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The Need for New Priorities:
The National Organization for Women and College Campuses

by

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Part One: The Process of Feminism

Contemporary texts about the women's movement often endeavor to remind their readers that feminism is not a dead movement. These texts point to economic, social, and political realities to emphasize that the goal of equality has not yet been reached. In her book, *The F Word: Feminism in Jeopardy*, Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner cites a 2003 General Accounting Office report which claims that "there has not been an improvement in the pay gap between men and women over the past two decades," thereby refuting the notion that women have already achieved the economic equality they sought throughout feminism's second wave (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 8). Some allege that *Roe v Wade*—"an indicator of the overall status of women's rights issues"—is slowly being eroded by a hostile political climate and an unsympathetic Supreme Court (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 52-3). The National Organization for Women (NOW) boldly declares, "Your Life Has Changed; Your World Hasn't Caught Up" on its website (www.now.org). The failure to get the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) passed is possibly the most noticeable setback in the fight for women's equality (as well as for the NOW, which championed the amendment for decades), and this setback still haunts the movement and its organizations. While these constant reminders that the goals of feminism have not yet been reached serve as a resounding call for women to join and strengthen the ongoing movement, it also leaves many wondering why a movement which seemed so promising in its past and so optimistic about its future has not been as politically effective as it should be. The answer may lie in the inability of recognized feminist organizations like NOW to attract and maintain young members in their chapters. In recent decades, the National Organization for Women has attempted to create chapters on college campuses with varied success; however, (on the whole) the organization has faced difficulty in recruiting and retaining college-age women as members.

In order for women—feminists or otherwise—to continue to achieve their goals in society, they must be politically active, and political participation via voting is the primary avenue for them to do so. Thirty years ago women “first used the power of their numbers, and voted more frequently than men” casting over 4 million more votes than men in the election of President Jimmy Carter (Zepatos 1995, 18). This trend reasserted itself in the 1992 presidential election when women used their collective voice to bring President Bill Clinton to office, proving that the women’s vote was “a formidable power” in its ability to swing an election (Zepatos 1995, 18). Despite these noteworthy milestones, recent years have shown that young women simply are not voting. In 1998, “only 18 percent of women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four voted,” and that percentage only went up to 35 percent for the same age group two years later (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, A:12). This means that “almost 19 million young women...didn’t vote” in the much-debated 2000 presidential election (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 2). This trend has not gone unnoticed by elected officials. Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner cites the remarks of an elected official who responded to a question about which issues might be important to young women by stating, “Why even talk about them? We’re wasting our time. Young women don’t vote anyway,” (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 2). Finkbeiner suggests that this lack of political participation ensures that “important issues like education, domestic violence, health-care funding, reproductive rights, college tuition increases, child care, social security, and equitable pay...aren’t debated with the opinions of young women in mind” (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 2). This creates, in essence, a sort of vicious cycle in which apathy breeds apathy. Young women who fail to vote also fail to influence the political process. In turn, these women feel left behind by policies that seem out of step with their priorities. Consequently, young women continue not to vote because they feel they are ignored by elected leaders.

Political participation, however, includes other important dimensions that have the potential to impact one another. For example, participation in political organizations can foster political participation in other arenas (like voting). The feminist movement presumably seeks to give a voice to young women, especially in recent years as efforts to recruit college-age women have increased. However, organizations like NOW find it difficult to build chapters on college campuses or gain and keep young women as members for a variety of reasons. While there are (of course) those young women who disagree with some of the goals of the women's movement, what is particularly troubling is that even young women who do agree with feminism are reluctant to join these types of organizations—or even to identify themselves as feminists. The fragmentation of feminism into a variety of smaller groups and movements that has occurred throughout the third wave may allow for more diversity, but this also may keep women from joining together in larger numbers via organizations like NOW to achieve legislative and social goals. This fragmentation, however, can only be seen as a recent in a long trend of change for the feminist movement.

As Elisabeth Armstrong notes, “feminism is a process” (Armstrong 2002, 12). Throughout its history, the feminist movement has had to adapt to keep up with the goals and priorities of contemporary women. Success for the movement can only be gained “through constant reassessment and revision of its weaknesses” (Armstrong 2002, 54). The women's movement did not come “from a well-spring of support by a mass constituency” but it instead “gained form from its self-definition, through its campaigns, goals, and ideals” (Armstrong 2002, 21). In fact, it seems as though the greatest challenge to the feminist movement has often been women themselves more than any other outside social or political force. Even in friendly political climates, women outside the movement have challenged it. Armstrong argues that

“dissent between women, even over its academic project as women’s studies, threatens the women’s movement as a whole and should be discouraged in favor of a strategic unity” (Armstrong 2002, 42). Despite this, each phase of the process of feminism has brought with it criticism from groups of women that feel left behind by the movement’s agenda.

Though women had participated in moral reform groups, charitable societies, and temperance organizations in the early 1800s, they first became a serious politicized group as part of the abolitionist movement in the second half of the nineteenth century (Whittier 2006). As more and more women were excluded from male abolitionist groups, they became increasingly aware that they were “not accepted as equals by their male counterparts in the public/political sphere” (Iannello 1992, 35). This growing awareness led women to use their own antislavery groups as “forums for discussion of female slavery as well” (Iannello 1992, 35-6). A similar process led to the Seneca Falls convention organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott in 1848 “after observing exclusion at a World Abolitionist convention” (Whittier 2006, 4). These women (and others) joined together in 1867 to form the Equal Rights Association, a group that “sought to gain equal rights for both African Americans and women” (Whittier 2006, 5). Unfortunately, racial unity was difficult to achieve at the time and remained difficult for decades.

Feminism’s first wave centers on the suffrage movement, which lasted from around 1848 until 1920 (Conway 1997). As some historians note, the progress of the women’s suffrage movement was sluggish in part because “dissent fragmented [the movement] into competing and contentious organizations during much of the struggle” (Conway 1997, 11). This became a pattern for the feminist movement that continues to affect its goals and processes to this day.

Even once women gained the right to vote via the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution, they soon realized that their problems were far from over. The suffragist

movement, despite its success, was soon criticized because it “didn’t pay enough attention to social hierarchies other than gender, like race and class” (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 22). Perhaps most glaringly, Jim Crow laws across the South continued to keep African American men and women from voting, even as the suffragists were celebrating their victory. These criticisms about women’s movement’s inability to account for social differences other than gender continue to haunt the movement into the present day.

The years following the ratification of the 19th Amendment proved difficult for organizing within the women’s movement. In the decades leading up to what would be known as the second wave of feminism, “Red scares...hurt many women’s organizations as they were tied to Communist organizations through a ‘spider’s web’ of organizational connections” (Banaszak 2006, 6). The political forces of the McCarthy era held back “threatening demands for women’s freedom or women’s liberation” (Armstrong 2002, 15). The repression and paranoia of the Cold War influenced Betty Freidan in her choice to address middle-class housewives in her book, *The Feminine Mystique* (Armstrong 2002). This choice would prove revolutionary, as housewives had been a virtually untapped activist resource until this time.

The conservatism of the 1950s yielded revolution in the 1960s and 1970s. The second wave was arguably the most productive time for the feminist movement, as activists achieved a number of legislative and social successes that are still enjoyed today (to one extent or another) such as “increased gender equality in the workplace, access to reproductive health care and sexuality information, and civil-rights legislation that made discrimination on the basis of sex or race illegal” (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 26). Some might suggest that the approval of the birth-control pill in 1963 was “the spark that lit the sexual revolution” and truly fueled second wave feminism (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 36). Within two years of its approval by the FDA, “the pill”

was the leading method of reversible contraception in the United States. In 1973 “Roe v Wade swept the country, legalizing abortion and setting a precedent for more than three decades of battles over reproductive choice” (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 36). From that point on, however, feminists would be split into two categories: those who fought for Roe and those who came to the movement after Roe was passed. The generational conflict that divides the feminist movement even now is often based on this decades-old distinction.

The second wave of the feminist movement also saw the rise of important feminist organizations that continue to work for equality forty years later. In 1961, a national Commission on the Status of Women (formed by President John Kennedy), “clearly documented the second-class status of women in the United States” (Iannello 1992, 37). In 1966, at the Third National Conference of the Commissions on the Status of Women was held. When conference officials “refused to bring to the floor a proposed resolution that urged the EEOC to give equal enforcement to the sex provision of Title VII as was given to the race provision,” a group of women met with Betty Freidan over lunch and formed the National Organization for Women (NOW) (Freeman 2006, 31-2). Freidan coined the name herself, and “before the day was over, 28 women paid \$5.00 each to join” (Freeman 2006, 32).

The formation of NOW triggered an increase in the number of feminist organizations. These new groups began working alongside older groups that had existed since the 1920s. Many of these new organizations featured similar structures that were “hierarchical, with elected officers, boards of directors, by-laws, and other procedural rules” (Iannello 1992, 37). However, this strict structure did not suit all of the women involved with second wave feminism. A more grassroots approach favored by students and women who had been involved with the civil rights movement led to the formation of consciousness-raising groups, which were “committed to non-

hierarchy and to experimenting with organizational structure” (Iannello 1992, 37). Rather than being concerned with issues of leadership and organization, these groups gave women opportunities to “discuss their experiences of sex discrimination...[and] devise strategies for change” (Iannello 1992, 37). More structured feminist organizations often did not take the consciousness-raising groups seriously, and some alleged that the groups “spent more time on their own needs rather than on furthering political struggle” (Armstrong 2002, 64). This division based on the issue of organization was just one of the stumbling blocks of the second wave.

Issues of race continued to be a problem in the second wave, and sexuality became a major point of debate—especially in the 1970s. Overall, the second wave has been criticized because it “by and large didn’t demonstrate fluidity in looking at other issues of social hierarchy (race, class, nationality, sexual orientation) through a feminist lens” (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 27). Women of color and lower-income women often felt that their struggles were ignored by the larger movement. This ultimately led to a pattern of “women of color and white women work[ing] for change alongside one another, instead of as part of the same overall movement” (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 27). Rather than insisting that members of the women’s movement were themselves racists, critics accused the movement as a whole with “organizational racism: a racism shared within the structures and assumptions guiding the movement” (Armstrong 2002, 50). The inability of feminist organizations like NOW to incorporate women of color significantly into their membership threatens the very future of the movement. “If only white women are feminists,” the legitimacy of feminism comes into question (Armstrong 2002, 45).

Instances where women of color demanded inclusion in existing feminist organizations drew attention to other exclusions “springing from heterosexism and elitism in the women’s movement” (Armstrong 2002, 37). In particular, heterosexism damaged second wave feminism

by “hurt[ing] unity among members and damag[ing] the struggles to free women of sexist expectations” (Armstrong 2002, 83). The problem garnered mass attention when Betty Freidan “began to purge NOW membership of lesbians and actively sought to squelch discussions about lesbian sexuality in the group” in 1969 and 1970 (Armstrong 2002, 79). However, members at NOW’s National Convention in 1971 “passed a resolution endorsing the rights of lesbians within the larger group and recognizing lesbian sexuality as a feminist issue” (Armstrong 2002, 82). Issues of sexual orientation could not simply be absorbed into the feminist movement as it existed, though. The inclusion of lesbians into these structured organizations “forced changes in feminist ideology, goals, and conceptions of movement and coalitions, even in how to define the women’s movement” (Armstrong 2002, 76). There was not as much hostility toward lesbians in the consciousness-raising groups, but often they “ignored lesbian sexuality within their membership and as a political issue” (Armstrong 2002, 79). The National Organization for Women continues to fall behind the times on issues of sexuality. In its list of priority issues the group continues to cite “lesbian rights,” rather than the more modern or inclusive terms like “queer” or “LGBT” rights (www.now.org). This choice of terminology can be alienating to a younger generation of women who no longer identify themselves according to NOW’s standards.

These divisions among women hampered the movement considerably. In fact, it was differences among women that caused what some consider the largest failure of the second wave—the failure to pass the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The campaign against the ERA “forge[d] a coalition of the traditional Radical Right, religious activists, and that previously relatively apolitical segment of the noncosmopolitan working and middle classes” (Mansbridge 1986, 16). In particular, the anti-ERA campaign succeeded in using an argument that the ERA would bring “substantive changes in women’s roles and behavior” to further divide women

(Mansbridge 1986, 20). Phyllis Schlafly's prominent role in the anti-ERA fight cemented belief that only a small, radical group of women supported the passage of the ERA. Her argument, however, "revolved around women's continuing need for male protection" (Mansbridge 1986, 69). Specifically, she argued that the ERA would force women into the military and into combat in the case of a draft. However, Jane Mansbridge notes in her book *Why We Lost the ERA* that "the ERA would have had few immediate, tangible effects" (Mansbridge 1986, 2). Instead, she argues that the main outcome of the ERA would have been a stronger public commitment to equality in the workforce (Mansbridge 1986). In addition to this public commitment, there may have been another more psychological element to the passage of the ERA: "if women knew that the Constitution guaranteed them equal rights, they would probably be more inclined to demand such rights" (Mansbridge 1986, 43).

The ERA campaign was troubled not only by attacks from non-feminists, but also from divisions within the feminist movement over how to shape arguments in support of the amendment. The lack of specific, immediate benefits of the ERA left supporters to "point to changes that were quite unpopular", including women's inclusion in the draft (Mansbridge 1986, 46). This prospect made many women hesitant to support the ERA, but some feminist supporters failed to take the issue seriously (primarily because most feminists opposed the draft altogether) (Mansbridge 1986). Other feminists began to exaggerate the outcomes of the ERA just as much as opponents, leading those in wavering states to believe that threatening substantive changes would, in fact, occur (Mansbridge 1986). As the amendment "lost its aura of benefiting all women and became a partisan issue", the hopes of gaining the support of the remaining states were lost (Mansbridge 1986, 6). By the early 1980s, the fight was over. The ERA campaign demonstrated the dangers of a failure to "dispense with 'ideology' in favor of practical political

reasoning” (Mansbridge 1986, 3). Because “feminists chose an interpretation [of the ERA] unpalatable to mainstream voters and legislators,” they undermined their own campaign (Mansbridge 1986, 68).

Feminism changed during the late 1980s and 1990s due to “an upsurge in openness about sexual behaviors and a reclaiming of some of the trappings of traditional femininity” (Whittier 2006, 56). Young women began to insist that there were many ways of being a feminist. As such, third wave feminism emerged as a movement that emphasized and celebrated the differences among women that had troubled feminism’s past. While third wave feminism can and should be applauded for being more sexually and racially diverse, it is troubling to note that “the third wave is more often broken down into factions than brought together as a broad social movement” (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 31). Third wave feminism stresses coalition work rather than participation in broad-based hierarchical organizations like NOW. However, it is still unclear whether or not this model can be successful in achieving women’s social and political goals. As the movement becomes more and more individualized, “the consequent loss of the language to discuss feminism as a collective entity” might be a symptom of the larger inability for activists to work together in larger organizations like NOW to gain feminist victories (Armstrong 2002, 4).

