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Rethinking Compassion: Toward a Political Account of the Partisan Gender Gap in the US

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Abstract

Scholarship on the political gender gap in the US has attributed women's political views to their greater compassion, yet has never tested such claims with direct empirical evidence. Using the only nationally representative survey to include both psychometrically validated measures of compassion with appropriate political variables, we show that women's compassion does not help explain the gender gap in partisanship. Instead, the gap can be accounted for by gender differences in egalitarian political values. Our findings suggest that the political gender gap is not a result of women's essentialized natures, but instead a response to the same social inequality and hierarchy that produces political divisions along lines of race, ethnicity, and other social cleavages.

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Introduction

The gender gap in partisanship has become an enduring phenomenon in American politics (Kaufmann, 2006). Women began to vote Democratic in greater numbers than men in 1964, and to consistently self-identify as Democrats in greater numbers beginning around 1980 (Kaufmann and Petrocik, 1999; Norrander 1999). A similar phenomenon has emerged across many Western European countries as well (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). Yet the political gender gap continues to defy simple explanation (Howell and Day, 2000; Huddy and Cassese, 2013; Schlesinger and Heldman 2001).

In this article, we address one of the "pressing questions" (Huddy and Cassese, 2013) in scholarship on the politics of gender in the US: does compassion help explain the political gender gap? In other words, are women different from men politically because they are more compassionate than men? The notion of a link between female compassion and liberal political attitudes has become thoroughly embedded in contemporary scholarly language as well as popular discourse. Yet direct tests of relationships between compassion, gender, and partisanship have been lacking to this point.

This omission indicates a missed potential connection between the social psychological studies of compassion or empathy, and the literature on the gender gap, mainly in political science. Social psychologists have developed and validated a multifaceted set of measures of self-reported compassion and empathy that have successfully predicted many behaviors (Davis, 1983, 1994; Eisenberg, Eggum, and DiGiunta, 2010), yet these have not been used in previous research on the political gender gap. Bridging this missed connection, we employ data from US-based nationally representative surveys that included these measures of empathy as well as measures of key political attitudes. This enables us to provide a new direct test the compassion theory of the gender gap.

As it turns out, direct tests do not support the compassion thesis. We find that gender differences in compassion exist, but do not help explain the gender gap in partisanship. Instead, we find that contemporary partisan gender gaps reflect differences in political values, in particular egalitarianism

(Eagly et al., 2004; Howell and Day, 2000). Direct evidence against the role of compassion in the American partisan gender gap is not only a novel finding in the literature, but also provides support for a counter-stereotypical narrative that undermines problematic popular assumptions about the political psychology of gender (Eagly and Diekman, 2006). In this counter-narrative, women and men do not reason about politics or form opinions in fundamentally different, gendered ways (Condon and Wichovsky, 2015); rather, small but consistent differences in political values leads to small but consistent differences in partisan identities between men and women.

Compassion and the Gender Gap

Compassion plays an important if often implicit role in existing explanations of the American political gender gap, in both popular accounts of electoral politics and leading scholarship in social psychology and political science. In its most straightforward form, the compassion thesis is the claim that women are more likely to identify as Democrats, vote for Democrats, and hold liberal positions on political issues because they are more compassionate than men on average (Box-Steffensmeier, DeBoef, and Lin, 2004; Hutchings et al., 2004).

Political practitioners and journalists often assume and reinforce this account of the gap, believing that Republicans' relative unpopularity among women has stemmed from the party's unsympathetic image (Burden, 2008). In the 1990s, Democratic leader Bill Clinton "felt your pain" while winning solid majorities of the female vote in route to two terms in the White House. Republicans sought to shrink the gender gap (with little success) by promoting "compassionate conservatism" in George W. Bush's 2000 campaign. These campaign appeals seemed sensible given popular assumptions about female compassion in politics; the compassion thesis conforms to widespread social stereotypes about women in politics, according to a substantial body of political psychological research (Diekman and

Schneider, 2010; Dolan, 2009; 2014; Eagly and Diekman, 2006; Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Kahn, 1996; Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Winter, 2010).

Scholarly accounts of compassion as a cause of the gender gap have often been more subtle, but no less persistent. Lacking direct measures of compassion, researchers have instead built compassion directly into existing measures. Many have argued that liberal preferences on social welfare issues are indicators of compassion, and that "compassionate" issue attitudes then lead to partisan or ideological choices (e.g. Chaney, Alvarez, and Nagler, 1998; Kaufmann, 2002; Kaufmann and Petrocik, 1999; Norrander and Wilcox, 2008). It has become conventional to discuss social welfare issues such as support for increasing spending on health, education, childcare and poverty as "compassion issues" in the context of the gender gap, in both political science and social psychology (e.g. DiTonto, Hamilton, and Redlawsk, 2014; Eagly, 1987; Hayes, 2011; Shapiro and Mahajan, 1986). Eagly and Diekman (2006) give still wider scope to compassion, including issues that go beyond the conventional conception of social welfare liberalism, such as police brutality and gun control, in their social compassion issue index.

