

II *Sex and Gender*

The United States, along with other advanced countries, has experienced both a sexual revolution and a gender revolution. The first has liberalized attitudes toward erotic behavior and expression; the second has changed the roles and status of women and men in the direction of greater equality. Both revolutions have been brought about by the rapid social changes in recent years, and both revolutions have challenged traditional conceptions of marriage.

The traditional idea of sexuality defines sex as a powerful biological drive continually struggling for gratification against restraints imposed by civilization. The notion of sexual instincts also implies a kind of innate knowledge: A person intuitively knows his or her own identity as male or female, he or she knows how to act accordingly, and he or she is attracted to the “proper” sex object—a person of the opposite gender. In other words, the view of sex as biological drive, pure and simple, implies “that sexuality has a magical ability, possessed by no other capacity, that allows biological drives to be expressed directly in psychological and social behaviors” (Gagnon and Simon, 1970, p. 24).

The whole issue of the relative importance of biological versus psychological and social factors in sexuality and sex differences has been obscured by polemics. On the one hand, there are the strict biological determinists who declare that anatomy is destiny. On the other hand, there are those who argue that all aspects of sexuality and sex-role differences are matters of learning and social construction.

There are two essential points to be made about the nature-versus-nurture argument. First, modern genetic theory views biology and environment as interacting, not opposing, forces. Second, both biological determinists and their opponents assume that if a biological force exists, it must be overwhelmingly strong. But the most sophisticated evidence concerning both gender development *and* erotic arousal suggests that physiological forces are gentle rather than powerful. Despite all the media stories about a “gay gene” or “a gene for lung cancer,” the scientific reality is more complicated. As one researcher put it, “the scientists have identified a number of genes that may, under certain circumstances, make an individual more or less susceptible to the action of a variety of environmental agents” (cited in Berwick, 1998, p. 4).

In terms of scholarship, the main effect of the gender and sexual revolutions has been on awareness and consciousness. Many sociologists and psychologists used to take it for granted that women’s roles and functions in society reflect universal physiological and temperamental traits. Since in practically every society women were subordinate to

men, inequality was interpreted as an inescapable necessity of organized social life. Such analysis suffered from the same intellectual flaw as the idea that discrimination against nonwhites implies their innate inferiority. All such explanations failed to analyze the social institutions and forces producing and supporting the observed differences.

As Robert M. Jackson points out, modern economic and political institutions have been moving toward gender equality. For example, both the modern workplace and the state have increasingly come to treat people as workers or voters without regard for their gender or their family status. Educational institutions from nursery school to graduate school are open to both sexes. Whether or not men who have traditionally run these institutions were in favor of gender inequality, their actions eventually improved women's status in society. Women have not yet attained full equality, but in Jackson's view, the trend in that direction is irreversible.

One reason the trend toward greater gender equality will persist is that young people born since the 1970s have grown up in a more equal society than their parents' generation. Kathleen Gerson reports on a number of findings from her interviews with 18- to 30-year-old "children of the gender revolution." She finds that young men and women share similar hopes; both would like to be able to combine work and family life in an egalitarian way. But they also recognize that in today's world, such aspirations will be hard to fulfill. Jobs require long hours, and good child care options are scarce and expensive.

In the face of such obstacles, young women and men pursue different second choices or "fall back strategies." Men are willing to fall back on a more "traditional" arrangement where he is the main breadwinner in the family, and his partner is the main caregiver. Young women, however, find this situation much less attractive; they are wary of giving up their ability to support themselves and their children, should the need arise. Gerson concludes that the lack of institutional supports for today's young families creates tensions between partners that may undermine marriage itself.

One reason for the lack of such supports is the "family-values" religious conservatives' opposition to feminism and the gender revolution. These so-called "values voters" have been credited with keeping George W. Bush and other Republicans in power in recent years. Andrew Greeley and Michael Hout find, in their reading, that conservative Christians are not as extreme in their views as much of the public thinks they are. For example, they welcome the new employment possibilities for women and the improved birth control methods of recent years. In addition, they are not as extreme as many of the leaders that claim to represent them. But conservative Christians are not the same as other Americans, either. They favor a "soft" version of patriarchy, rather than the egalitarian relations most people say they prefer.