Some young women have not taken up the feminist cause in recent years because they believe that the goals of feminism have already been achieved. This, however, is simply not the case. Most of the victories of the women’s movement have only occurred in the last forty years, and these victories still need to be defended. On the issue of reproductive rights, many “cite decreased access to reproductive health care and contraceptives, along with the increase in federal funding for abstinence-only education” as an indication of the gradual erosion of these

achievements (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 53). In the sphere of economics, many argue that the pay gap between men and women in the work force does not exist or results from women's lifestyle choices. However, a study by the General Accounting Office showed that "if we put aside differences that affect earnings such as education and employment interruptions, women actually earn far less than the calculated 79 percent of men's wages" (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 61). Clearly there is still much work to be done in order for women to protect what they have and continue to strive for equality.

Young women began to enter the feminist movement in larger numbers as a result of "massive demonstrations for abortion rights in 1989 and 1992" (Whittier 2006, 56). However, this influx of younger women in the 1990s brought with it the realization that generational differences be a problem that would keep young women from entering and remaining in feminist organizations. These generational divisions continue to exhibit themselves in a variety ways, but primarily the attempts at cooperation between second and third wave feminists reveal intensifying resistance to the label "feminist" as well as stark changes in priorities over the last few decades that lead young women to believe that feminist organizations do not and can not speak for them in the political and social arenas.

The negative connotations of the word "feminist" are not new by any means. Perceptions about the meaning of the word "feminism" have consistently been unsettling to women, even those who otherwise support feminism's goals. A 2003 poll by the Peter Harris Research Group showed that "83 percent of all women queried said that they approved of the movement to strengthen women's rights. And in the eighteen to twenty-four-year-old age group, an incredible 92 percent rated the women's movement favorably" (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 7). Despite this, young women still reject the feminist label. In fact, even third wave feminists themselves often

“present feminism as an identity they cannot fully embrace” (Armstrong 2002, 11). While those who support equality but reject the label may have their point, some suggest that “the controversy around the word helps to keep us polarized from our cohorts in the women’s movement” (Zepatos 1992, 24).

The immediate association of feminist organizations (particularly NOW) with the fight for abortion rights troubled women during the ERA campaign. “Although the ERA had no obvious direct bearing on whether ‘abortion is murder,’ the two issues nonetheless became politically linked” especially because of NOW’s position as the most visible supporter in both cases (Mansbridge 1986, 13). Today, young women still perceive feminist organizations as overly focused on reproductive rights. This, of course, is a direct result of the generational gap between those at the head of organizations like NOW and the young women they intend to recruit. While those who fought for *Roe v Wade* in the second wave steadfastly hold on to this major legislative victory, “younger women, who have always had the legal right to abortion, feel that the focus on abortion obscures other social issues” (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 51). According to some research, economic (rather than reproductive) issues may now be at the forefront of young women’s consciousness. Surprisingly, Rowe-Finkbeiner found that “motherhood, particularly the social and economic burden facing women with children, is perhaps the principal feminist issue for today’s young women, with surveys showing that many women in college are already concerned about balancing work and motherhood in the future” (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 10). However, the 2003 Women’s Movement survey found that “[one of] the greatest supporters of abortion rights were eighteen-to-twenty-nine-year-old women (76 percent of whom support choice)” (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 64).

Elisabeth Armstrong argues that “if young feminists disagree with current trends in feminism, their role must be to change rather than merely reject the movement” (Armstrong 2002, 12). However, it is unclear how successful young women would be at attempting to transform the movement from within traditional organizations like NOW. The strict structure of NOW that posed challenges to women of color, lower-income women, and those outside the heterosexual mainstream, may now be posing serious challenges to younger women. The hierarchical structure of the organization poses a problem “because it promotes competition to the extent that competition becomes a goal in itself” (Iannello 1992, 7). Kathleen Iannello insists that the inflexibility of an organization brought on by hierarchy can only be solved by having “all members engaged in the correction of errors and the creative activity of problem solving” (Iannello 1992, 21). Early members of NOW often had media expertise that made it possible to “give [NOW] the impression of being larger than it was”; these members, however, were less skilled at bringing about concrete changes or organizing [the group]” (Freeman 2006, 32). Many members from the second wave are still incredibly active in NOW and tenaciously hold on to their positions of power within the organization. Therefore, this inflexibility is clearly still part of NOW’s reality.

Nancy Whittier outlines NOW’s attempts to integrate young women into the organization in “From the Second to the Third Wave: Continuity and Change in Grassroots Feminism.” In 1991, seven hundred women attended NOW’s first Young Feminist Conference. However, the event was criticized for being “organized primarily by second wave feminists” (Whittier 2006, 56). In addition, these types of conferences were sometimes marked by conflict, especially over what younger women considered “gender essentialism” on the part of second wavers (Whittier 2006, 57). At one national conference second and third wave activists “disagreed vehemently

over whether the freedom to shift gender, including access to surgery and the ability to live as a member of either or neither gender, regardless of birth, were central feminist issues” (Whittier 2006, 61). These types of disagreements may spring from the fact that (as some believe) “young feminists are mostly invited to serve as token representatives” at these types of conferences and panels” and also because young women are often left out of the planning of projects aimed at reaching out to third wave activists (Whittier 2006, 65). Whittier notes that often young women join NOW merely because it was one of “the most visible surviving feminist organizations”, and later moved on to more grassroots or radical groups (Whittier 2006, 57). NOW has pressed on in its efforts to attract young activists through its Young Feminist conferences and newly-formed Young Feminist Task Force, despite complaints “of a patronizing air and lack of input from young feminists into the content of the conferences (let alone into NOW’s organizational policy)” (Whittier 2006, 66).

Part Two: Can feminism come to Tigerland?

In February of 2005, I was invited to attend a leadership training conference for new chapter organizers at the NOW National Action Center in Washington, D.C.. While there, several of the women in the national leadership expressed to me their excitement over my intention to build a chapter on LSU’s campus, especially because they had not had as much success as they would have liked building campus chapters in the past. When I returned to Baton Rouge and found that it was as difficult to build a campus chapter as they had suggested, I began thinking about why so many young women (even those I knew were feminists) were reluctant to join the organization. In looking for answers to this dilemma, I gave a survey out to over 350 female students at LSU. The survey measured a number of factors (including socio-economic status, general political knowledge, and party identification) as well as the two main issues I

thought might shed some light on my (and ultimately NOW's) problem: the word "feminism" and priority differences.

In looking for answers to this question, I conducted a survey of 370 female LSU students in the spring of 2006. The survey was administered initially to 235 students in POLI 1001 (Introduction to Politics) and POLI 2051 (American Government). Confusion in answering one of the questions (to be discussed later) prompted me to administer the survey to an additional 135 students in another section of POLI 2051 and a section of POLI 2053 (Introduction to Comparative Politics). The two versions of the survey questionnaire are included in Appendix B.

The survey contains several features that are crucial to this investigation. First, an experimental survey design was used to determine if the word "feminism" is adversely affecting attitudes towards women's issues. A random half of the survey respondents received a survey with the statement, "I agree with the goals of feminism" while the other half received the statement, "I agree that men and women should be politically, socially, and economically equal." The students were asked to respond in terms of a five point Likert scale that ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Second, the survey included questions asking how important respondents considered six issues of particular concern to women: a constitutional amendment for equality, reproductive rights, racism, lesbian rights, violence against women, and economic justice. These are the six issues identified by NOW as their priority issues as described on their website (www.now.org). In addition, the students were asked to indicate how important they thought each of these issues was to NOW. The scale was a five point Likert scale ranging from "very important" to "not important at all." This comparison allows me to determine if differences in issue priority may be keeping college age women from supporting

NOW. Finally, a series of questions asking basic demographic information, political knowledge, and partisan attachment were included as well to determine if partisan differences were impacting opinions towards NOW and women's issues.

In entering the data gathered from the survey, I noticed that there may have been some confusion with the Likert scale regarding responses to the feminism or equality statement. More than one student had written in "5-strongly agree" on her survey, leading me to believe that the results may not be totally accurate. The results from this first set can be found in Appendix A. In order to deal with this problem, I gave out a second round of surveys that did not contain the numbered scale, but asked the women to write in one of the responses to the statement. Figure 1 shows the results of the second round of surveys regarding the feminism or equality statement, which were given to approximately 130 female students. The values in Figure 1 clearly indicate a hesitancy on the part of the students to strongly identify with the feminist label. Only 23% of those given the feminist statement chose "strongly agree," while over 70% of women given the equality statement strongly agreed.

Figure 2 shows the results of the priorities portion of the survey. Students were asked to indicate how important each of NOW's priority issues were to them as well as how important they thought each was to NOW. As shown in Figure 2, there were significant gaps between the priorities of the students and what those students perceived as the priorities of NOW. Regarding the theory that an emphasis on abortion deters women from entering feminist organizations, the results clearly show that while 74.93% of the students surveyed felt that reproductive rights were very important to NOW, only 46.22% indicated that the issue was very important to them. However, an even more significant gap occurred on the issue of lesbian rights. Only 13.11% of students indicated that they felt lesbian rights were very important, but 47.8% felt that the issue

was very important to NOW. Students overwhelmingly indicated that violence against women was a very important issue. 85.12% indicated that the issue was very important to them, making it the highest scoring issue among the students. However, a constitutional amendment was perceived as the most important of the issues to NOW, with 78.77% of the students indicating they felt NOW saw it as very important. In one instance (racism), students actually felt that an issue was more important to them than it was to NOW. While 48.24% indicated that the issue was important to them, only 42.15% responded that the issue was very important to NOW. Full results for all of the response choices can be found in Appendix A.

Figures 3 and 4 show the results from Figure 2 broken down by party identification. Students were asked to identify themselves as Democrats, Independents, or Republicans. Figure 3 shows results for student priorities. Violence against women scored well in all three groups, with almost equal percentages of Democrats and Republicans indicating that the issue was very important. Lesbian rights did not fare well with either party, but significantly higher percentages of Democrats found the issue to be very important. The largest gap between the parties occurred on the issue of racism. While 73.53% of Democrats indicated that the issue was very important, only 31.95% of the Republicans felt the same. Figure 4 shows how students perceived NOW, with a breakdown by party identification. On a number of the issues, all three groups had almost identical perceptions of NOW. Only on the issues of lesbian rights and racism did Republicans tend to view the organization differently from Democrats. Full data for all of the response choices with party identification breakdowns can be found in Appendix A.

I also wanted to see how strong the correlations were between individual students' responses to each of the issues and their perceptions of NOW. This was done by finding correlation coefficients between student priorities and perceptions of NOW on each of the issues.

The strongest correlations were on the issues of reproductive rights ($r = .37$) and lesbian rights ($r = .38$), meaning that individual students felt that NOW's priorities match their own on these two issues more than any of the others. The correlation coefficients for the other four issues were similar to one another, ranging from a constitutional amendment ($r = .28$) to violence against women ($r = .24$). Because violence against women was so strongly supported overall by students, but received the lowest correlation coefficient, this seems to be one area where NOW could pick up large numbers of women on LSU's campus by strengthening and publicizing their campaign efforts on this particular issue.

Part Three: A New NOW

Based on the research and my survey results, it seems that if NOW (and organizations like it) want to build support on college campuses, they must seriously reshape their efforts. This problem can be dealt with on two levels: organization and leadership. Organizations like NOW may need to become more flexible in their structures if they want to attract young members. In the past, feminist groups have held onto "problematic tenets of what can constitute feminist political organization" (Armstrong 2002, 63). For example, organizations like NOW hold onto their strict hierarchies and continue to see consciousness-raising type groups as ineffective or less important. However, this harshly defined structure may have had the consequence of pushing young women away (Armstrong 2002, 63). In theorizing how the feminist movement could have worked to pass the Equal Rights Amendment, Mansbridge argues that "the movement would have had to develop an ongoing, district-based political network capable of turning generalized public sympathy for reforms that benefit women into political pressure on specific legislators in the marginal states" (Mansbridge 1986, 4). The same may be true for the movement today. With all of the political and intellectual power of NOW concentrated at the National

Action Center in Washington, D.C., it is difficult for local chapters (especially in conservative states) to achieve legislative goals on a regular basis. Without these tangible benefits, young women might not see the use in joining such an organization.

Sadly, leadership is also an issue in NOW and other long-standing feminist organizations. As the gap between the experiences of the leaders of these groups and the young women they are trying to recruit widens, the possibility for synthesis diminishes.

In order to combat the obvious racial divide in the organizations, as well as the documented perception that the movement is unconcerned with racism, feminist organizations like NOW “must invent new techniques to nourish antiracist struggles and produce a richly diverse movement” (Armstrong 2002, 34). Though much has been done to include a broader definition of sexuality within the movement, organizations like NOW still need to address and challenge “unstated heteronormativity within feminist goals” (Armstrong 2002, 77).

Of course, young women must also bear some of the responsibility in bringing about this change. College-age women must find a way to “incorporate voting back into their political agenda” (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 14). At the very least, voting would enable young women to preserve what rights they already have. At best, an increase in voting by young women would force elected officials to take their concerns (whatever they might be) seriously.

Ironically, the state of South Dakota might do more to rapidly increase membership in NOW and other feminist organizations than anything the organizations could do on their own. As previously noted, attacks on reproductive rights in the 1980s and early 90s brought young women into standing feminist organizations as they tried to protect what they thought had been secured by the second wave. Though young women may have previously felt that groups like NOW placed too much emphasis on protecting and enforcing *Rowe v Wade*, recent attacks on

reproductive rights by a number of states across the country (which started with abortion ban legislation in South Dakota earlier this year) may change that perception. As noted by Armstrong, “anger fuels the political positions of women and groups,” and as young women become more outraged by the threats to their rights, they may become more likely to join these organizations (Armstrong 2002, 43). Only time will tell if this increase in membership will last long-term, however, without serious change on the part of the organizations themselves.