But in other contexts, liberalism or Democratic partisanship are not considered inherent expressions of compassion, despite the existence of social stereotypes of liberals as "bleeding hearts." For example, African American men are more liberal than white women (and often as liberal as black women) in partisanship (Manza and Brooks, 1998) and on numerous social welfare issues (Author Citation), yet this has not led scholars to argue that black men are more compassionate than white women, or that they are particularly compassionate as a group. In the context of policy preferences of African Americans (Dawson, 1994), as with white working class voters (Bartels, 2006), union members, or other Democratic-leaning groups, standard accounts treat liberal preferences on social welfare issues are instead treated as the expression of core political values. In fact, the term

4

"compassion issues" is not widely used in research on political behavior, except in the context of the gender gap. A search for this phrase in the academic database Jstor.org found 35 articles in political science journals as of May 2016; 33 of these were about gender differences.

But research to this point has not directly tested whether compassion actually accounts for political gender gaps (Huddy and Cassese, 2013). As Huddy and colleagues (2008) note, "the compassion hypothesis would gain stronger support from evidence that the gender gap is fueled by women who score highly on empathy scales, rate themselves as compassionate, or express sympathy with the plight of disadvantaged people." Because of the absence of measures of compassion on political surveys (Conover 1988), however, this call has remained almost entirely unfulfilled. (The only exception to our knowledge uses a small non-random and non-representative student sample [McCue and Gopoian 2001].)

Political Values, Attitudes & Preferences

Aside from compassion, past research has identified several individual-level differences that might contribute to the gender gap: 1) core political values such as egalitarianism, 2) issue attitudes, and 3) economic preferences. Prior research has found that egalitarian values and predispositions are one potential source of gender differences in partisanship (Huddy, Cassese, and Lizotte, 2008; Schlesinger and Heldman, 2001). Women are more likely to endorse egalitarian core values (Eagly et al., 2004; Howell and Day, 2000), including greater support for racial equality (Hutchings et al., 2004), and greater approval of women playing an equal role to men at home and in society (Twenge, 1997). Reviews of the literature note evidence consistent with the hypothesis that egalitarianism explains a portion of the partisan gender gap (Huddy and Cassese, 2013).

Several studies of the gender gap have suggested that gendered differences in issue attitudes drive gendered differences in partisan identification and vote choice; either because men and women have

5

different attitudes on the average or because they weight issues differently in coming to their decisions on party identification and vote choice (e.g. Chaney et al., 1998; Kaufmann and Petrocik, 1999). The explanatory issues are typically the so-called "compassion issues" that have been used as a proxy for differences in individual-level compassion. These studies treat partisanship and/or vote choice as the dependent variable, with issue attitudes functioning as explanatory variables. However, the assumption that issue attitudes shape partisanship (rather than partisanship influencing issue attitudes) goes against the conclusions of a considerable body of research (e.g. Achen, 1992; Bartels, 2010; Green and Yoon, 2002).

   Outside of the literature on the gender gap, party identification is generally understood to be a stable, early-learned psychological attachment that shapes partisans' policy preferences and even perceptions of politically-relevant facts (Campbell et al., 1960; Bartels, 2002; Rahn, 1993). The "revisionist" challenge has shown that an extreme view of party ID as the "unmoved mover" of political behavior is untenable (Dancey and Goren, 2010; Fiorina, 2002). But recent findings confirm that while issue attitudes can sometimes generate change in party identification for a few citizens who see an issue as highly salient and perceive differences between the parties, party ID influences issue attitudes more consistently and broadly (Carsey and Layman, 2006). Given our previously stated concerns about the use of "compassion issues" as a proxy for compassion, and the lack of appropriate data to disentangle the causal direction of issue attitudes and partisan choice while at the same time accounting for compassion, we do not include attitudes on the so-called "compassion issues" as potential explanations of the gender gap in partisanship.

   Finally, women may hold systematically different economic preferences than men, and these preferences may contribute to the gender gap in partisanship. This might reflect women's greater economic vulnerability, or alternatively a more pronounced (and potentially compassionate) concern

with economic conditions (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2004; Chaney et al., 1998; Welch and Hibbing, 1992). Previous research has found that economic self-interest, at least as measured by objective demographic proxies, does not account for the gender gap (Howell and Day, 2000). Nonetheless, perceptions of economic conditions do differ by gender and might plausibly contribute to the gender gap.

We should note that many scholars have argued for causes of gendered political behavior that go beyond the sorts of relatively stable individual-level differences in political values or preferences that we consider in this paper. Political scientists and social psychologists have explored the explanatory role of more systematic social, cultural or biological contributors, such as: a gendered division of labor, with roots in "biosocial" differences (Wood and Eagly, 2002), status within social hierarchies (Fiske 2010), or genetic differences (Hatemi, Medland, and Eaves, 2009). Each of these explanations goes back further in the causal chain, asking what causes individual differences in core political values, economic preferences, or emotional dispositions. These more distant levels of explanation are outside the scope of this study, which focuses on more proximate individual-level contributors to gendered political differences.