In her article, Beth Bailey presents a historian's overview of the most recent sexual revolution. She finds that it was composed of at least three separate strands. First, there has been a gradual increase, over the course of the twentieth century, in sexual imagery and openness about sexual matters in the media and in public life generally. Second, in the 1960s and 1970s, premarital sex, which had always been part of dating, came to include intercourse and even living together before or without marriage. The flamboyant sex radicals of the sixties' counterculture were the loudest but the least numerous part of the sexual revolution.

Both the sexual revolution and gender revolution have reshaped the ways young men and women get together. In their study of the current college social scene, Paula England and Reuben J. Thomas find that the traditional “date” seems to be on the way out on college campuses. A “date” used to mean that a man called a woman in advance to invite her out to dinner or a movie or some other event. The tradition is not very old, however: Dating was “invented” in the 1920s. Earlier, the young man would come to “court” the young woman at her home while her parents looked on. When dating replaced the home visit, the older generation was shocked.

Today, college students apply the term “dating” only to couples who are already in a romantic relationship. “Hanging out,” often in groups, and “hooking up” have replaced the old-fashioned date. A “hook-up” means the couple goes off somewhere to be by themselves. It implies that something sexual happens, but not necessarily intercourse. England and Thomas conclude that the college sexual scene is marred by gender inequality.

One of the reasons many people think marriage is a dying institution is due to the growth of cohabitation in recent years. Is living together going to replace marriage eventually? In their article here, Lynne M. Casper and Suzanne M. Bianchi look at the demographic evidence on cohabitation—how widespread it is, who does it, and what it means for “traditional marriage.” They conclude, as have other researchers, that cohabitation will not replace marriage in the United States. In some European countries, living together has become a standard living arrangement for raising children. In America, however, people cohabit for diverse reasons. For many couples, living together is a step on the way to a planned marriage. Some cohabit because they are uncommitted or unsure about a future together. Young couples with low incomes may live together and put off marriage because they feel they can’t afford a wedding or a home.

Cohabitation is one aspect of a dramatic shift in the lives of young adults. As recently as 1970, young people grew up quickly. The typical 21 year old was likely to be married or engaged and settling into a job or motherhood. Now the road to adulthood is much longer. Indeed, it has become harder to define exactly when and how a person becomes an adult. The years between the end of adolescence and making serious commitments to work and family can last until the age of 30 and even beyond. Social scientists have only recently begun to study this new life stage, and it still doesn’t have an agreed-on name.

Michael J. Rosenfeld calls it the “independent life stage.” In his reading, Rosenfeld argues that because of this new stage in life, parents have less control over their children’s dating and mate selection. As a result, there has been a sharp rise in “unconventional” unions—interracial and same-sex unions.

Looking at American marriage more broadly, Andrew J. Cherlin describes the forces, both economic and cultural, that have transformed family life in recent decades. Economic change has made women less dependent on men; it has drawn women into the workplace and deprived less-educated men of the blue-collar jobs that once enabled them to support their families. Getting married and staying married have become increasingly optional. Despite all the changes, however, Americans value marriage more than people in other developed countries, and the two-parent family remains the most common living arrangement for raising children.

Despite all the changes, marriage remains a cherished U.S. institution. The Census Bureau estimates that 90 percent of Americans will marry at some point in their lives. Very few do so expecting that the marriage will end in divorce. So what makes a marriage break down? In her article, Arlene Skolnick shows that in recent years researchers have found out a great deal about couple relationships, and some of the findings are contrary to widespread assumptions. For example, happy families are not all alike. And every marriage contains within it two marriages—a happy one and an unhappy one.

Laurence M. Friedman shows that the “divorce revolution” of the 1970s—when many states passed no-fault divorce laws—did not spring up suddenly out of nowhere. Nor was it the result of feminism or any other public protest movement. In the first half of the twentieth century, a dual system of divorce prevailed; the official law allowed divorce only on the basis of “fault”—one partner had to be proven guilty of adultery or cruelty or some other offense. But most divorces were actually “collusive”—the result of a deal between husbands and wives, who would concoct a story—or act one out—to permit a divorce to be granted. Legal reformers proposed no-fault divorce to remedy what they saw as a mockery of the law.