Figure 1. The F Word

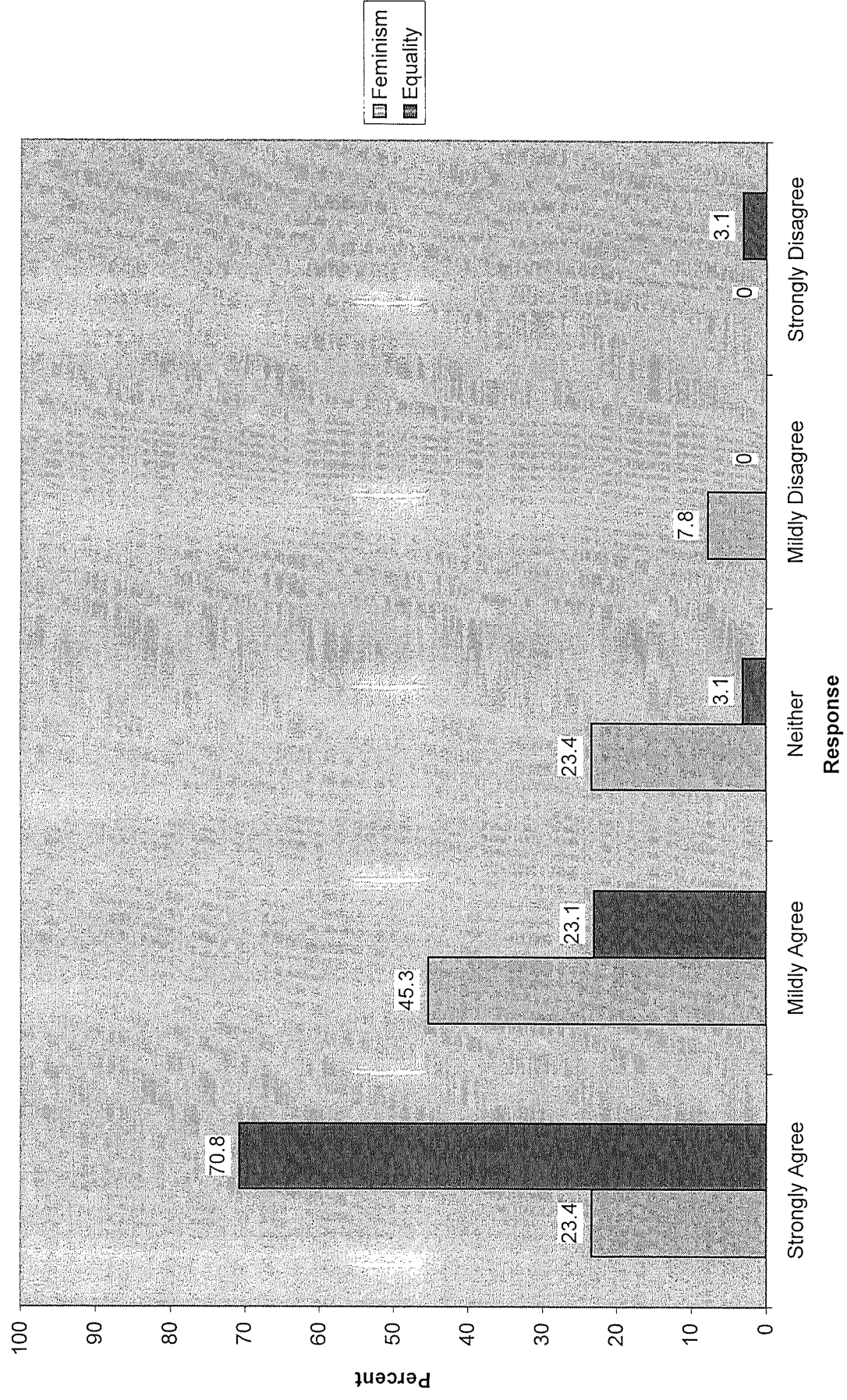


Figure 2. Priorities and Perceptions

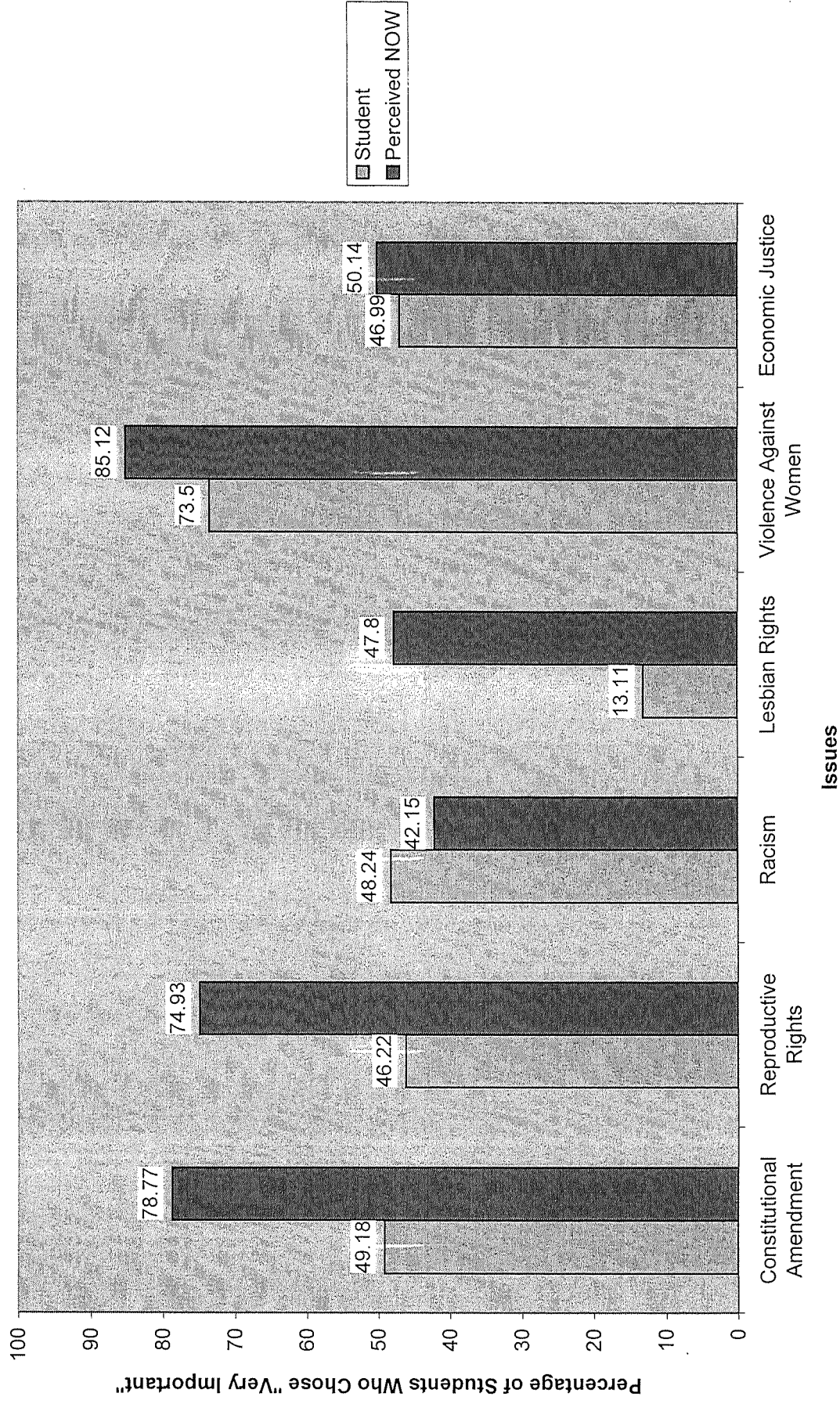


Figure 3. Priorities (by party identification)

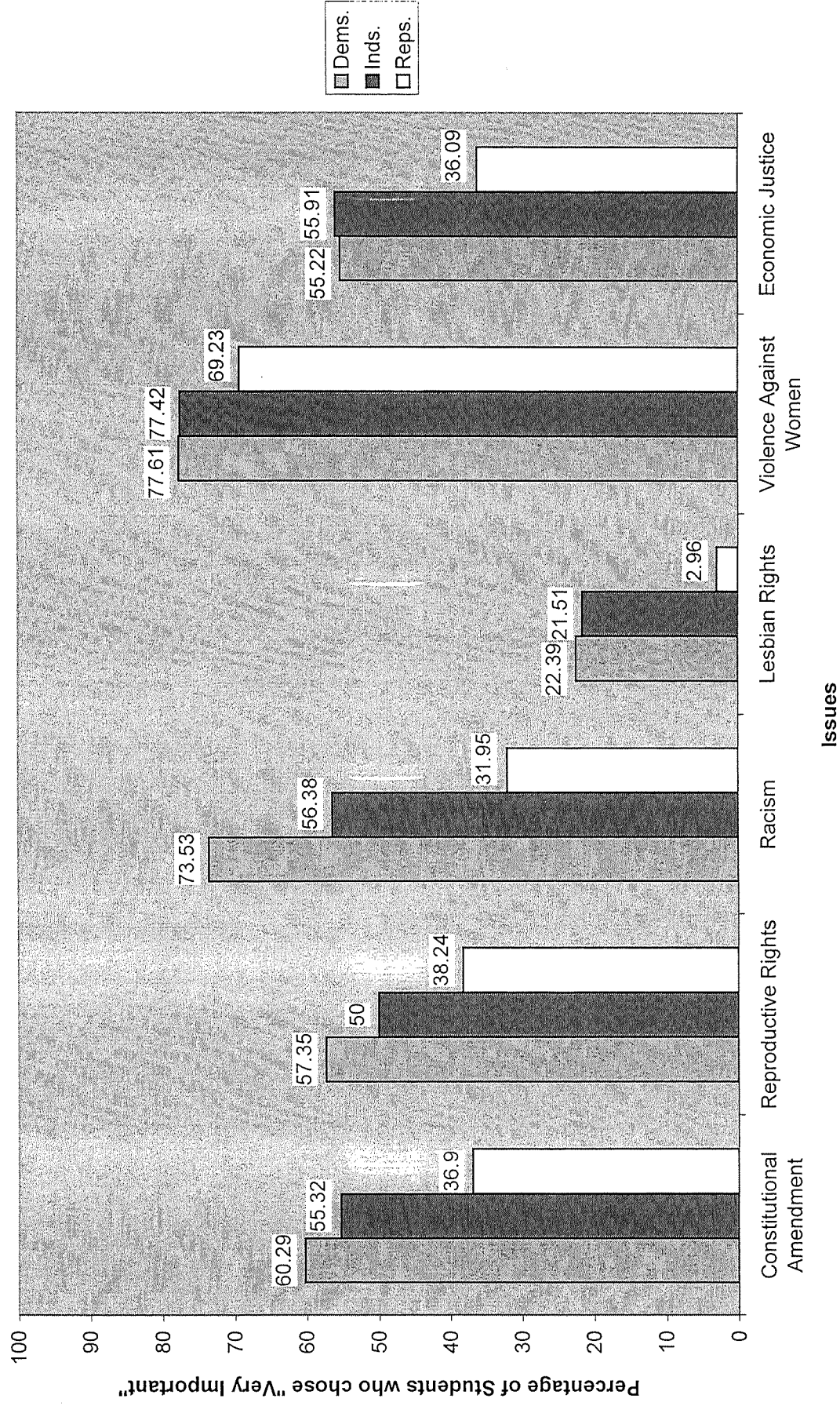
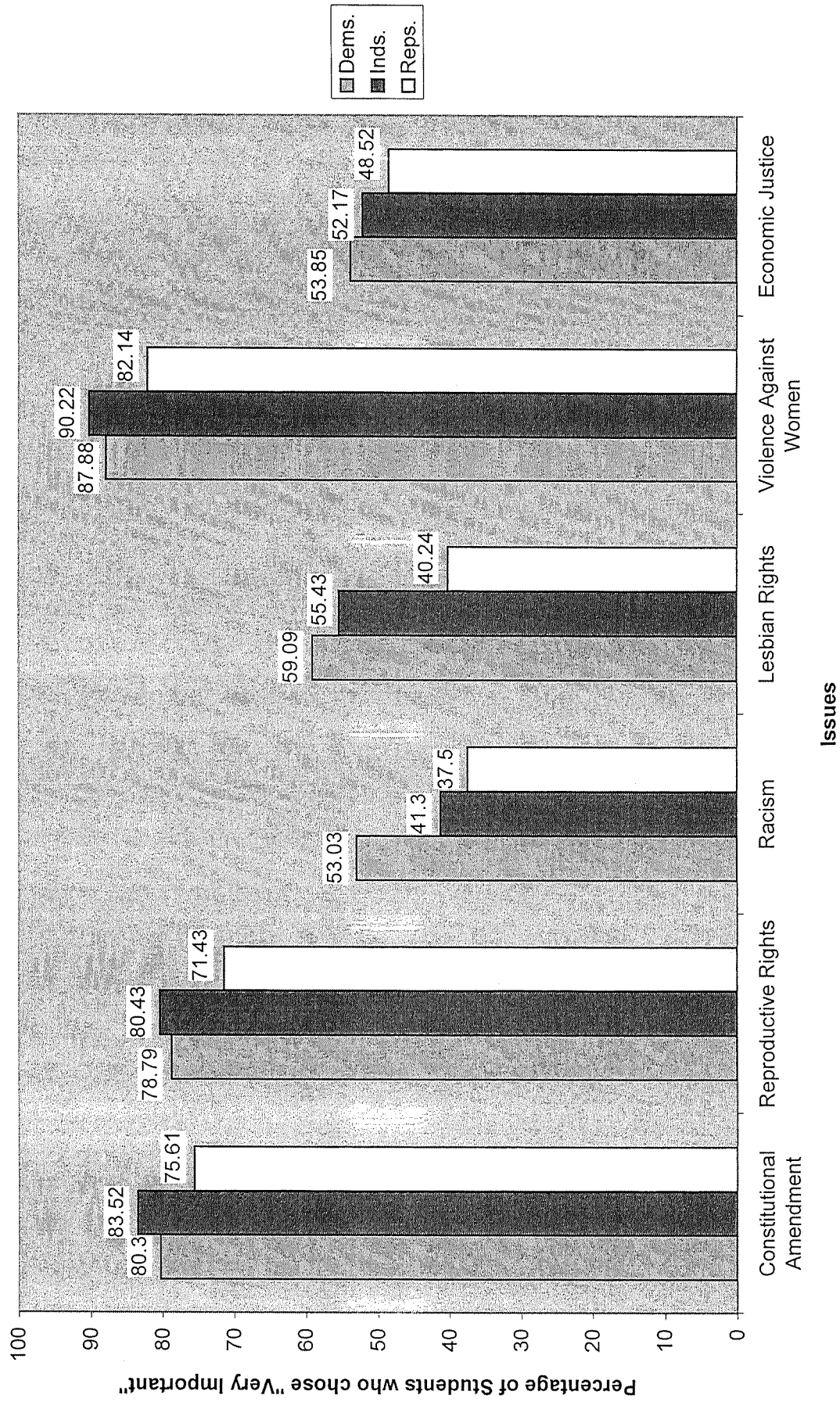


Figure 4. Student Perceptions (by party identification)