Data and Methods

A political gender gap exists with respect to three distinct types of dependent variables: partisanship, presidential vote choice, and issue attitudes. In this paper, we focus on partisanship as the dependent variable of interest, measured by a standard seven-point scale ranging from strong Democratic to strong Republican identifiers. To examine individual-level determinants of partisanship, we estimate effects using OLS regression with individual partisanship as the dependent variable and compassion and

egalitarianism as the key, competing explanatory variables.[1] Regression analyses use the full seven-point scale, while, for analyses that require comparing Democratic partisans with Republican partisans (as in Figure 1), we include independents who "lean" toward one party or the other as partisans, excluding only "true" independents at the middle of the seven-point scale. (We also obtain the same substantive pattern of results using Presidential vote instead of partisan identification as the dependent variable; these results are available online in the supplementary appendix.)

A direct test of whether compassion is responsible for the political gender gap requires a data set with valid measures of compassion at the individual level—something that has been missing from prior research on the gender gap. Appropriate measures are available in the 2002 and 2004 versions of the General Social Survey (GSS), a large, nationally representative survey of Americans' social and political attitudes conducted repeatedly over time. In 2002 and 2004, the GSS included a module on altruism, administered to a randomly selected half of the sample, that measures three different aspects of compassion empathetic feelings, a principled commitment to caring about others, and helping behavior (Smith, 2006). Measures are also available for egalitarianism (detailed below), perceptions of one's economic circumstances, and demographic control variables (gender, age, education, income, married, church attendance).

The GSS module on altruism and the questions used to measure egalitarianism were administered only to a randomly selected subset of respondents, and the modules did not overlap perfectly. This leads to a large drop in the number of valid cases when both sets of measures are used together. Fortunately, these missing cases are "missing completely at random" (MCAR), resulting from random assignment to versions of the survey (Smith, 2006) rather than respondents' decisions not to answer the questions ("item non-response") or other non-random factors. Therefore, the absence of these cases

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[1] Alternative results obtained using ordered probit were virtually identical to OLS results, suggesting that the seven-point partisanship scale sufficiently approximates a cardinal variable for our purposes.

should not create bias in the remaining valid cases, and multiple imputation can be used to generate more efficient estimates (King et al., 2001). We also limit the analysis to white respondents, because the gender gap has been observed primarily among white voters (Lien, 1998), and emerged from partisan shifts among white men (Kaufmann and Petrocik, 1999). Our models therefore do not include a variable for race, as this is already held constant by design.

Compassion

Compassion is defined as "feeling sorrow or concern for the suffering of another person, coupled with the desire to alleviate that suffering" (Stellar and Keltner, 2014), or as "sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others" by the Oxford English Dictionary. It makes up part of a "family of emotions," together with empathy, sympathy, and pity, and the distinctions among these are not always clear (Stellar and Keltner, 2014).

As noted above, we use measures of three constructs related to compassion. We describe this in turn, beginning with *empathy*. "Empathic concern" is a seven-item subscale of Davis' (1983, 1994) Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), which was implemented in the 2002 and 2004 GSS. Items include statements such as "I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me;" respondents assess the extent to which such statements describe themselves. (See Appendix for a full list of items.) The sub-scale comes from a larger, multi-faceted measure of "dispositional empathy," or empathy as a stable, individual-level trait. Davis (1994) defines empathic concern in terms similar to general definitions of compassion, as "the tendency to experience feelings of sympathy and compassion for others in need."

As with any survey data, these measures rely on individual self-report, and so may raise concerns about socially desirable responding or related issues related to self-report. Other research on compassion has relied on other types of measurement, including data on facial expressions, voice, and

touch (Stellar and Keltner, 2014). However, a significant body of research demonstrates the usefulness of self-report data in predicting subsequent behavior, and especially the reliability and validity of self-reported compassion as measured by the empathic concern sub-scale

The empathic concern scale has good internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.75 in the GSS implementation, see Smith, 2006). It has strong predictive validity; higher scores on the empathy scales are associated with higher rates of helping behavior (Smith, 2006), particularly spontaneous helpful acts (Einolf, 2008). The scale also shows impressive convergent validity with physiological indicators of empathetic responses; for example, higher in dispositional empathy are associated with physiological responses to the stress of others, due in part to gene-based variation in oxytocin receptors (Rodrigues et al., 2009). Politically, higher empathy levels are also associated with support for human rights ideals (McFarland and Mathews, 2005).

The empathy scale has also been shown to tap into a stable personality dimension: in a longitudinal study, adolescents with higher empathy scores retained higher levels of altruistic or "prosocial" reasoning as 21-26 year olds (Eisenberg et al., 2002), and children as young as ages 4-5 who exhibit more spontaneous helping behavior turn out to show higher levels of empathic concern in early adulthood (Eisenberg et al., 1999). The empathy scale has even shown signs of heritability from parent to child (Davis, Luce, and Klaus,1994).

One alternative to an emotional or sentimental empathy that is nonetheless related to compassion is a *principle of care.* Gilligan (1982) argued that women are more likely than men to develop a morality based on an "ethic of care" while men are more likely to use an ethic of rights or justice. Distinct from compassion as empathic concern, the ethic of care posit differences in moral reasoning, not affective responses. Gilligan's argument has been invoked in support of the compassion explanation of the

gender gap (e.g. Hutchings et al., 2004), despite numerous critiques of her original research on empirical and theoretical grounds.