Divorce has become a common experience for Americans. In the past decade, there has been a backlash against divorce, especially for couples with children. The media have featured dramatic stories about the devastating, life-long scars that parental divorce supposedly inflicts on children. Legislators in some states have been considering making divorce more difficult. Joan B. Kelly and Robert E. Emery review the growing social science literature on the effects of divorce, and they offer a far more complex picture. Divorce does increase the risk for psychological and social problems, but most children are resilient—that is, most recover from the distress of divorce and do as well as those from intact families. Kelly and Emery discuss the factors that can protect children from the risks.

Because most divorced people remarry, more children will live with stepparents than in the recent past. As Mary Ann Mason points out in her article, stepfamilies are a large and growing part of American family life, but their roles in the family are not clearly defined. Moreover, stepfamilies are largely ignored by public policymakers, and they exist in a legal limbo. She suggests a number of ways to remedy the situation.

Despite all its difficulties, marriage is not likely to go out of style in the near future. Ultimately we agree with Jessie Bernard (1982), who, after a devastating critique of traditional marriage from the point of view of a sociologist who is also a feminist, said:

The future of marriage is as assured as any social form can be. . . . For men and women will continue to want intimacy, they will continue to want to celebrate their mutuality, to experience the mystic unity which once led the church to consider marriage a sacrament. . . . There is hardly any probability such commitments will disappear or that all relationships between them will become merely casual or transient. (p. 301)

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3

Changing Gender Roles

■ READING 7

Destined for Equality

Robert M. Jackson

Over the past two centuries, women's long, conspicuous struggle for better treatment has masked a surprising condition. Men's social dominance was doomed from the beginning. Gender inequality could not adapt successfully to modern economic and political institutions. No one planned this. Indeed, for a long time, the impending extinction of gender inequality was hidden from all.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, few said that equality between women and men was possible or desirable. The new forms of business, government, schools, and the family seemed to fit nicely with the existing division between women's roles and men's roles. Men controlled them all, and they showed no signs of losing belief in their natural superiority. If anything, women's subordination seemed likely to grow worse as they remained attached to the household while business and politics became a separate, distinctively masculine, realm.

Nonetheless, 150 years later, seemingly against all odds, women are well on the way to becoming men's equals. Now, few say that gender equality is impossible or undesirable. Somehow our expectations have been turned upside down.

Women's rising status is an enigmatic paradox. For millennia women were subordinate to men under the most diverse economic, political, and cultural conditions. Although the specific content of gender-based roles and the degree of inequality between the sexes varied considerably across time and place, men everywhere held power and status over women. Moreover, people believed that men's dominance was a natural and unchangeable part of life. Yet over the past two centuries, gender inequality has declined across the world.

The driving force behind this transformation has been the migration of economic and political power outside households and its reorganization around business and political interests detached from gender. Women (and their male supporters) have fought against prejudice and discrimination throughout American history, but social conditions

governed the intensity and effectiveness of their efforts. Behind the very visible conflicts between women and male-dominated institutions, fundamental processes concerning economic and political organization have been paving the way for women's success. Throughout these years, while many women struggled to improve their status and many men resisted those efforts, institutional changes haltingly, often imperceptibly, but persistently undermined gender inequality. Responding to the emergent imperatives of large-scale, bureaucratic organizations, men with economic or political power intermittently adopted policies that favored greater equality, often without anticipating the implications of their actions. Gradually responding to the changing demands and possibilities of households without economic activity, men acting as individuals reduced their resistance to wives and daughters extending their roles, although men rarely recognized they were doing something different from their fathers' generation.

Social theorists have long taught us that institutions have unanticipated consequences, particularly when the combined effect of many people's actions diverges from their individual aims. Adam Smith, the renowned theorist of early capitalism, proposed that capitalist markets shared a remarkable characteristic. Many people pursuing only selfish, private interests could further the good of all. Subsequently, Karl Marx, considering the capitalist economy, proposed an equally remarkable but contradictory assessment. Systems of inequality fueled by rational self-interest, he argued, inevitably produce irrational crises that threaten to destroy the social order. Both ideas have suffered many critical blows, but they still capture our imaginations by their extraordinary insight. They teach us how unanticipated effects often ensue when disparate people and organizations each follow their own short-sighted interests.