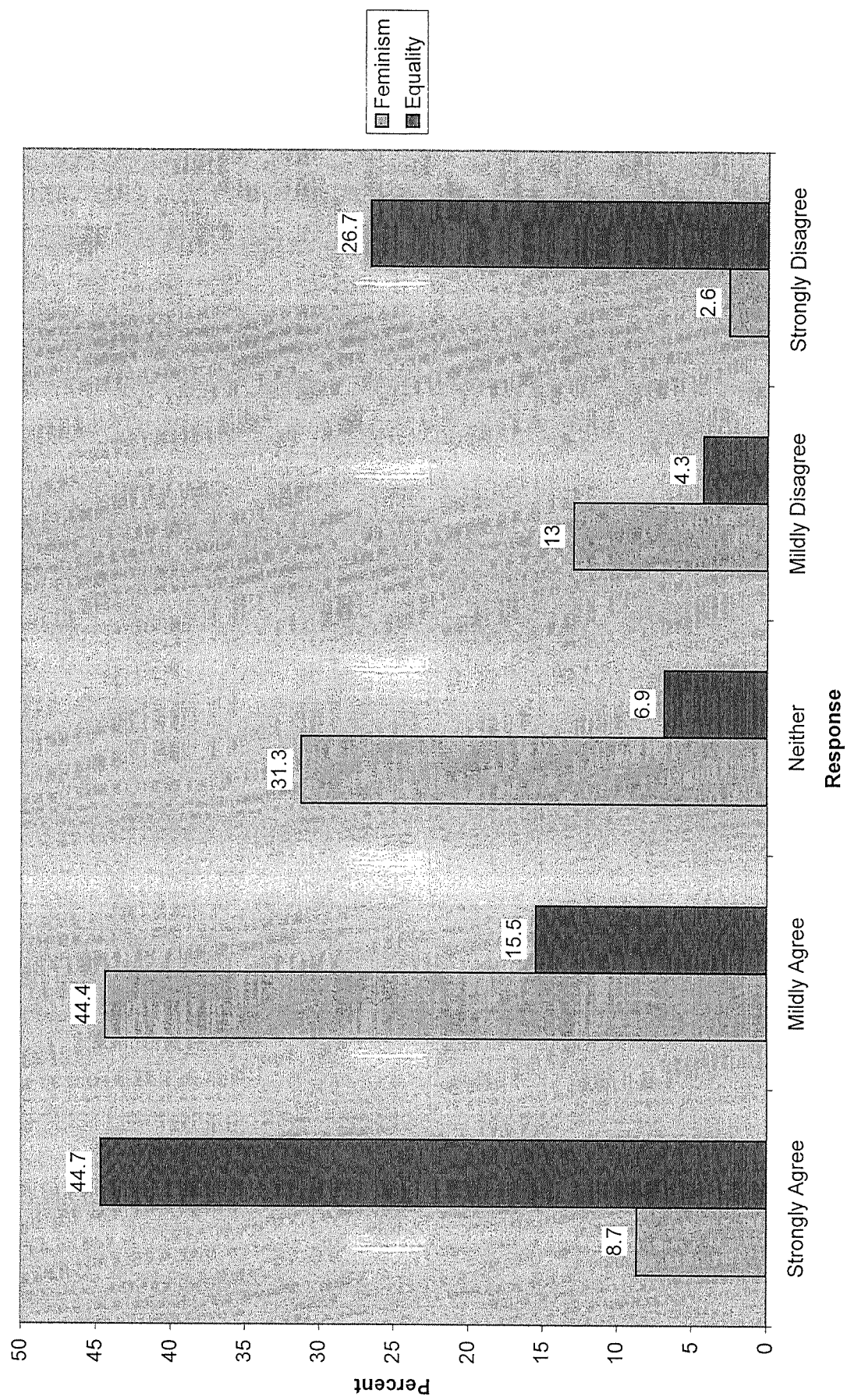
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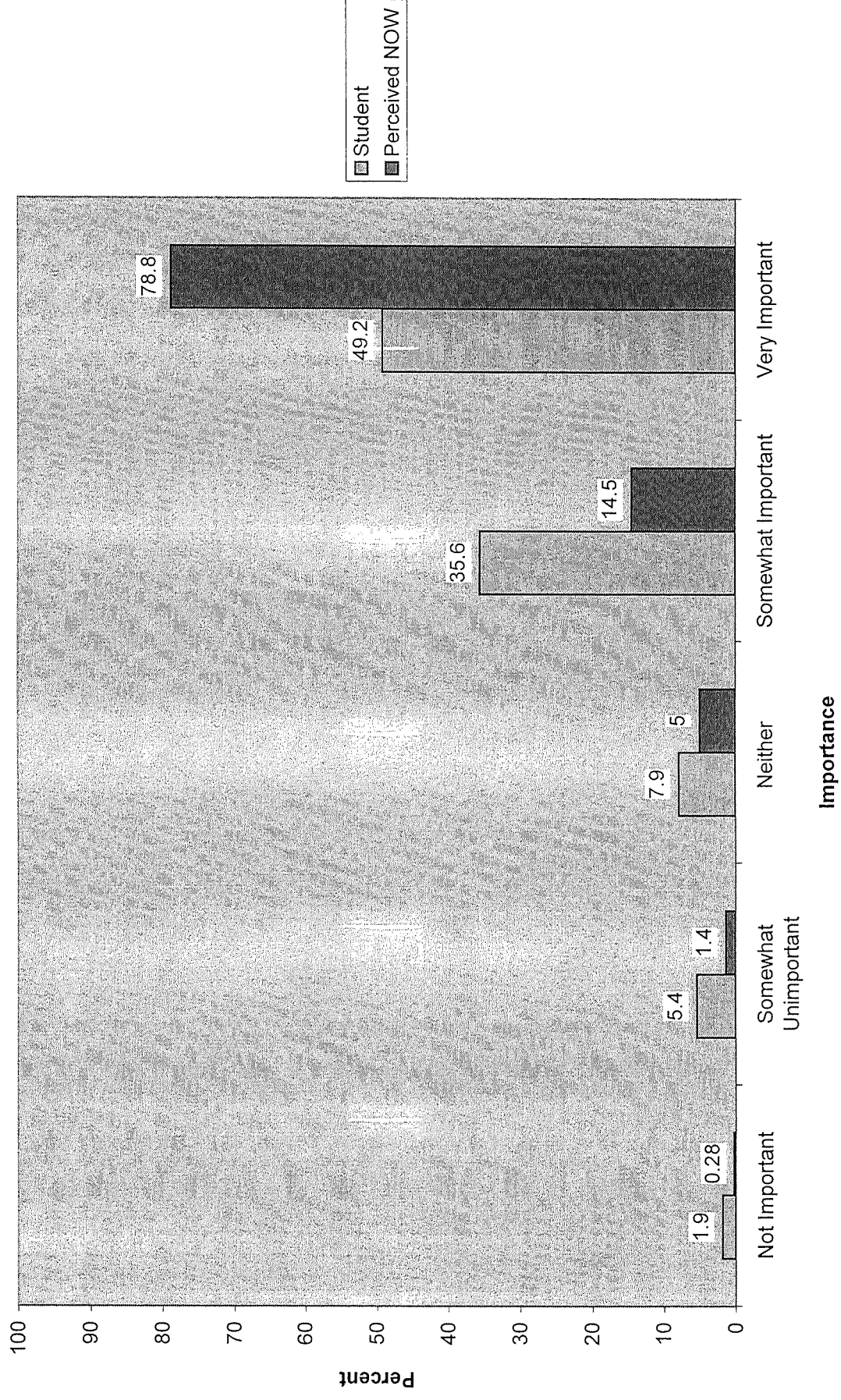
Appendix A:

Figures

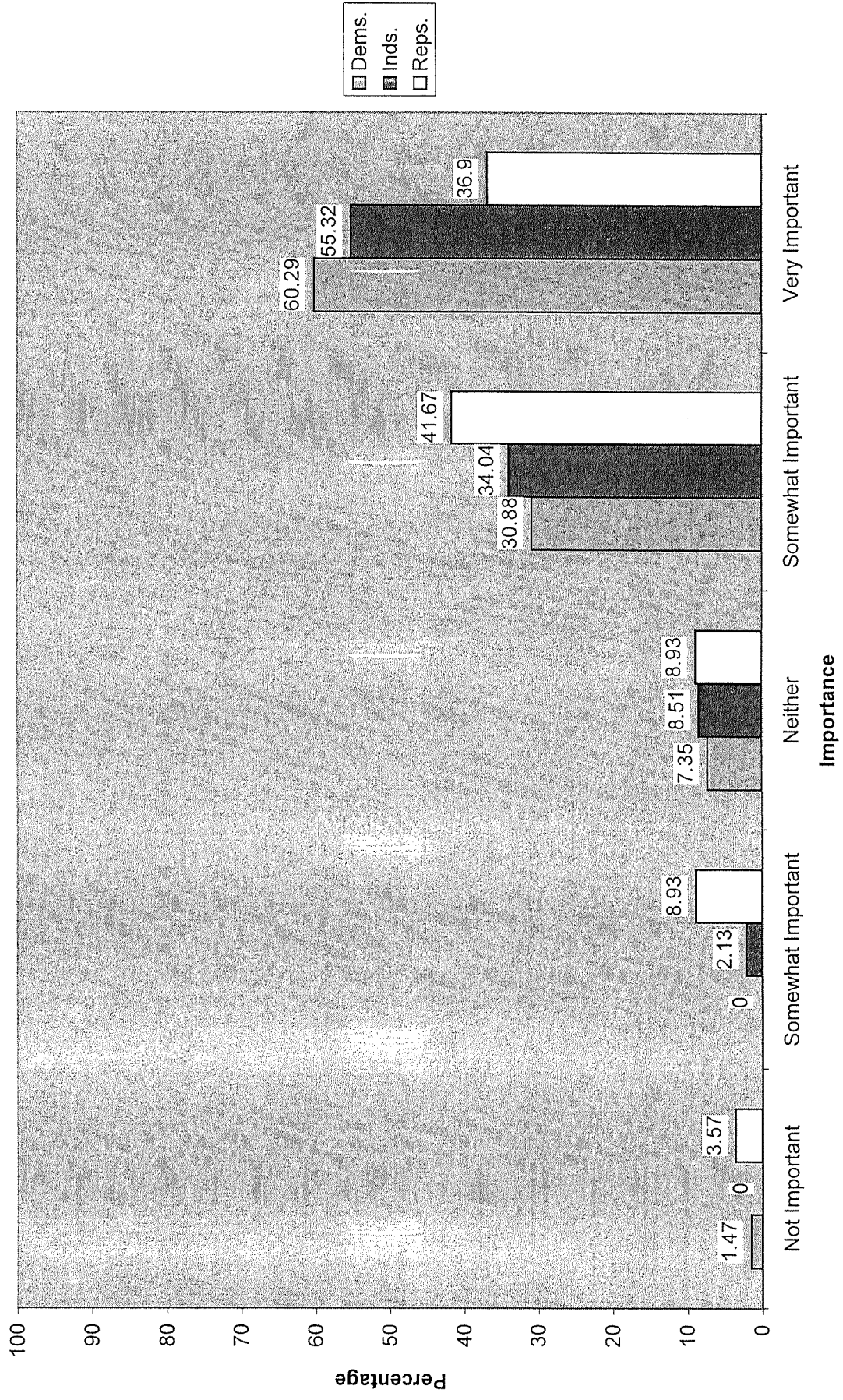
The F Word (Round 1)



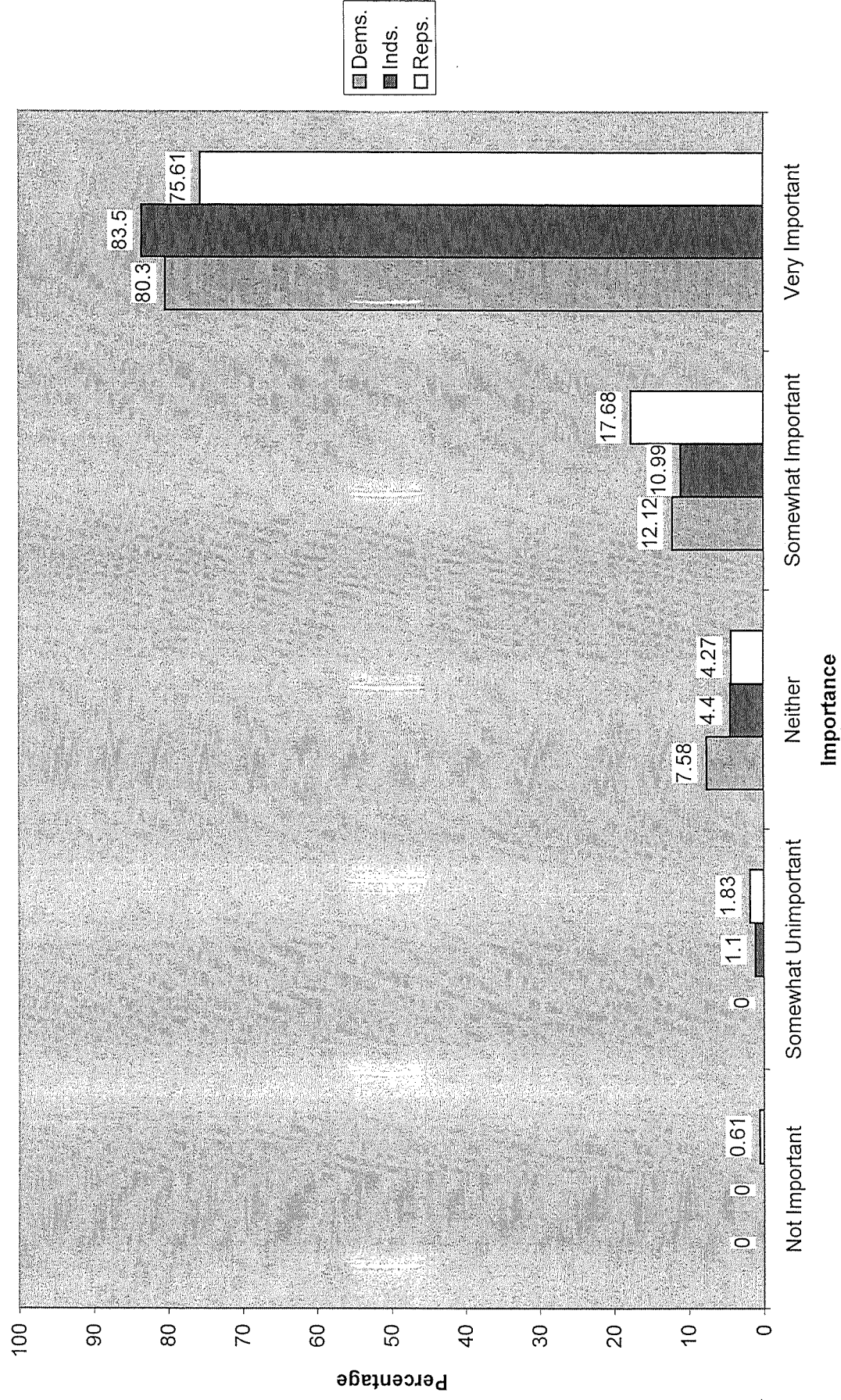
Constitutional Amendment For Equality For Women



