0.27

\*\*\*p < .01, one-tailed test

\*\*p < .05, one-tailed test

\*p < .10, one-tailed test

Canadian Alliance support in either year, once we control for other factors. In sum, we find that socio-demographic factors matter, though not necessarily the same factors that Weisberg (1987) and Plissner (1983) identify in the US context. Our findings clearly indicate that the marriage gap is not merely an artifact of the voting preferences of a racially concentrated economic underclass. Most importantly, we find that socio-demographic variables do not account for all of the variance in vote choice between married and unmarried respondents.

Indeed, the attitudinal measures in these models are also significant. Not surprisingly, those who profess general ideological conservatism and those who express dissatisfaction with the state of the national economy under the incumbent Liberals are substantially more likely to support Reform party/Canadian Alliance candidates. What is most telling, however, is that marital status remains a significant predictor of vote choice even *after* all of these factors are accounted for. The models in Table 2 control for a generous array of the most prominent conventional explanations of the marriage gap. That it persists strongly even independent of race, income, gender and ideology bespeaks the need for a more discriminating investigation of its underlying issue basis.

In examining the specific issues fueling the remaining substantial marriage gap in Canadian politics, it is instructive to divide socio-political questions into two categories, those that touch on questions of traditional morality (consistent with both the Gerson and the family values hypotheses) and those that reflect a more generalized conservatism. The CES data afford us the opportunity to explore four questions in each category over the two relevant elections. With respect to traditional moral values, respondents are asked for their opinions on legalized abortion, homosexual marriage, whether mothers should remain at home with small children, and broader "traditional family ties." Questions tapping generalized conservatism consist of items on taxes, the environment, immigration and Quebec sovereignty. If married people are more conservative on both of these sets of issues, this suggests support for the Reform party/Canadian Alliance rooted in a broad-based generalized conservatism encompassing economic, cultural and moral issues. If, on the other hand, the attitudinal differences between married and unmarried people are confined to questions of traditional moral values, we will find strong evidence that the marriage gap is powerfully rooted in one of our particularistic issue hypotheses.

Tables 3 and 4 present multivariate models of issue positions on representative questions of generalized conservatism for 1997 and 2000. Here, issue stances are modeled as a function of self-described ideology, marital status, and the array of socio-demographic controls (region, race, language and so forth) discussed above. The results provide very little evidence that marital status is associated with conservatism on these questions. Only on tax policy (and then only in 1997) do married people exhibit significantly more conservative attitudes than do the unwed. In 2000, we find significant effects only for immigration. Ironically, here the effect is in an unexpected direction—married Canadians are actually more liberal on immigration than their unwed counterparts, all other things being equal.

Tables 5 and 6 report exactly the same sorts of models, but this time for particularistic issues of traditional morality. Here, the results are dramatically different. Even after controlling for both self-reported general ideological orientation and religious affiliation, married respondents are significantly more conservative on all issues in both years. What seems clear from these data is that the residual marriage gap (that not explained by socio-demographic variables) is rooted overwhelmingly in a discrete subset of issues. In other words, marriage among Canadians exerts a powerful rightward pull, but only in the domain of social conservatism.

Having eliminated generalized conservatism as the basis for the attitudinal component of the marriage gap, all that remains is to discriminate between our two more particularistic hypotheses, Gerson's (1987) anti-feminist backlash thesis and the broader family values hypothesis.

In both 1997 and 2000, initial evidence suggests that the marriage gap is consistent across gender lines.<sup>8</sup> Although in the interest of space

TABLE 3  
Positions on Non-Moral Issues (1997)