Another sub-scale from the GSS module has been used as a measure of the principle of care. This sub-scale is based on four items that measure "altruistic values." Items include statements such as: "Personally assisting people is very important to me." Following Wilhelm and Bekkers (2010), we use three of these four items, omitting a fourth that focuses on the attitudes of the help-receiver, not the respondent. For the three items we employ, the coherence of the scale is less than ideal (Cronbach's alpha = 0.54), but reflects a sufficient level of average item intercorrelation for a scale with as few as three items. See Wilhelm and Bekkers (2010) for a more detailed justification of the reliability of this scale.

Finally, we consider the possibility that compassion revealed by *helping behavior* rather than feelings or principles is more politically meaningful. Perhaps people who take helpful actions, rather than those who simply report having tender feelings, are politically distinct in a way that helps account for the gender gap. The GSS altruism battery also includes a measure of compassionate helping behavior. This 11-item index assessed how many times respondents undertook various helping activities within the past year (Smith 2006; see Appendix for details), and forms a reasonably reliable scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.71).

Political Values

In order to directly test the explanatory power of compassion, we need to account for the impact of egalitarianism. Egalitarianism is the political value most often used to explain the partisan gender gap, so omitting is would surely lead to biased estimates of the impact of compassion. The GSS does not include the extensive measures of egalitarianism used in political surveys such as the American National Election Study (ANES), but we identified several indicators suitable to our purposes. Since

partisanship often develops early, we identified items indicating egalitarianism in three domains with demonstrated links to early childhood socialization: orientations toward race (Hirschfeld, 1996; Miller and Sears, 1986), gender (e.g. Eccles, Jacobs, and Harold, 1990; Fagot, Rodgers, and Leinbach 2000), and basic equality with respect to distribution of goods (Fehr, Bernhard, and Rockenbach, 2008). We hypothesize that these forms of egalitarianism will predict partisanship at the individual level and also account for the partisan gap between men and women.

Several validity tests suggest that these items are reasonable approximations of the richer measures in other political surveys. The first item we employ addresses *income egalitarianism*, asking respondents whether or not they support government action to reduce income differences. This question converges with alternative GSS measures of egalitarianism available in other years. It is strongly correlated (r=0.37) with a question tapping into pure preferences over income distribution that is available in other years on the GSS ("Are income differences in American too large?").[2] Additionally, it has a respectable correlation (r=0.22) with the only core ANES egalitarianism measure available on any year of the GSS ("The big problem is that we don't give everyone an equal chance").[3] This observed inter-item correlation is in line with the average inter-item correlation among the ANES scale items (average r=0.21). Thus, the income egalitarianism measure would most likely fit comfortably within the ANES scale. While it would be preferable to have the whole scale, no other nationally representative survey data set combines the full egalitarianism scale with the compassion items uniquely available in the GSS.

The next two egalitarianism items measure attitudes toward equality for African Americans and women, respectively. The racial equality item asks whether black people should have to "work their way up" like "other groups," a common measure of broad political orientations toward race and politics

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[2] INCGAP available in 1987, 1996, 2000 and 2008.
[3] SOCDIF$ available in 1990.

(Kinder and Sanders, 1996). The gender equality item addresses equal treatment of women, asking whether or not women should be encouraged to achieve outside the home. This item captures the notion that orientations toward feminism shape political attitudes and behavior among both men and women. Such attitudes have been shown to affect the political views of men just as strongly as women, but still may help explain the gender gap if they are more common among women (Conover, 1988; Conover and Sapiro, 1993; Cook and Wilcox, 1991).

Our primary goal is not to demonstrate that egalitarianism explains the gender gap, nor is it to establish decisively that egalitarian values cause partisanship rather than being determined in part by partisanship. Rather, our goal is to test the compassion explanation directly for the first time. This test would be affected by the omission of relevant variables such, or by the inclusion of biased measures, but it is not altered by measurement error or "noise" in our egalitarianism measures. The primary advantage of multi-item scales is to reduce measurement error and make it easier to detect correlations (Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder, 2008). The available measures of egalitarianism therefore suit our purposes of a) pitting the compassion thesis against a politics-centered view, and b) determining whether a gender gap remains even after accounting for gender differences in egalitarian predispositions in the domains of class, race, and gender. In fact, the single-item egalitarian measures offer a conservative test of our prediction that egalitarianism is a better explanation of the gender gap than compassion.

In addition, the chosen egalitarianism items assess general orientations toward income distributions, gender roles, and racial orders, as opposed to issue attitudes or policy preferences. Therefore, employing them to explain party identification is consistent with the classic view of party identification outlined earlier. Further, as we demonstrate below, these measures are not merely capturing tender feelings or principles of care in another name. We find that egalitarianism is not closely correlated with

any of the compassion measures, and that egalitarianism is highly unlikely to mediate the impact of compassion on political identity.