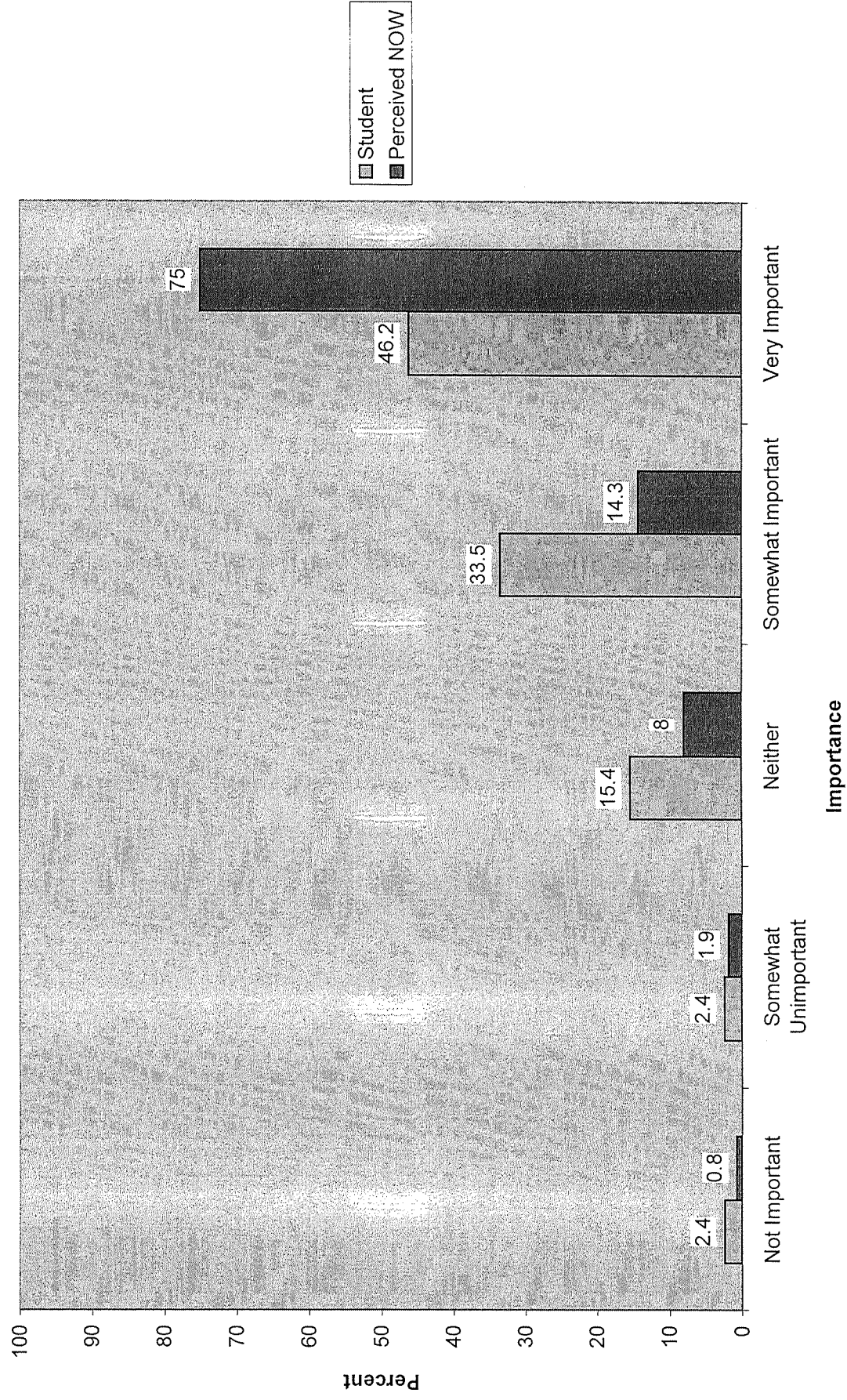
Importance of a Constitutional Amendment to Students (By Party Identification)



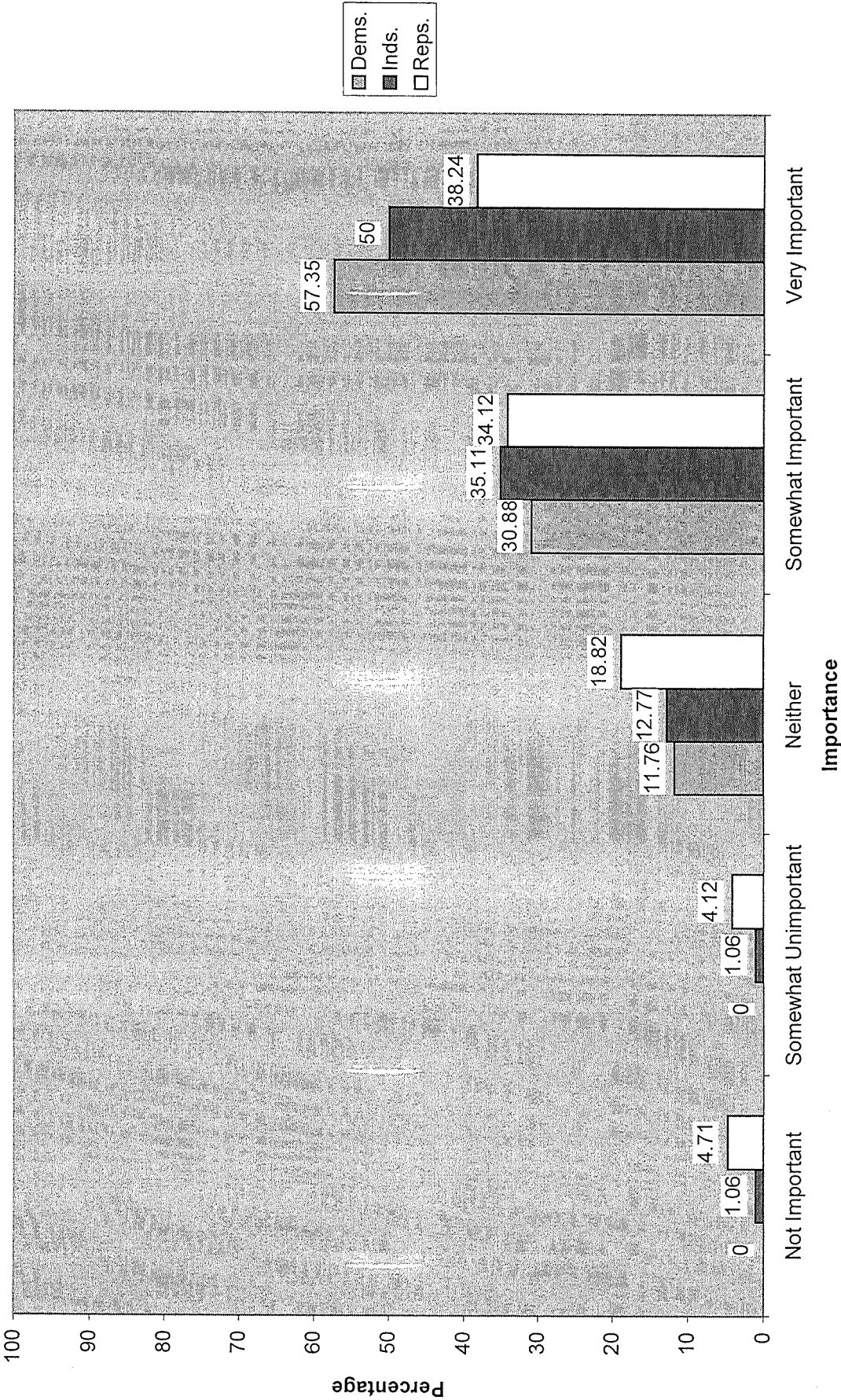
Perceived Importance of a Constitutional Amendment to NOW (by party identification)



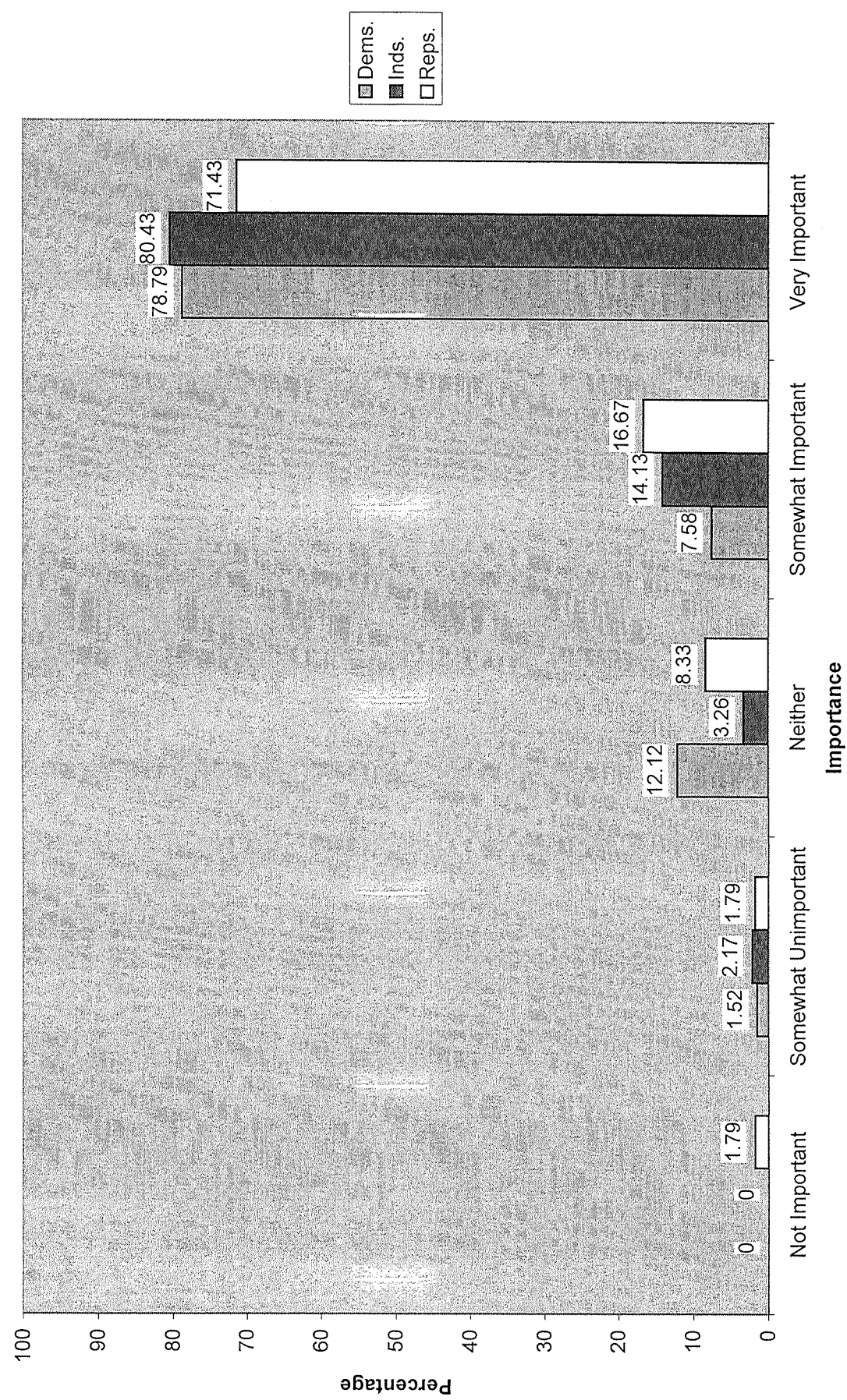
Reproductive Rights



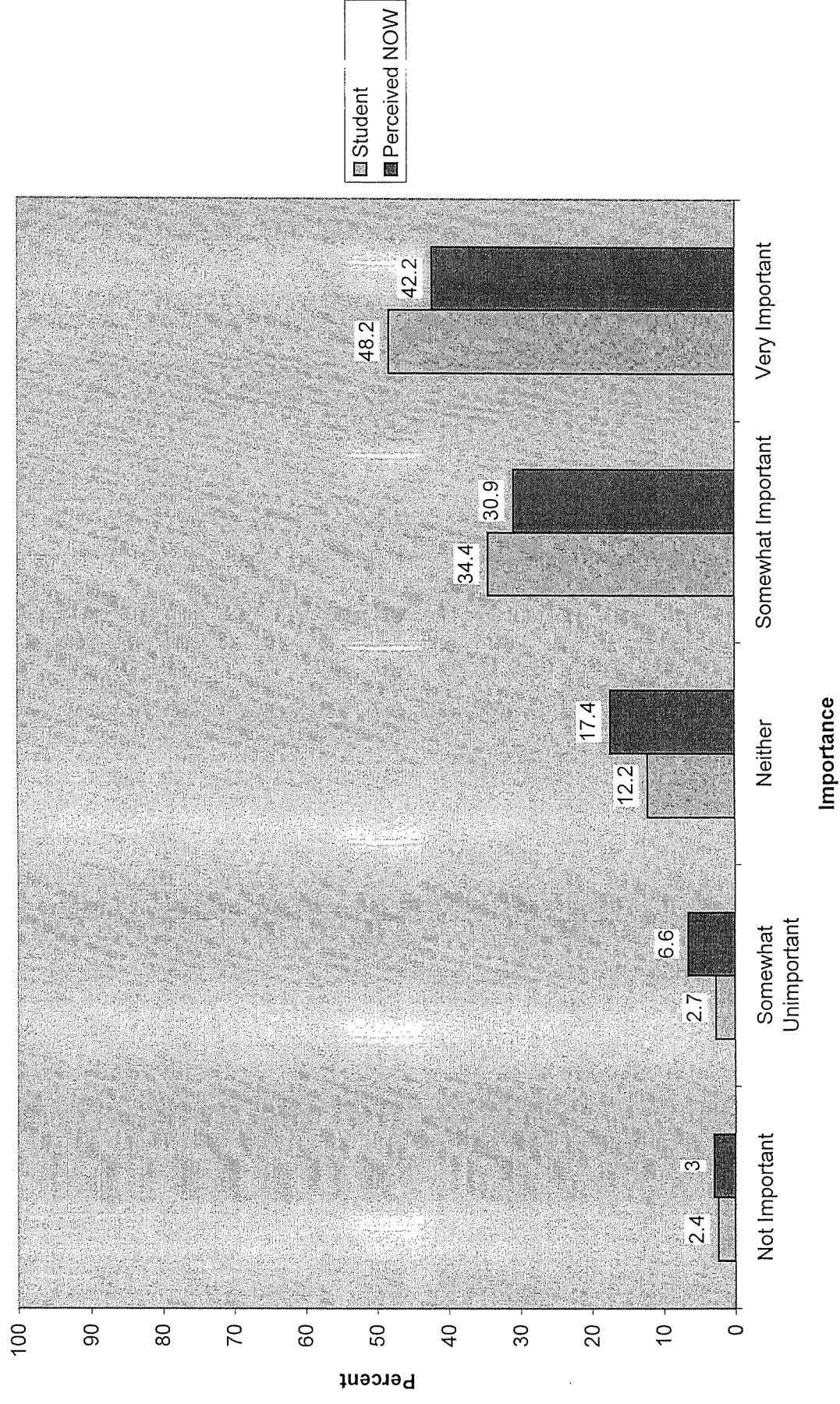
Importance of Reproductive Rights to Students (By Party Identification).