Through a similar unanticipated and uncontrolled process, the changing actions of men, women, and powerful institutions have gradually but irresistibly reduced gender inequality. Women had always resisted their constraints and inferior status. Over the past 150 years, however, their individual strivings and organized resistance became increasingly effective. Men long continued to oppose the loss of their privileged status. Nonetheless, although men and male-controlled institutions did not adopt egalitarian values, their actions changed because their interests changed. Men's resistance to women's aspirations diminished, and they found new advantages in strategies that also benefited women.

Modern economic and political organization propelled this transformation by slowly dissociating social power from its allegiance to gender inequality. The power over economic resources, legal rights, the allocation of positions, legitimating values, and setting priorities once present in families shifted into businesses and government organizations. In these organizations, profit, efficiency, political legitimacy, organizational stability, competitiveness, and similar considerations mattered more than male privileges vis-à-vis females. Men who had power because of their positions in these organizations gradually adopted policies ruled more by institutional interests than by personal prejudices. Over the long run, institutional needs and opportunities produced policies that worked against gender inequality. Simultaneously, ordinary men (those without economic or political power) resisted women's advancements less. They had fewer resources to use against the women in their lives, and less to gain from keeping women subordinate. Male politicians seeking more power, businessmen pursuing wealth and success, and ordinary men pursuing their self-interest all contributed to the gradual decline of gender inequality.

Structural developments produced ever more inconsistencies with the requirements for continued gender inequality. Both the economy and the state increasingly treated people as potential workers or voters without reference to their family status. To the disinterested, and often rationalized, authority within these institutions, sex inequality was just one more consideration with calculating strategies for profit and political advantage. For these institutions, men and women embodied similar problems of control, exploitation, and legitimation.

Seeking to further their own interests, powerful men launched institutional changes that eventually reduced the discrimination against women. Politicians passed laws giving married women property rights. Employers hired women in ever-increasing numbers. Educators opened their doors to women. These examples and many others show powerful men pursuing their interests in preserving and expanding their economic and political power, yet also improving women's social standing.

The economy and state did not systematically oppose inequality. On the contrary, each institution needed and aggressively supported some forms of inequality, such as income differentials and the legal authority of state officials, that gave them strength. Other forms of inequality received neither automatic support nor automatic opposition. Over time, the responses to other kinds of inequality depended on how well they met institutional interests and how contested they became.

When men adopted organizational policies that eventually improved women's status, they consciously sought to increase profits, end labor shortages, get more votes, and increase social order. They imposed concrete solutions to short-term economic and political problems and to conflicts associated with them. These men usually did not envision, and probably did not care, that the cumulative effect of these policies would be to curtail male dominance.

Only when they were responding to explicitly egalitarian demands from women such as suffrage did men with power consistently examine the implications of their actions for gender inequality. Even then, as when responding to women's explicit demands for legal changes, most legislators were concerned more about their political interests than the fate of gender inequality. When legislatures did pass laws responding to public pressure about women's rights, few male legislators expected the laws could dramatically alter gender inequality.

Powerful men adopted various policies that ultimately would undermine gender inequality because such policies seemed to further their private interests and to address inescapable economic, political, and organizational problems. The structure and integral logic of development within modern political and economic institutions shaped the problems, interests, and apparent solutions. Without regard to what either women or men wanted, industrial capitalism and rational legal government eroded gender inequality.

MAPPING GENDER INEQUALITY'S DECLINE

When a band of men committed to revolutionary change self-consciously designed the American institutional framework, they did not imagine or desire that it would lead toward gender equality. In 1776 a small group of men claimed equality for themselves

and similar men by signing the Declaration of Independence. In throwing off British sovereignty, they inaugurated the American ideal of equality. Yet after the success of their revolution, its leaders and like-minded property-owning white men created a nation that subjugated women, enslaved blacks, and withheld suffrage from men without property.