Results: Compassion, Egalitarianism and the Gender Gap

If the political gender gap is attributable to women's compassion, we would need to find that: 1) women are on average more compassionate than men, and 2) more compassionate people are more likely to be Democrats. Even if women are more compassionate than men, compassion cannot explain the partisan gender gap if compassionate people are not more likely to be Democrats. Figure 1 compares the distribution of self-reported compassion and egalitarianism for women and men and for Democratic and Republican partisans, highlighting the estimated mean and standard errors for each of the groups. As expected, women are generally more compassionate than men: women score higher than men on the empathic concern scale as well as on the principle of care scale. Perhaps surprisingly, men score higher on helping behaviors. Overall, however, the evidence confirms expected gender gaps in both compassionate feelings and principles.

On the other hand, little evidence supports an association between compassion and partisanship. Democratic partisans are very similar to Republican partisans on all three compassion measures. There are no statistically significant differences between Democratic and Republican identifiers on the empathic concern scale or the helping behavior scale. A substantively small difference on the principle of care scale (means: Democrats = 0.72, Republicans = 0.71, on a scale recoded to the unit interval) registers as statistically significant (p<0.05). These results suggest that only the altruistic principles scale—not conventional affective compassion—is a plausible candidate for making a even a small causal contribution to the gender gap. However, the substantively small partisan difference suggests that principled compassion cannot contribute very much to the overall size of the political gender gap.

14

Political egalitarianism, on the other hand, has more potential explanatory power. Looking at the right-hand side of Figure 1, women and Democrats, as expected, provide on average more egalitarian responses than men and Republicans, respectively. The gender difference in egalitarianism is statistically significant on all but the racial egalitarianism item.

[Figure 1 about here]

These simple relationships may be misleading, of course, without taking into account other factors that are associated with partisanship. Therefore, we use multiple regression to test whether empathy and egalitarian predispositions predict individual-level partisanship, holding constant other known correlates of partisanship. We begin with a simple demographic model of partisanship as a baseline, shown in Table 1 (Model 1). This models also controls for self-reports of a recent (negative) change in economic circumstances.

As expected, higher incomes are associated with Republican partisanship. Thus, some of the observed gender gap could be attributed to compositional effects of gender differences in income: lower income individuals are more Democratic, and women on average have lower incomes. However, even after controlling for income and other sources of compositional effects, the gender gap persists: the coefficient for male gender remains positive and statistically and substantively significant.

In Model 2, we add empathic concern, altruistic principles and helping behaviors as independent variables. Empathy again has no apparent effect on partisanship. The altruistic principles measure does have a statistically significant association with partisanship in the predicted direction. However, adding these variables has no discernible impact on the coefficient for males, confirming that while principled compassion may have a gendered aspect, it does not appear to cause the political gender gap.

[Table 1 about here]

Introducing core political values in Model 3, we find that gendered differences in egalitarianism are sufficient to eliminate the remaining gender difference in partisanship, without independent contribution from empathy, altruistic principles, or tendency toward helping behavior. The coefficient on gender falls from 0.23 and statistically significant in Model 2 to -0.01 and not significant in Model 3. When the income and feminist egalitarianism measures are included as explanatory variables, the gender gap is fully accounted for statistically, as gender no longer accounts for any of the variation in partisanship. The egalitarianism measures in Models 3 and 4 (which includes racial egalitarianism) outperform the direct measures of compassion, with each one exhibiting a substantively and statistically significant relationship with partisanship. A comparison of Models 3 and 4 confirms that as expected all three egalitarianism measures are significantly related to partisanship, but only economic and feminist egalitarianism, not racial egalitarianism, are responsible for the political gender gap. Extrapolating from these estimates, moving from the minimum to the maximum (most liberal) positions on all three political value variables is sufficient to move a true independent to a strong Democrat on the seven-point party identification scale.

In Model 5 we use multiple imputation to ensure that our results do not change from the significant loss of cases following the introduction of the core political values in Models 3 and 4. As noted above, missing responses on these items are MCAR, and should not introduce bias into the estimates (King et al. 2001). Nonetheless, if uncorrected, the loss of cases could unfairly advantage our argument against the compassion thesis by reducing the efficiency of the estimates, making it harder to detect effects of empathy on partisanship. As Model 5 shows, our results hold even when correcting for this loss of efficiency. The coefficients on empathy and principles of care remain insignificant even with the imputed data, and the coefficient for male increases but remains indistinguishable from zero. (Data were imputed using Amelia II for R and estimated using Zelig [Imai, King, and Lau, 2007].)

These results, then, do not support the view that female compassion underlies the gender gap in partisanship. Although women self-report higher levels of tender feelings than men on average, this difference is not associated with partisanship in any of the multiple regression models. The results initially appeared slightly more promising for the principle of care. However, its estimated impact on partisanship is substantively small, has little or no impact on the size of the estimated gender gap, and does not remain statistically significant when tested directly against egalitarianism.