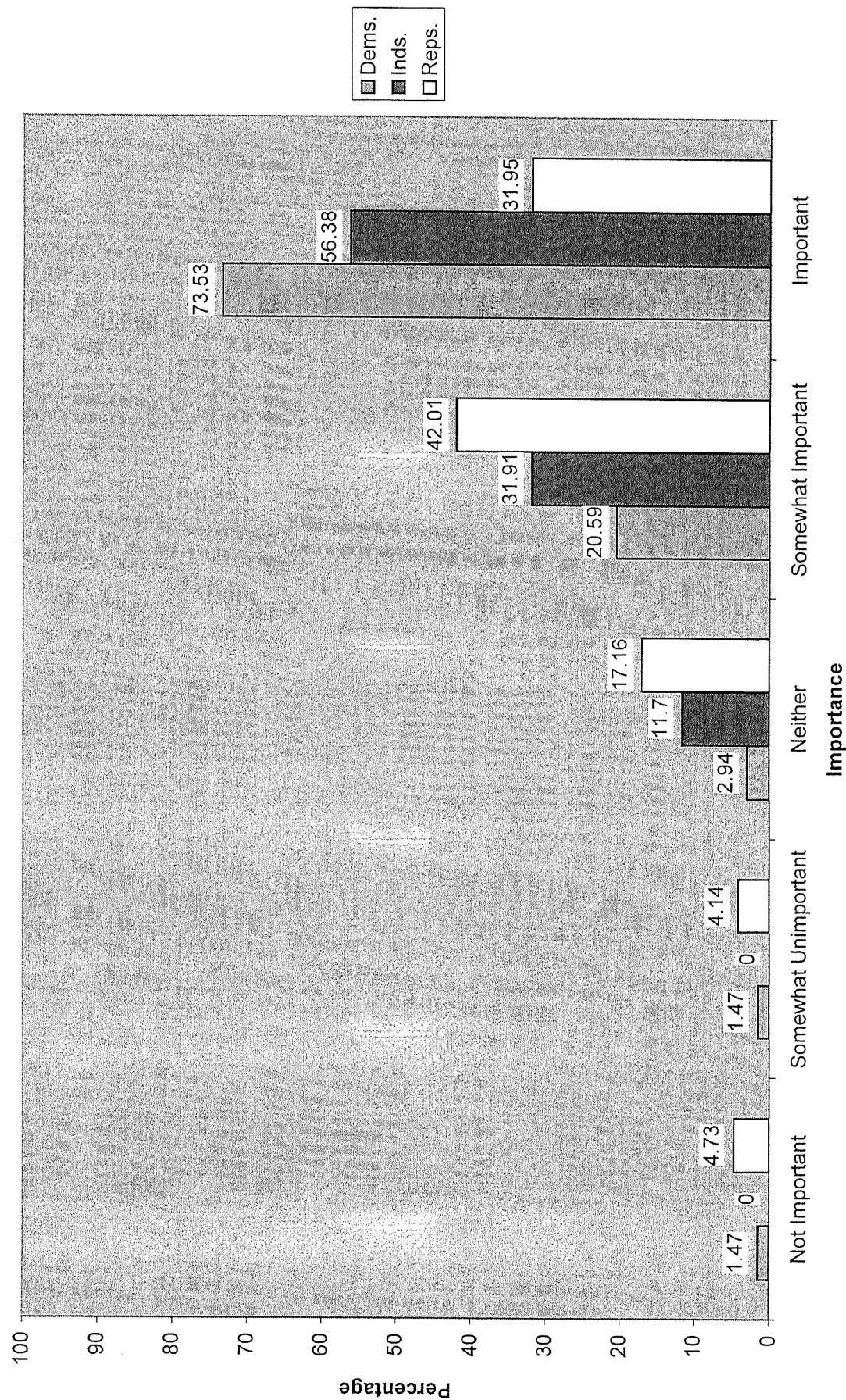
Perceived Importance of Reproductive Rights to NOW (by party identification)



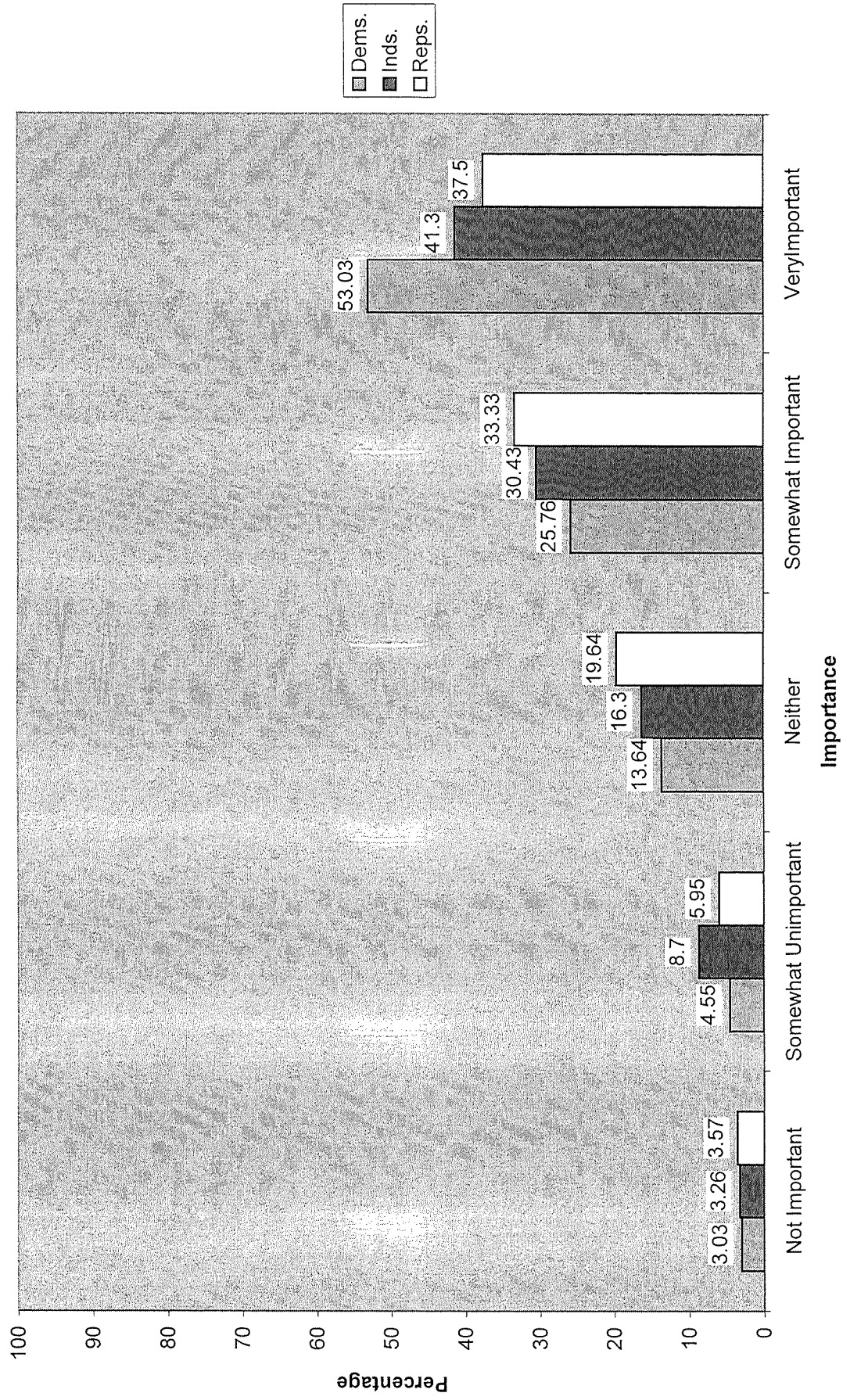
Racism



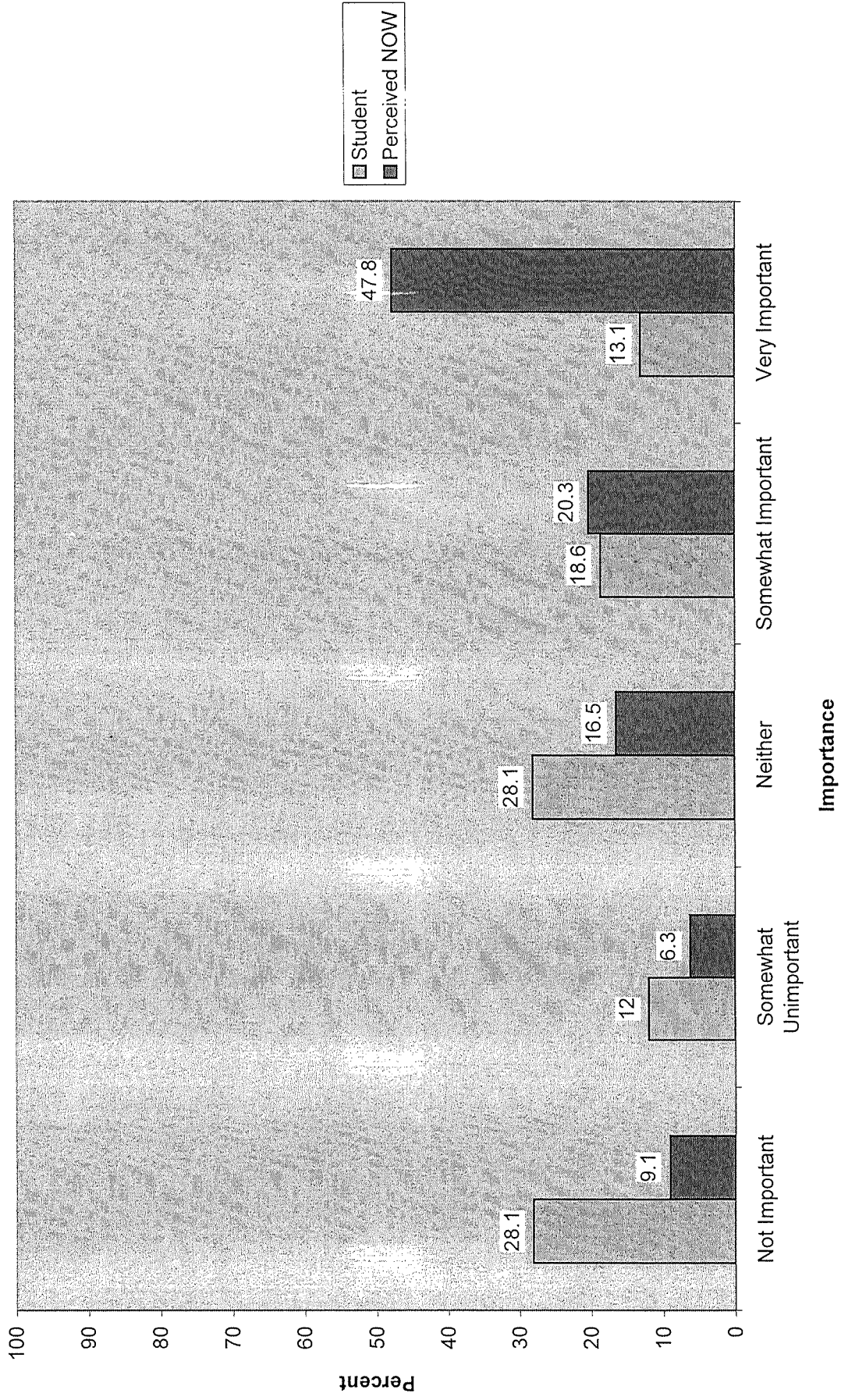
Importance of Racism to Students (By Party Identification).



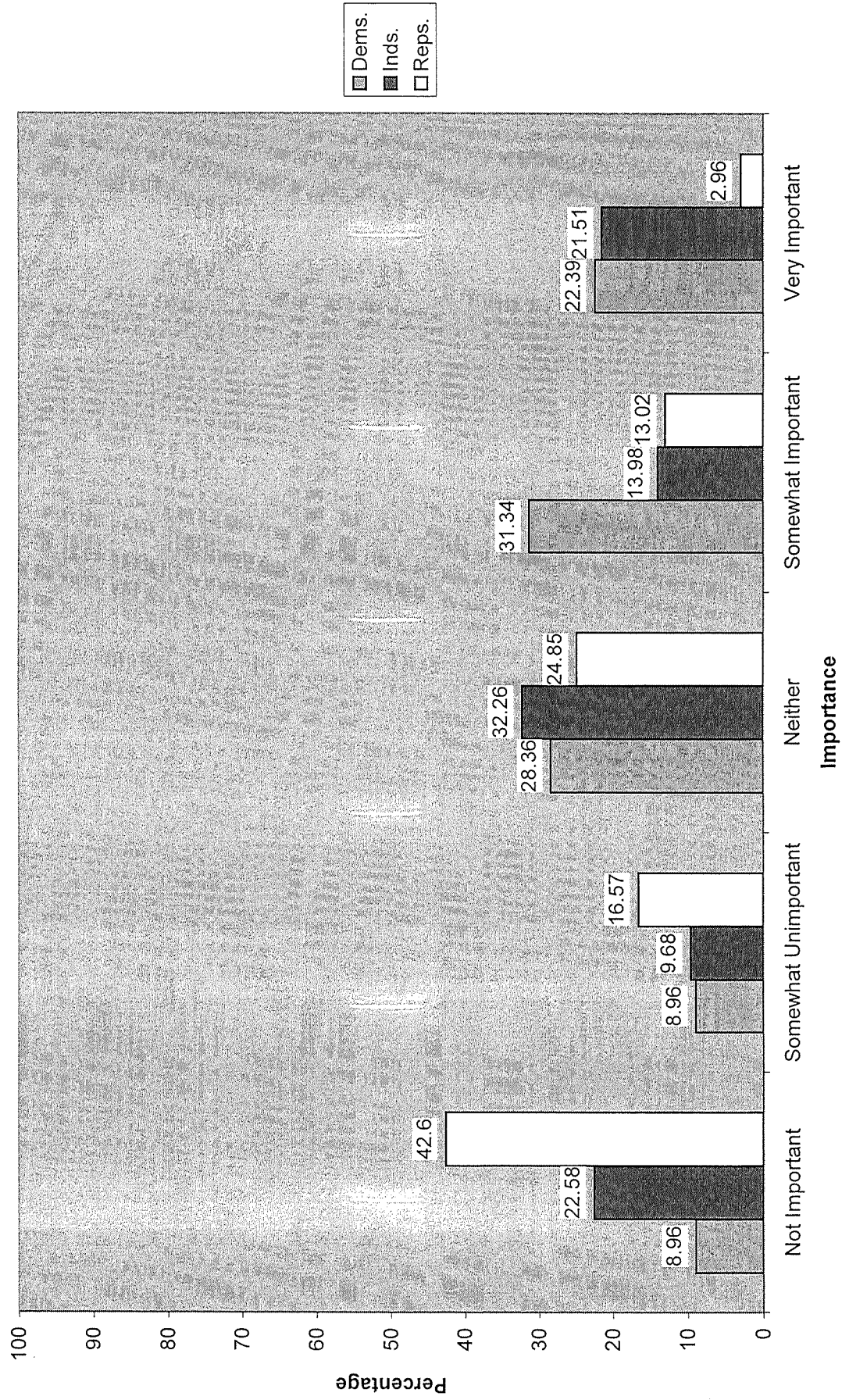
Perceived Importance of Racism to NOW (by party identification)