Variable	Taxation (OLS)	Environment (OLS)	Immigration (OProbit)	Quebec (OProbit)
Constant <sup>10</sup>	-3.10 (0.24)***	-1.91 (0.16)***	-1.83 (0.23)	-0.86 (0.28)
Married	0.21 (0.08)***	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.24 (0.23)	-0.75 (0.28)
Ideologically conservative	0.14 (0.02)***	0.04 (0.01)***	0.04 (0.08)	0.05 (0.10)
Asian	-0.02 (0.28)	0.03 (0.18)	0.06 (0.02)***	0.08 (0.02)***
Native	-0.02 (0.28)	0.03 (0.18)	-0.69 (0.25)***	-0.04 (0.33)
Black	-0.11 (0.33)	0.09 (0.21)	0.43 (0.32)*	-0.63 (0.41)*
Female	0.22 (0.47)	0.59 (0.45)*	-0.62 (0.43)*	0.69 (0.75)
Age	-0.13 (0.08)**	0.18 (0.05)***	0.13 (0.07)**	0.18 (0.09)**
Education	-0.01 (0.00)***	0.00 (0.00)*	-0.00 (0.00)*	-0.01 (0.00)**
Income	-0.04 (0.02)**	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.13 (0.02)***	-0.13 (0.02)***
Francophone	0.03 (0.02)**	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.03 (0.02)*
Western Canada	0.14 (0.12)	0.10 (0.08)	-0.30 (0.11)***	-0.54 (0.27)**
Atlantic Canada	-0.08 (0.09)	0.03 (0.06)	-0.19 (0.08)**	0.25 (0.10)***
Catholic	0.05 (0.14)	0.01 (0.09)	-0.05 (0.13)	0.11 (0.15)
Evangelical protestant	-0.02 (0.19)	0.16 (0.08)**	0.20 (0.11)**	0.06 (0.14)
Mainline protestant	0.05 (0.37)	-0.13 (0.27)	0.05 (0.33)	1.03 (0.56)**
	0.02 (0.11)	0.06 (0.07)	0.33 (0.10)***	0.10 (0.12)
N =	1019	974	1084	796
R <sup>2</sup> =	0.08	0.04	0.07 <sup>11</sup>	0.06

TABLE 4  
Positions on Non-Moral Issues (2000)

Variable	Taxation (OLS)	Environment (OLS)	Immigration (OProbit)	Quebec (OLS)
Constant	0.39 (0.06)***	0.36 (0.07)***	-1.69 (0.14) -0.17 (0.14)	2.19 (0.11)***
Married	0.01 (0.02)	0.04 (0.03)	-0.12 (0.06)**	-0.03 (0.05)
Ideologically conservative	0.18 (0.02)***	0.08 (0.02)***	0.22 (0.04)***	0.12 (0.04)***
Asian	0.20 (0.08)***	-0.02 (0.09)	-0.43 (0.18)***	-0.46 (0.15)***
Native	-0.16 (0.12)*	-0.13 (0.14)	0.68 (0.32)**	0.30 (0.24)
Black	0.01 (0.13)	-0.11 (0.17)	-0.72 (0.31)**	-0.38 (0.27)*
Female	-0.06 (0.02)***	-0.07 (0.03)***	0.23 (0.05)***	0.00 (0.04)
Age	-0.00 (0.00)**	-0.00 (0.00)***	-0.07 (0.00)***	-0.00 (0.00)
Education	-0.02 (0.01)***	0.01 (0.01)*	-0.13 (0.01)***	-0.01 (0.01)
Income	0.02 (0.00)***	0.01 (0.01)**	-0.00 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)***
Francophone	-0.01 (0.03)	0.23 (0.04)***	-0.14 (0.07)**	-1.54 (0.06)***
Western Canada	0.11 (0.03)***	0.14 (0.03)***	0.03 (0.06)	0.20 (0.05)***
Atlantic Canada	0.07 (0.03)**	0.07 (0.04)*	0.01 (0.08)	0.06 (0.07)
Catholic	0.04 (0.03)	0.05 (0.04)*	0.21 (0.07)***	0.08 (0.06)*
Evangelical protestant	-0.11 (0.08)*	0.11 (0.10)	-0.02 (0.20)	-0.18 (0.16)
Mainline protestant	0.04 (0.03)*	0.11 (0.04)***	0.10 (0.07)*	0.08 (0.06)*
N =	2087	2132	2081	2048
R <sup>2</sup> =	0.09	0.05	0.05	0.40