One potential objection is that egalitarianism might merely mediate the relationship between compassion or caring values and partisanship. Perhaps people motivated by compassion or principles of care adopt more egalitarianism political values, which then in turn leads them identify as Democratic partisans. In order to support the claim that a mediated relationship exists, there would need to be evidence of the direct effect of compassion on both partisanship and the proposed mediating variables or egalitarianism (Baron and Kenny 1986). However, empathy does not have a substantively or statistically significant association with partisanship even in a bivariate correlation ($r = -0.02$) or any estimated direct effects shown Table 2. Thus, we can conclude that egalitarianism does not mediate the relationship between empathy and partisanship even without a full mediation analysis.

[Table 2 about here]

A mediated causal relationship between principles of care and partisanship is initially more plausible, as this variable has an estimated effect on partisanship in Model 2 that disappears when egalitarianism measures are included in Model 3. However, we observe small correlations between egalitarianism and principles of care, consistent with prior findings from a survey of several hundred New York area residents (Feldman and Steenbergen, 2001). As Table 2 shows, none of these correlations between principle of care and the three egalitarianism measures exceed $r = 0.13$, and the correlations are lower between principled compassion and the two egalitarianism measures that provide

17

the best statistical explanation of the gender gap: income (r=0.11) and feminist (r=0.02). A full mediation analysis (available in the online supplementary material) confirms that egalitarianism almost completely mediates the relationship between gender and partisanship, and that the direct and indirect contribution of the principle of care (including any mediation of compassion by egalitarianism) accounts for at most approximately 5% of the total partisan gender gap.

Discussion

We have provided evidence that women's greater compassion is not responsible for the gender gap in Americans' partisanship and issue attitudes. This fulfills the central purpose of our analysis, which was to provide the first empirical test of whether compassion explains the gender gap in US partisanship, using direct, psychometrically-valided measures of compassion on a nationally representative sample. The key result, then, is this clear lack of support for empathic concern as a cause of the gender gap. The principle of care may have a small effect on partisan identification, but it accounts for little or none of the political gender gap.

In contrast, gendered differences in core political values, in particular economic and feminist egalitarianism, can fully account for the partisan gender gap. But identifying the impact of egalitarianism is only a first step in understanding the sources of the political gender gap, and there are still further questions to address. What causes men and women to differ in the egalitarian predispositions we have identified? And what explains the timing of the emergence of the gender gap in American politics? We cannot answer these questions here. However, by ruling out a uniquely feminine compassion as a cause of the gender gap, we take a step toward a view of the partisan gender gap as a contingent outcome of political contestation (Inglehart and Norris, 2003) within a hierarchical social order, rather than a manifestation of stable gender differences in either inherent or socialized dispositional empathy.

18

For example, our results suggest that newly resurgent biological or genetic explanations of political behavior will be unlikely to improve understandings of the political gender gap. Women's compassion, even more than other stereotypical gender traits, is commonly attributed to genetic difference (Cole et al., 2007), and indeed there is evidence for the heritability of the emotional aspects of compassion (Davis et al., 1994). Thus, evidence against compassion as a plausible explanation of the gender gap is worth considering for political scientists using genetics to explain gender differences (Hatemi et al., 2009; Hibbing, Smith, and Alford, 2013), or for those evaluating such uses and their political implications (Charney and English, 2012).

Instead of focusing on inherent gender differences, we suggest a view of the gender gap as part of a broader phenomenon in which socialized views toward equality and hierarchy shape not only the gender gap, but other social divisions in political views as well (Pratto, Stallworth, and Sidanius 1997). Political egalitarianism and partisanship also vary across race and ethnicity (as well as class, region, and religion). In our view, the greater liberalism of both women and racial/ethnic minorities may be better viewed as part of the same phenomenon. Ideally, future research on the gender gap will investigate political, social, and psychological mechanisms that could simultaneously create both racial and gender gaps in political attitudes, rather than relying on characteristics particular to women. In this, our conclusions about the role of compassion in the gender gap are in keeping with Eagly and Diekmann's (2006: 32) critique of "stereotypical interpretations" rooted in women's "sentimental or risk-averse qualities" as impediments to accurate explanation of gender differences in political orientations. Our findings help dispel one such stereotypical interpretation rooted in women's sentimental qualities.

It is also important to note that static gender differences in egalitarianism cannot explain political gender gaps that change over time and across issues. While beyond the scope of this study, future work

19

might explore how gender gaps have responded to shifting social and political constructions of links among parties, issues, and core values. As others have noted, the political changes brought about by the Civil Rights movement coincided with the emergence the gender gap (Hutchings et al., 2004). We agree that this timing is significant, but we argue that there is not evidence to support the claim that (white) women's compassion for African Americans triggered the gender gap. On the contrary, we fine that compassion and specifically racial egalitarianism do not have a significant role in explaining the contemporary gender gap.

Instead, we suggest that the dynamic shifts over time in the political gender gap may reflect the gradual transition to a party politics defined to a significant degree by conflicts over "ascriptive Americanism" (Smith, 1999) pitting the traditionally dominant identity group (white male Protestants) against traditionally excluded or subordinated groups (including women), and away from the New Deal era's primarily class-based conflict over economic issues that restricted contestation to a political battle between white men from middle class and working class backgrounds. With a broader population participating in politics and newly defined dimensions of partisan conflict, white men concerned with protecting their relative group position (Blumer, 1958; Kaufmann, 2002) were pulled in the opposite direction from women and racial minorities.