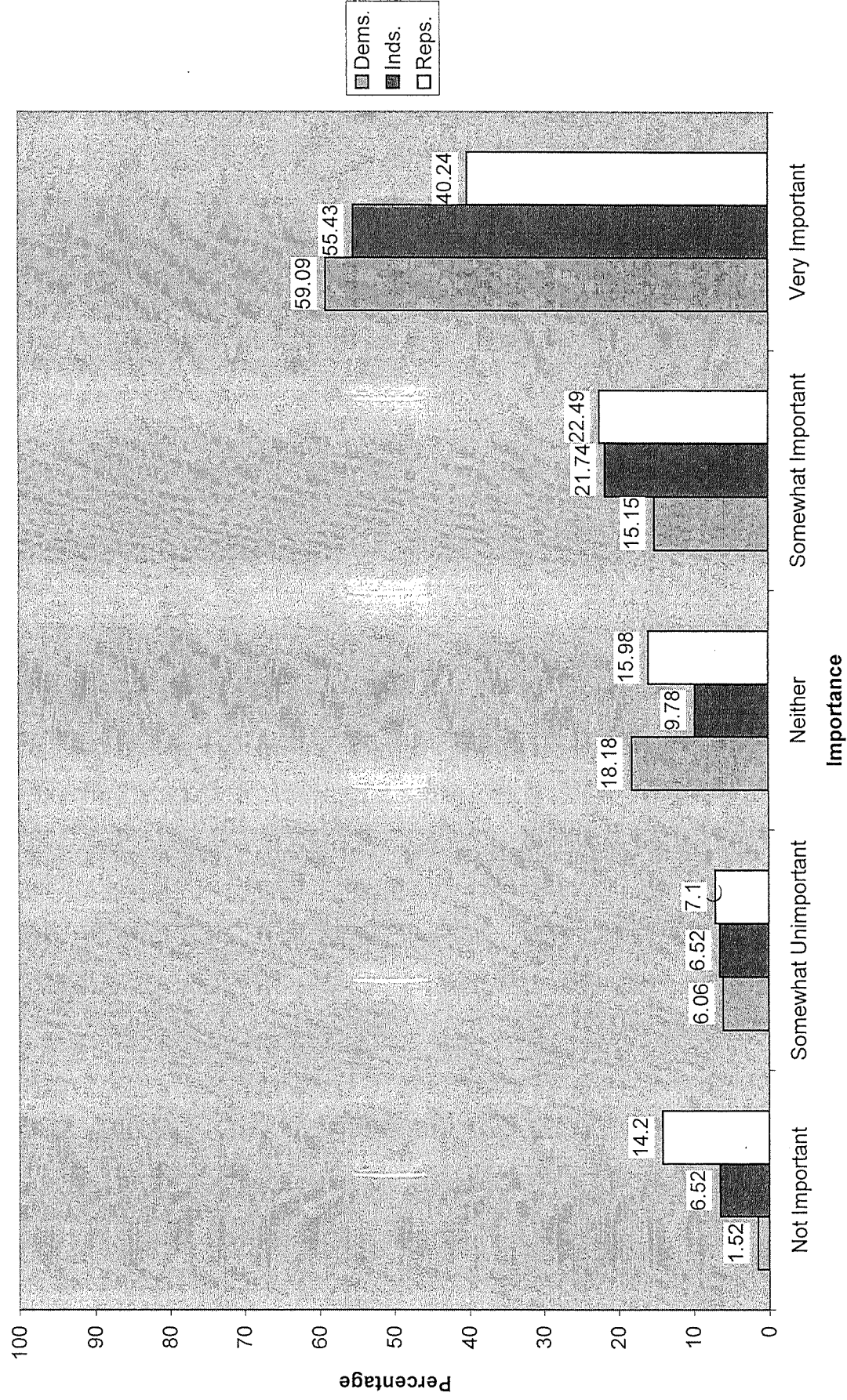
Lesbian Rights



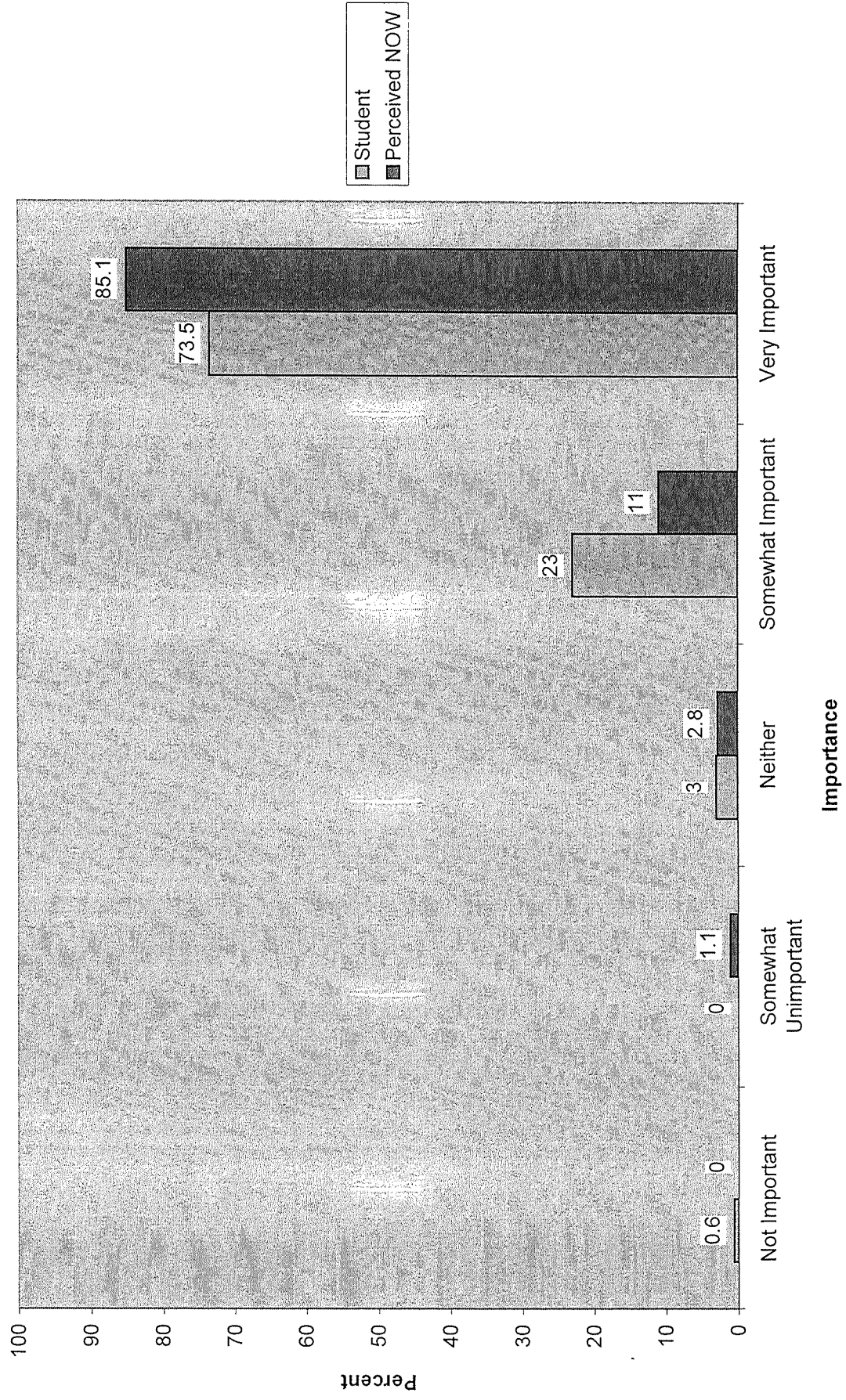
Importance of Lesbian Rights to Students (By Party Identification).



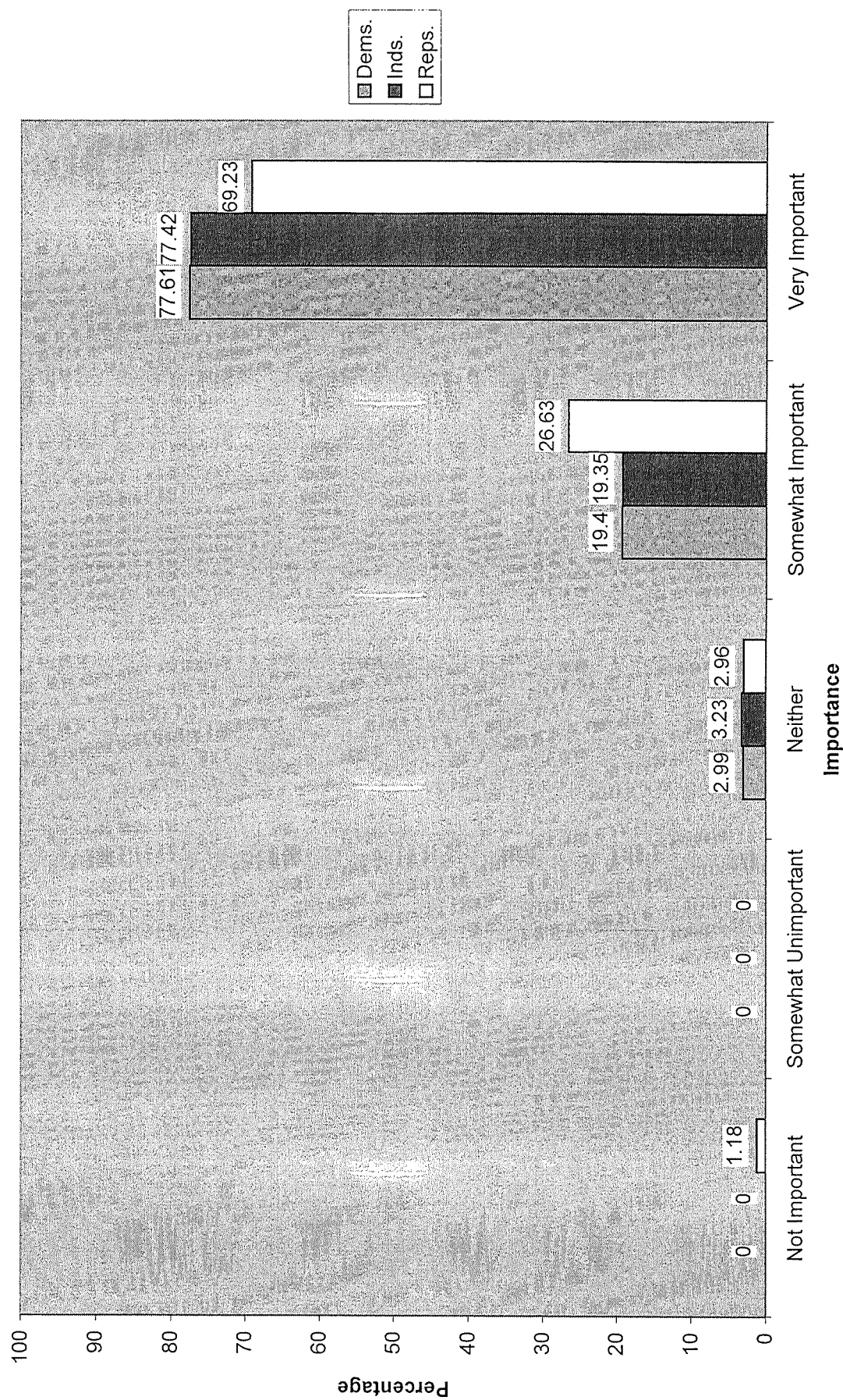
Perceived Importance of Lesbian Rights to NOW (by party identification)



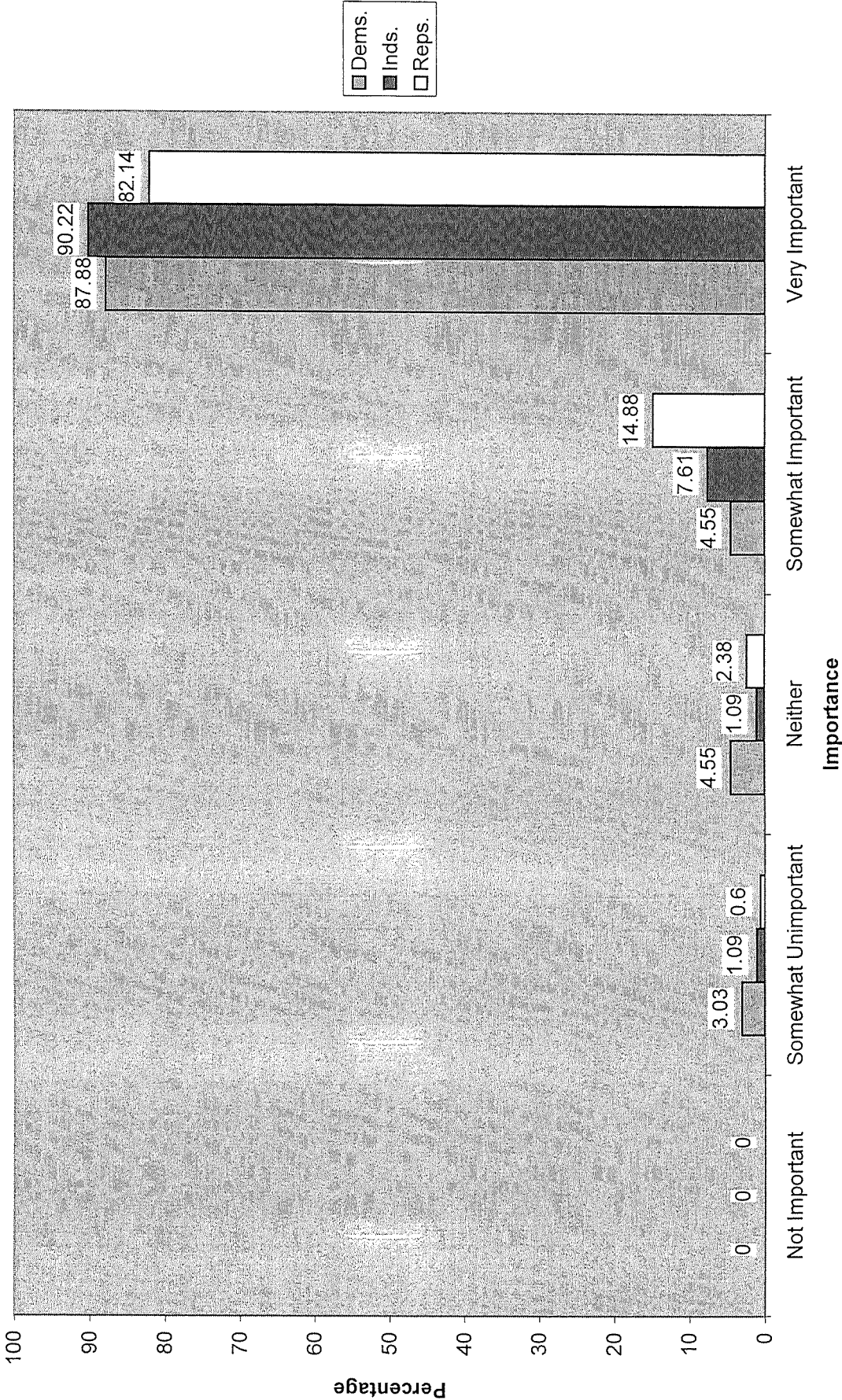
Violence Against Women



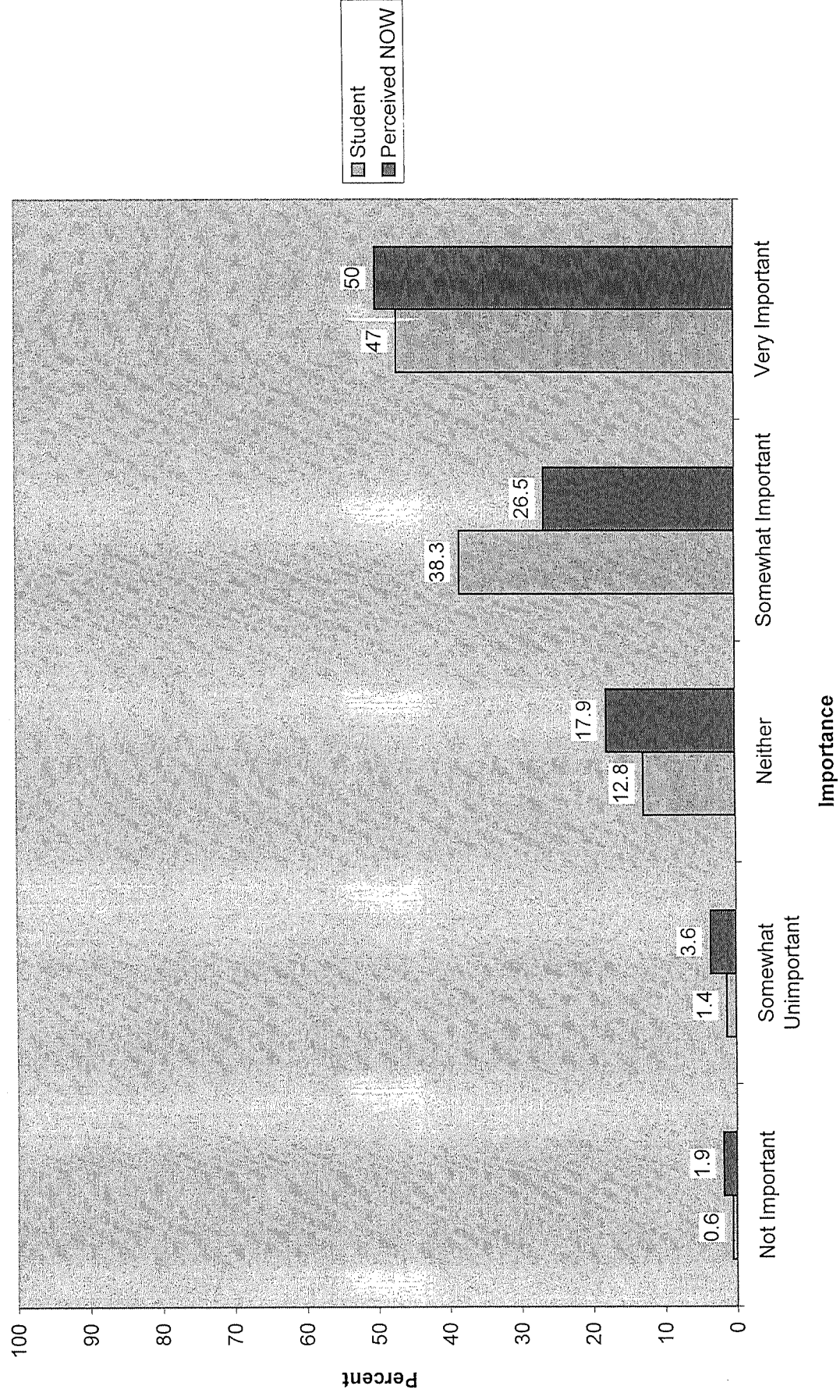
Importance of Violence Against Women to Students (by Party Identification).