TABLE 5  
Positions on Moral Issues (1997)

Variable	Abortion (Oprobit)	Gay marriage (OLS)	Mothers at home (OLS)	Traditional values (OLS)
Constant	1.67 (0.26) 2.89 (0.26)	0.66 (0.18)***	0.53 (0.20)***	1.06 (0.15)***
Married	0.37 (0.08)***	0.32 (0.06)***	0.23 (0.07)***	0.19 (0.05)***
Ideologically conservative	0.10 (0.02)***	0.08 (0.01)***	0.10 (0.02)***	0.08 (0.01)***
Asian	0.19 (0.28)	0.26 (0.21)	0.19 (0.24)	0.32 (0.18)**
Native	-0.04 (0.35)	-0.11 (0.25)	-0.11 (0.27)	0.06 (0.23)
Black	0.48 (0.43)	0.26 (0.37)	0.07 (0.40)	0.18 (0.30)
Female	-0.13 (0.08)*	-0.29 (0.06)***	-0.06 (0.07)	-0.08 (0.05)*
Age	0.01 (0.00)**	0.02 (0.00)***	0.02 (0.00)***	0.01 (0.00)***
Education	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.01)***	-0.08 (0.02)***	-0.05 (0.01)***
Income	-0.05 (0.02)***	-0.03 (0.01)***	-0.06 (0.01)***	-0.02 (0.01)**
Francophone	-0.41 (0.12)***	-0.27 (0.09)***	-0.21 (0.10)**	-0.08 (0.07)
Western Canada	0.04 (0.09)	-0.05 (0.07)	0.07 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.06)
Atlantic Canada	0.21 (0.14)*	0.01 (0.11)	0.01 (0.12)	0.13 (0.09)*
Catholic	0.88 (0.13)***	0.46 (0.09)***	0.27 (0.10)***	0.39 (0.07)***
Evangelical protestant	1.64 (0.33)***	1.28 (0.29)***	0.93 (0.30)***	0.90 (0.22)***
Mainline protestant	0.48 (0.12)***	0.36 (0.08)***	0.21 (0.09)**	0.28 (0.07)***
N =	1090	1009	1067	1059
R <sup>2</sup> =	0.08	0.25	0.20	0.20

TABLE 6  
Positions on Moral Issues (2000)

Variable	Abortion (OLS)	Gay marriage (OLS)	Women's roles (OLS)	Traditional values (OLS)
Constant	1.26 (0.12)***	0.62 (0.13)***	0.63 (0.13)***	1.38 (0.14)***
Married	0.18 (0.05)***	0.18 (0.05)***	0.28 (0.05)***	0.21 (0.06)***
Ideologically conservative	0.15 (0.04)***	0.31 (0.04)***	0.19 (0.04)***	0.31 (0.04)***
Asian	0.40 (0.16)***	0.50 (0.17)***	0.12 (0.17)	0.05 (0.19)
Native	0.61 (0.24)***	0.21 (0.28)	-0.48 (0.27)**	-0.19 (0.32)
Black	-0.18 (0.29)	0.71 (0.30)***	0.16 (0.29)	-0.41 (0.45)
Female	0.03 (0.04)	-0.32 (0.05)***	0.14 (0.05)***	-0.02 (0.05)
Age	0.00 (0.00)	0.02 (0.00)***	0.02 (0.00)***	0.01 (0.00)***
Education	-0.05 (0.01)***	-0.06 (0.01)***	-0.07 (0.01)***	-0.07 (0.01)***
Income	-0.04 (0.01)***	-0.03 (0.01)***	-0.04 (0.01)***	-0.02 (0.01)**
Francophone	-0.43 (0.07)***	-0.13 (0.07)**	-0.05 (0.07)	-0.05 (0.08)
Western Canada	0.04 (0.06)	-0.00 (0.06)	0.20 (0.06)***	-0.01 (0.06)
Atlantic Canada	0.15 (0.07)**	-0.06 (0.08)	-0.14 (0.08)**	0.01 (0.08)
Catholic	0.34 (0.06)***	0.21 (0.07)***	0.20 (0.07)***	0.37 (0.07)***
Evangelical protestant	0.92 (0.17)***	1.02 (0.19)***	0.60 (0.19)***	0.83 (0.19)***
Mainline protestant	0.15 (0.06)***	0.30 (0.07)***	0.17 (0.07)***	0.26 (0.07)***
N =	1623	1990	2053	969
R <sup>2</sup> =	0.14	0.20	0.16	0.21

