

## BOX 7.1 A Note on Interpreting Statistical Findings—Comparing Means, Statistical and Substantive Significance

When comparing means (average scores) one must consider whether the differences between groups achieve **statistical significance**, that is, the differences are not random and are unlikely to happen merely by chance. Thus, in all the tables in this chapter and in Chapter 8, we present measures indicating the probability that differences among cleavage groups are statistically meaningful. Because of our large pooled sample size of 27,000 and the many gradations of our standard 100-point scales, even variation of only a few points may attain statistical significance. That does not mean that the observed differences between means also achieve **substantive significance**, that is, prove consequential. For example, for our total sample, the difference between 77% of men and 79% of women liking ice cream may be statistically significant at a 99% confidence interval, but it does not reveal an important or useful difference between men and women. Therefore, we go beyond simple statistical significance tests to assess the substantive import of the differences we observe. We mark cells for what we consider substantively important findings (we arbitrarily set this at a 5 scale-point difference between the lowest and highest category means).