Finally, we do not wish to argue that compassion is irrelevant to contemporary American gender politics, merely that it does not explain the gender gap. Throughout American history, women who projected a compassionate political identity have been more likely to be allowed access to political power, while women who project more radical and stereotypically masculine notions of power have been ostracized (Baker, 1984). Female political candidates are expected to be compassionate and to focus on women's issues or social issues (Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes, 2003; Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Sanbonmatsu, 2002), and risk censure as cold and ambitious if they diverge from these

20

expectations (Kahn, 1996). Widely held beliefs about female compassion remain relevant to contemporary politics as an expectation of female political actors.

Moreover, compassion may play an important role in political behavior, for both women and men and for individuals of all ideological and partisan orientations, even if it is not responsible for the political gender gap. For example, in studies in Sweden, Bäckström and Björklund (2007) find that empathy is a strong predictor of prejudice, mediating gender gaps in prejudice. More broadly, compassion may manifest itself in a range of political actions other than support of liberal parties or social welfare policies. Compassionate people with different worldviews will perceive different sorts of action as helpful to others. Some compassionate people may wish to help the poor through social welfare policy, but others motivated by compassion may prefer policies that promise to save souls, or save the environment, or protect various other-regarding political values. We suggest that political psychological research should remain open to studying compassion as a motivating force behind a variety of political actions and orientations. But, crucially, such studies should use of independent, psychometrically validated measures of compassion or empathy, instead of treating political preferences on social welfare issues as a proxy for compassion. Both women's and men's support for liberal policies might arise from many other combinations of interests, values, beliefs, and emotions.

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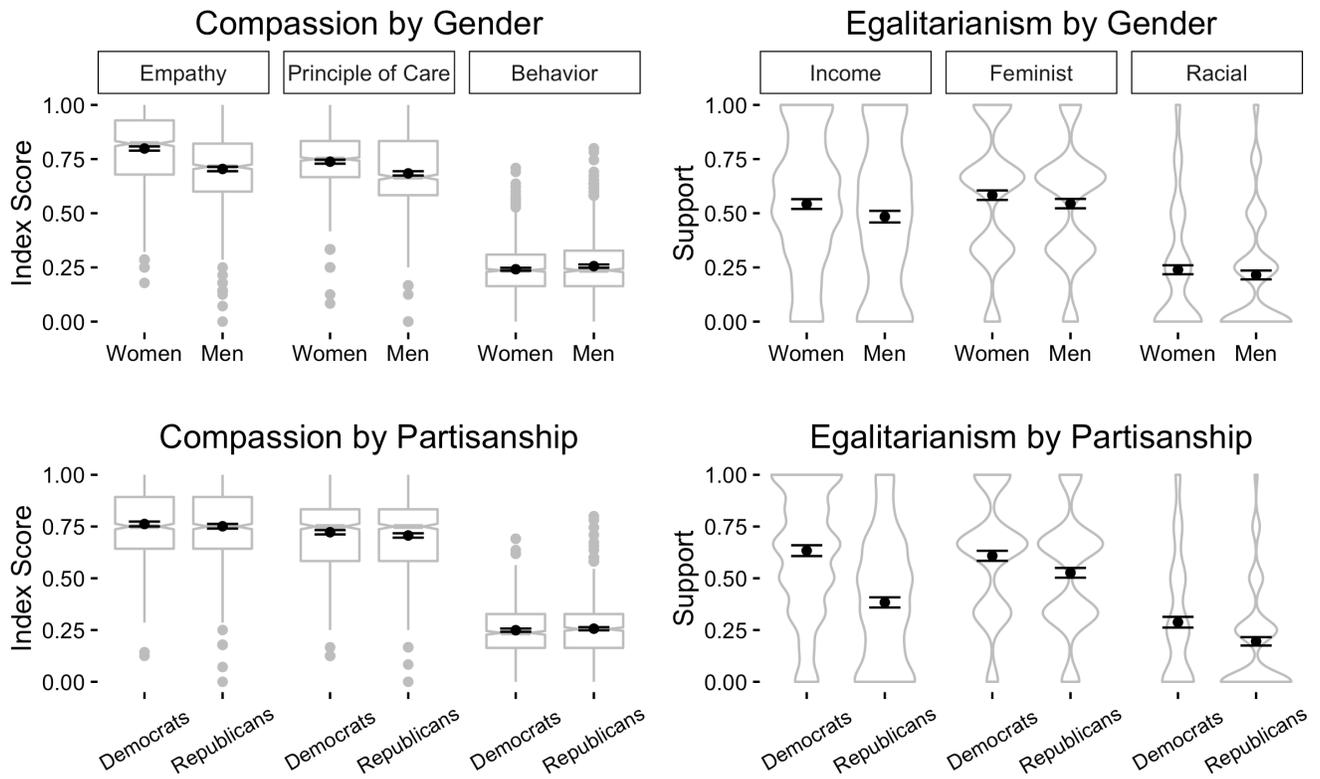
Figure 1. Mean and Distribution of compassion and egalitarianism, by gender and partisanship

Distribution of individual compassion index scores and responses to egalitarianism questions depicted in grey using a notched boxplot (left) and violin plot (right). Estimated mean indicated in black with error bars for 95% confidence interval.