TABLE 7

The Marriage Gap on Moral Issues, by Gender (1997 & 2000)<sup>12</sup>

Gender	1997			
	Abortion	Gay marriage	Women's roles	Traditional values
Men	0.37 (0.11)***	0.24 (0.08)***	0.14 (0.09)*	0.12 (0.07)**
Women	0.41 (0.13)***	0.45 (0.09)***	0.35 (0.11)***	0.28 (0.08)***
N =	605 M, 485 W	559 M, 450 W	590 M, 477 W	591 M, 468 W
R <sup>2</sup> =	0.09 M, 0.09 W	0.22 M, 0.28 W	0.21 M, 0.21 W	0.20 M, 0.23 W

  

Gender	2000			
	Abortion	Gay marriage	Women's roles	Traditional values
Men	0.17 (0.07)***	0.23 (0.07)***	0.28 (0.07)***	0.21 (0.08)***
Women	0.21 (0.08)***	0.10 (0.08)*	0.32 (0.08)***	0.21 (0.09)***
N =	917 M, 706 W	1106 M, 884 W	1121 M, 932 W	529 M, 440 W
R <sup>2</sup> =	0.13 M, 0.16 W	0.18 M, 0.21 W	0.15 M, 0.17 W	0.22 M, 0.23 W

no tabular data are reported, our findings are easily summarized. Among women, the marriage gap in Reform/Canadian Alliance support is 8.5 per cent in 1997 and 12.9 per cent in 2000. For men, the figures are a comparable 7.6 per cent and 12.4 per cent, respectively. This is indicative of a marital basis for partisanship that is more consistent with the family values hypothesis than with Gerson's gender-specific one.

These findings are reinforced by multivariate analysis. The results reported in Table 7 disaggregate the marital status variable by gender, which proved so highly predictive of attitudes toward moral issues in Tables 5 and 6. The results strongly support the family values hypothesis. In both years, on all four moral issues examined, marriage is a significant predictor of support for traditional values among both women *and* men. These results allow us to set aside Gerson's anti-feminist backlash hypothesis in favour of our broader family values one.

## Conclusion

This paper expands, both conceptually and comparatively, the as yet underdeveloped literature addressing the fact that married Americans tend to be more likely than their unwed fellow citizens to vote for the party of the right. With only a couple of exceptions, most observers of the marriage gap in the United States have attributed it to a socio-demographic artifact: the fact that the economic underclass, disproportionately African-American and unmarried, tends to vote Democratic (Plissner, 1983; Weisberg, 1987). While our findings also indicate that socio-demographic factors affect the marriage gap, we find that race contributes weakly, and income not at all. Moreover, we find that the marriage gap survives; that

is, remains statistically significant, even after controlling for all potentially relevant socio-demographic factors.

Clearly then, as some of the US literature suggests, at least part of the marriage gap is driven by attitudinal factors. We test three competing attitudinal hypotheses. First, following Kingston and Finkel (1987), we examine whether the responsibilities of married life breed a generalized conservatism among married voters. We find that this hypothesis holds virtually no explanatory purchase. Marital status is not a significant and consistent predictor of positions on any non-moral issue in the elections that we examine, and for at least one issue (immigration in 2000) married folk are more liberal than their unwed counterparts.