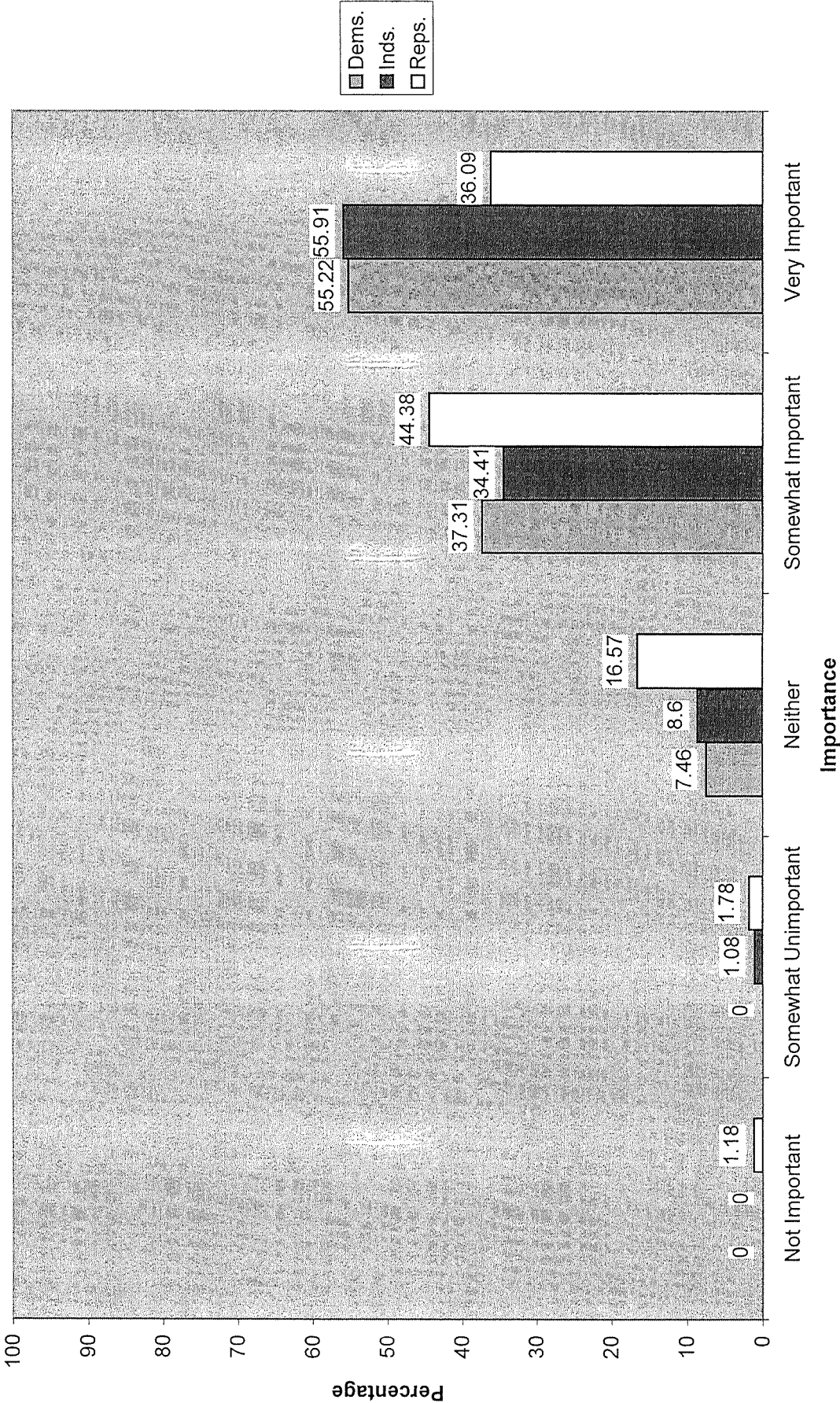
Perceived Importance of Violence Against Women to NOW (by party identification)



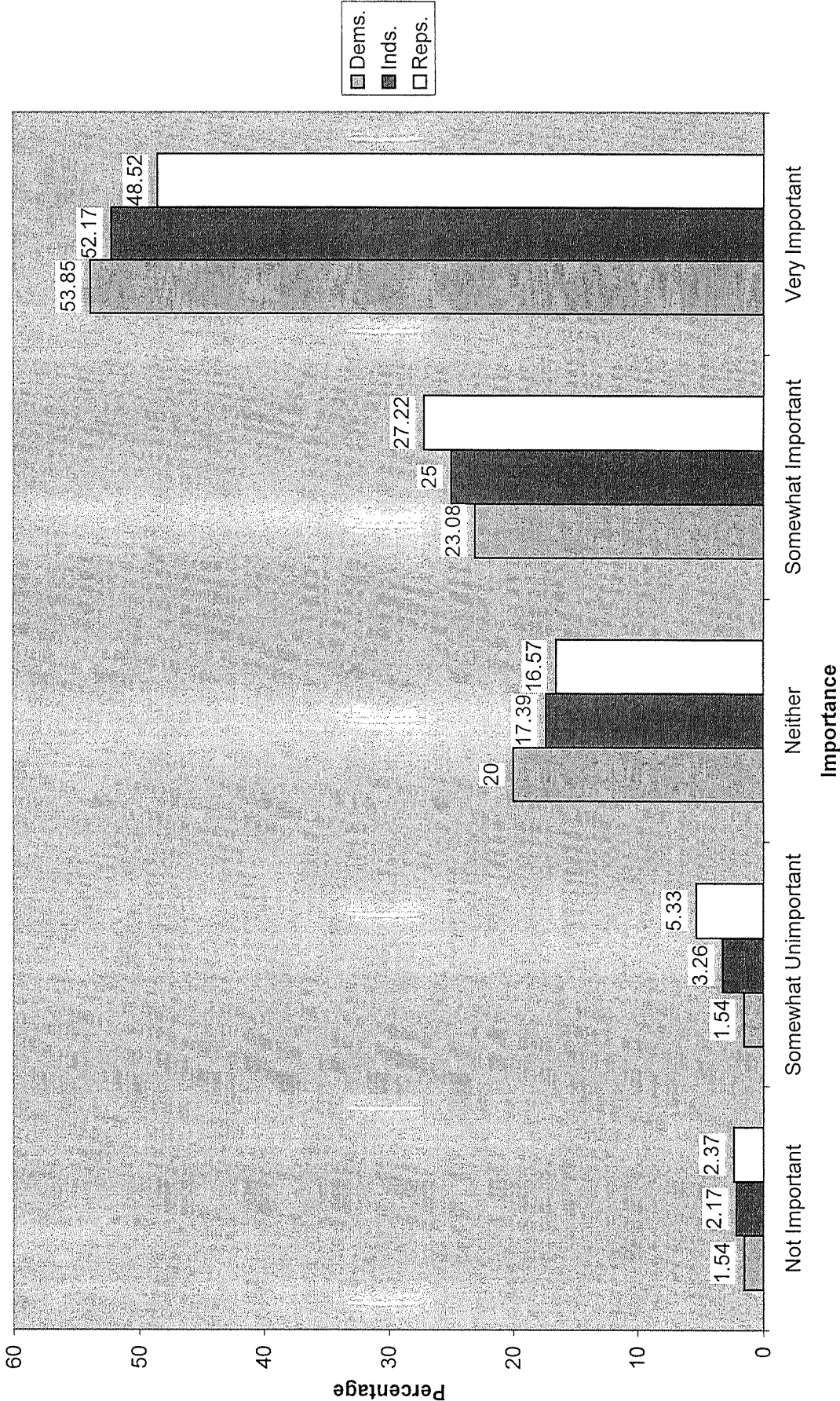
Economic Justice



Importance of Economic Justice to Students (by Party Identification).



Perceived Importance of Economic Justice to NOW (by party identification)



Appendix B: The Survey

Honors Thesis Survey: Version 1

1. Class Standing
1-Freshman, 2-Sophomore, 3-Junior, 4-Senior, 5-other
2. Religious affiliation?
1-Protestant, 2-Catholic, 3-Jewish, 4-None, 5-other
3. Frequency of Church attendance
1-Never, 2-Once or twice a year, 3-Once a month, 4- Once a week, 5-More than once a week
4. Family Income
1-less than \$15,000, 2-\$15,000 to 25,000, 3-\$25,000 to 35,000, 4-\$35,000 to 50,000
5-\$50,000 to 75,000, 6-\$75,000 and over
5. What is your Political Party?
1-strong Democrat, 2-weak Democrat, 3-leaning Democrat, 4-Independent, 5-leaning Republican,
6-weak Republican, 7-strong Republican, 9-don't know
6. How often do you read a newspaper?
1-Never, 2-Once a month, 3-Once a week, 4-A few times a week, 5-Daily
7. How interested are you in following political events of this political campaign?
1-Very Interested, 2-Somewhat Interested, 3-Not too interested, 4-Don't Know
8. Are you a member of any campus organization or group?
9. Please list these organizations or groups?
10. Ideologically, are you a
1-strong liberal, 2-weak liberal, 3-leaning liberal, 4-moderate, 5-leaning conservative
6-weak conservative, 7-strong conservative, 9-don't know

Please use the following scale to answer questions 11 through 22

- 1-Not important at all
- 2-somewhat unimportant
- 3-neither important nor unimportant,
- 4-somewhat important
- 5-very important

How important are each of the following issues to you?

11. A constitutional amendment for equality for women
12. Reproductive rights
13. Racism

- 14. Lesbian rights
- 15. Violence against women
- 16. Economic justice

Now indicate how important you think each of these issues is to the National Organization for Women (NOW).

- 17. A constitutional amendment for equality for women
- 18. Reproductive rights
- 19. Racism
- 20. Lesbian rights
- 21. Violence against women
- 22. Economic justice

- 23. How many terms can a president serve?
1-One, 2-Two, 3-Three, 4-Unlimited
- 24. How many US Senators are elected from each state?
1-One, 2-Two, 3-Three, 4-Depends on state's size
- 25. What is the length of term for a US Senator?
1-Two years, 2-Four years, 3-Six years, 4-Eight years
- 26. Which party has the most members in the House of Representatives?
1-Democrats, 2-Republicans
- 27. Which party has the most members in the Senate?
1-Democrats, 2-Republicans
- 28. What is the name of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court?

29. Circle the option that most closely resembles your response to the following statement:

I agree with the main goals of feminism.

Options:

- Strongly agree
- Mildly agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Mildly disagree
- Strongly disagree

Honors Thesis Survey: Version 2

1. Class Standing
1-Freshman, 2-Sophomore, 3-Junior, 4-Senior, 5-other
2. Religious affiliation?
1-Protestant, 2-Catholic, 3-Jewish, 4-None, 5-other
3. Frequency of Church attendance
1-Never, 2-Once or twice a year, 3-Once a month, 4- Once a week, 5-More than once a week
4. Family Income
1-less than \$15,000, 2-\$15,000 to 25,000, 3-\$25,000 to 35,000, 4-\$35,000 to 50,000
5-\$50,000 to 75,000, 6-\$75,000 and over
5. What is your Political Party?
1-strong Democrat, 2-weak Democrat, 3-leaning Democrat, 4-Independent, 5-leaning Republican,
6-weak Republican, 7-strong Republican, 9-don't know
6. How often do you read a newspaper?
1-Never, 2-Once a month, 3-Once a week, 4-A few times a week, 5-Daily
7. How interested are you in following political events of this political campaign?
1-Very Interested, 2-Somewhat Interested, 3-Not too interested, 4-Don't Know
8. Are you a member of any campus organization or group?
9. Please list these organizations or groups?
10. Ideologically, are you a
1-strong liberal, 2-weak liberal, 3-leaning liberal, 4-moderate, 5-leaning conservative
6-weak conservative, 7-strong conservative, 9-don't know

Please use the following scale to answer questions 11 through 22

- 1-Not important at all
- 2-somewhat unimportant
- 3-neither important nor unimportant,
- 4-somewhat important
- 5-very important

How important are each of the following issues to you?

11. A constitutional amendment for equality for women
12. Reproductive rights
13. Racism

- 14. Lesbian rights
- 15. Violence against women
- 16. Economic justice

Now indicate how important you think each of these issues is to the National Organization for Women (NOW).

- 17. A constitutional amendment for equality for women
- 18. Reproductive rights
- 19. Racism
- 20. Lesbian rights
- 21. Violence against women
- 22. Economic justice

- 23. How many terms can a president serve?
1-One, 2-Two, 3-Three, 4-Unlimited
- 24. How many US Senators are elected from each state?
1-One, 2-Two, 3-Three, 4-Depends on state's size
- 25. What is the length of term for a US Senator?
1-Two years, 2-Four years, 3-Six years, 4-Eight years
- 26. Which party has the most members in the House of Representatives?
1-Democrats, 2-Republicans
- 27. Which party has the most members in the Senate?
1-Democrats, 2-Republicans
- 28. What is the name of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court?

29. Circle the option that most closely resembles your response to the following statement:

I agree that men and women should be politically, socially, and economically equal.

Options:

- Strongly agree
- Mildly agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Mildly disagree
- Strongly disagree