Table 1. Republican identification as function of compassion and egalitarianism

	Model 1 Demographics	Model 2 ...+ Compassion	Model 3 ... + Income & Feminist Egal	Model 4 ... + Racial Egal.	Model 5 Full Model Imputed Data
Demographics					
Male	0.25*	0.23*	-0.01	-0.01	0.09
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.09)
Age (18-89)	-0.004	-0.004*	-0.006	-0.006	-0.009*
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(.002)
Southern	0.31*	0.32*	0.44*	0.41*	0.21*
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.09)
Education	-0.006	0.0004	0.05*	0.07*	0.018
(0-20 years)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.016)
Income	0.004*	0.0046*	0.0020	0.0025	0.0032*
($1,000's)	(0.0014)	(0.0014)	(0.0020)	(0.0024)	(0.0014)
Married	0.17	0.17	0.30	0.28	0.14
	(0.01)	(0.10)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.09)
Church	0.11*	0.12*	0.09*	0.07*	0.08*
Attendance (0-8)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Economic Evaluations					
Worse/Same/	0.18*	0.18*	0.16	0.19*	0.13*
Improve	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.06)
Compassion					
Empathy		0.26	0.14	0.17	0.38
		(0.31)	(0.55)	(0.54)	(0.30)
Principle of Care		-1.14*	-0.38	-0.28	-0.50
		(0.34)	(0.59)	(0.58)	(0.33)
Helping Behavior		-0.13	-1.12	-0.96	-0.08
		(0.42)	(0.77)	(0.77)	(0.41)
Egalitarianism					
Income			-1.38*	-1.24*	-1.67*
			(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.16)
Feminism			-1.21*	-1.13*	-0.81*
(Women work)			(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.19)
Racial				-1.09*	-1.00*
(Work way up)				(0.29)	(0.19)
Constant	3.11*	3.64*	4.40*	4.26*	5.05*
	(0.26)	(0.37)	(0.69)	(0.69)	(0.39)
	n=1913	n=1911	n=615	n=609	n=1913
	R^2=0.05	R^2=0.06	R^2=0.16	R^2=0.17	R^2=0.18

Notes: Data from GSS 2002-2004, pooled. Cells show OLS coefficients with robust standard errors below in parentheses. Asterisks indicate statistical significance (* = $p<0.05$). Data imputed using Amelia II for R and estimated using Zelig (Imai et al., 2007).

Table 2. Correlations among indicators of empathy and egalitarianism, white respondents only

	Income Egalitarianism	Racial Egalitarianism	Gender Role Egalitarianism	Party ID
Empathy	0.10*	0.04	-0.05	-0.02
Principle of Care	0.11*	0.13*	0.02	-0.05*
Helping Behavior	-0.02	0.07*	0.11*	-0.02

Notes: Data from 2002 & 2004 GSS, pooled. Cells are Pearson's r correlation coefficients using pairwise complete observations for white respondents. Asterisks indicate statistical significance (* = $p<.05$).

Appendix: Question Wordings

GSS Compassion Measures

Empathy Scale. (Five point scales, strongly disagree to strongly agree, * = reverse-coded item.)

1. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.
2. Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems.*
3. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them.
4. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal.*
5. When I see someone treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them.*
6. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen.
7. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.

Principle of Care Scale. (Five point scales, strongly disagree to strongly agree, * = reverse-coded item.)

1. People should be willing to help others who are less fortunate.
2. Personally assisting people in trouble is very important to me.
3. These days people need to look after themselves and not overly worry about others.*

Helping Behavior Scale. (Respondents were asked if they had done each of the following within the past year, and if so how may times.)
1. Talked to depressed person
2. Helped others with housework
3. Allowed someone to cut ahead
4. Gave directions
5. Gave money to charity
6. Volunteered for charity
7. Give to homeless
8. Helped someone find job
9. Helped someone who was away
10. Gave up seat
11. Carried belongings
12. Loaned item
13. Lent money
14. Returned extra change
15. Gave blood

GSS Egalitarianism and Partisanship Measures

Income Egalitarianism [EQWLTH]. Some people think that the government in Washington ought to reduce the income differences between the rich and the poor, perhaps by raising the taxes of wealthy families or by giving income assistance to the poor. Others think that the government should not concern itself with reducing this income difference between the rich and the poor. (*Place yourself 1-7, with 1: the government ought to reduce the income differences between rich and poor, to 7: the government should not concern itself with reducing income differences.*)

Gender Role Egalitarianism [FEFAM]. It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family *(strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree).*

Racial Egalitarianism [WRKWAYUP]. The Irish, Italians, Jews, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors *(agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly).*

Partisanship [PARTYID]. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?