A second attitudinal hypothesis, articulated by Gerson (1987), suggests that the marriage gap is driven by women. Specifically, married women are more likely to place a higher premium on traditional gender roles as they pertain to the family. Sensing a cultural shift away from traditional gender roles, Gerson argues, married women are more likely to support parties of the right. That is, they will support the party perceived as most resistant to the cultural changes they find most threatening. Our findings in Tables 5 and 6 are potentially consistent with this view—certainly, married women in our study are much more supportive of Reform/Canadian Alliance candidates, and exhibit sharply more traditional social and moral views, than single women. However, when we examine the results in Table 7 a more comprehensive picture emerges. Consistent with our third, family values hypothesis, we find two issues of note. First, the size of the marriage gap is insensitive to gender—married men differ from their single counterparts just as strongly as do married women from theirs. Second, the range of issues that we examine takes us beyond the narrowly tailored question of women's social roles. In other words, while the Gerson hypothesis appears to have some merit, its explanatory value is subsumed in our larger, more theoretically comprehensive framework.

The findings in this paper speak to the need for broader, and particularly more comparative, analysis of the marriage gap first noted in American politics. Our examination of Canada has allowed us to transcend the specifically American (and possibly spurious) racial and economic explanations for the marriage gap, and to identify a more precise and generalizable attitudinal basis. Analysis of the Canadian case, moreover, may help to identify constituencies for socially conservative parties of the right. Indeed, elsewhere we have argued that the Reform party/Canadian Alliance's ability to displace the Conservatives as the dominant party of the Canadian right was largely a function of precisely the set of issues that we find here as contributors to the marriage gap (Lusztig and Wilson, 2005). Future research should trace the implications of these findings for other advanced industrial democracies.



## Notes

- 1 The obvious distinctions, of course, are the political importance of race in the United States and language in Canada.
- 2 The study was conducted by telephone from September 19 to October 10, 1996. The sample consisted of 6,023 interviews divided roughly equally between Canadian and American respondents.
- 3 There are several excellent analyses of the rise of the Reform party. See, for example, Archer and Ellis (1994); Laycock (1994; 2002); and Nevitte et al. (1998).
- 4 Both the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Constitutional Accords were perceived in western Canada to pander to the interests of Quebec, and ultimately helped to undermine PC support in the West (Lusztig, 1994). Equally damaging was the 1986 Bristol Aerospace incident, in which Montreal-based Canadair was awarded a CF-18 maintenance contract, despite a lower bid from Bristol Aerospace, located in Winnipeg (Flanagan, 1995).
- 5 In 1993, the Reform party won 19 per cent of the popular vote and 52 seats; the PC won 16 per cent of the vote, but only two seats. In 1997, Reform's numbers were 19 per cent (60 seats), while the PC won 19 per cent and 20 seats. In 2000, the Canadian Alliance significantly outperformed the PC, taking 26 per cent of the popular vote to 12 per cent, and 66 seats to 12.
- 6 After the 1997 election, in an attempt to generate more appeal in Central Canada (ostensibly the province of Ontario), the Reform party merged with disaffected members of the Progressive Conservative Party to form the Canadian Alliance.
- 7 This would seem to suggest that any possible remnants of a pre-Quiet Revolution conservatism, if they exist, do not translate to support among francophones for Canada's most conservative political party. Of course, this is not surprising given the Reform/Canadian Alliance stance on constitutional and linguistic issues.
- 8 This is not to say, of course, that men and women are equally committed to voting for the Reform/Canadian Alliance party. While a gender gap certainly does exist, our point is that the gender gap does not drive the marriage gap. For more on the gender gap in Canadian partisan politics see O'Neill (2001); Erickson and O'Neill (2002); and Gidengil et al. (2002).
- 9 Married respondents are those married and living together. Unmarried respondents are all others.
- 10 For ordered probit models, reported "constant" values reflect the two cut-points of the estimated model.
- 11 For ordered probits, values reflect a pseudo r-squared calculation.
- 12 Entries represent coefficients and standard errors, by gender, for the marital status variable in the model reported in Tables 5 and 6 above. Full results for the gender-specific models are available from the authors.

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