These men understood the egalitarian ideals they espoused through the culture and experiences dictated by their own historical circumstances. Everyone then accepted that women and men were absolutely and inalterably different. Although Abigail Adams admonished her husband that they should “remember the ladies,” when these “fathers” of the American nation established its most basic rights and laws, the prospect of fuller citizenship for women was not even credible enough to warrant the effort of rejection. These nation builders could not foresee that their political and economic institutions would eventually erode some forms of inequality much more emphatically than had their revolutionary vision. They could not know that the social structure would eventually extend egalitarian social relations much further than they might ever have thought desirable or possible.

By the 1830s, a half-century after the American Revolution, little had changed. In the era of Jacksonian democracy, women still could not vote or hold political office. They had to cede legal control of their inherited property and their income to their husbands. With few exceptions, they could not make legal contracts or escape a marriage through divorce. They could not enter college. Dependence on men was perpetual and inescapable. Household toil and family welfare monopolized women’s time and energies. Civil society recognized women not as individuals but as adjuncts to men. Like the democracy of ancient Athens, the American democracy limited political equality to men.

Today women enjoy independent citizenship; they have the same liberty as men to control their person and property. If they choose or need to do so, women can live without a husband. They can discard an unwanted husband to seek a better alternative. Women vote and occupy political offices. They hold jobs almost as often as men do. Ever more women have managerial and professional positions. Our culture has adopted more affirmative images for women, particularly as models of such values as independence, public advocacy, economic success, and thoughtfulness. Although these changes have not removed all inequities, women now have greater resources, more choices in life, and a higher social status than in the past.

In terms of the varied events and processes that have so dramatically changed women’s place in society, the past 150 years of American history can be divided into three half-century periods. The *era of separate spheres* covers roughly 1840–1890, from the era of Jacksonian democracy to the Gilded Age. The *era of egalitarian illusions*, roughly 1890–1940, extends from the Progressive Era to the beginning of World War II. The third period, the *era of assimilation*, covers the time from World War II to the present (see Table 7.1).

Over the three periods, notable changes altered women’s legal, political, and economic status, women’s access to higher education and to divorce, women’s sexuality, and the cultural images of women and men. Most analysts agree that people’s legal, political, and economic status largely define their social status, and we will focus on the changes in these. Of course, like gender, other personal characteristics such as race and age also define an individual’s status, because they similarly influence legal, political, and economic rights and resources. Under most circumstances, however, women and men are

TABLE 7.1 *The Decline of Gender Inequality in American Society*

	<i>1840–1890 The Era of Separate Spheres</i>	<i>1890–1940 The Era of Egalitarian Illusions</i>	<i>1940–1990 The Era of Assimilation</i>	<i>1990–? Residual Inequities</i>
<i>Legal and political status</i>	Formal legal equality instituted	Formal political equality instituted	Formal economic equality instituted	Women rare in high political offices
<i>Economic opportunity</i>	Working-class jobs for single women only	Some jobs for married women and educated women	All kinds of jobs available to all kinds of women	“Glass ceiling” and domestic duties hold women back
<i>Higher education</i>	A few women admitted to public universities and new women’s colleges	Increasing college; little graduate or professional education	Full access at all levels	Some prestigious fields remain largely male domains
<i>Divorce</i>	Almost none, but available for dire circumstances	Increasingly available, but difficult	Freely available and accepted	Women typically suffer greater costs
<i>Sexuality and reproductive control</i>	Repressive sexuality; little reproductive control	Positive sexuality but double standard; increasing reproductive control	High sexual freedom; full reproductive control	Sexual harassment and fear of rape still widespread
<i>Cultural image</i>	Virtuous domesticity and subordination	Educated motherhood, capable for employment & public service	Careers, marital equality	Sexes still perceived as inherently different

not systematically differentiated by other kinds of inequality based on personal characteristics, because these other differences, such as race and age, cut across gender lines. Educational institutions have played an ever-larger role in regulating people’s access to opportunities over the last century. Changes in access to divorce, women’s sexuality, and cultural images of gender will not play a central role in this study. They are important indicators of women’s status, but they are derivative rather than formative. They reveal inequality’s burden.

The creation of separate spheres for women and men dominated the history of gender inequality during the first period, 1840–1890. The cultural doctrine of separate spheres emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. It declared emphatically that women and men belonged to different worlds. Women were identified with the household and maintenance of family life. Men were associated with income-generating employment and public life. Popular ideas attributed greater religious virtue to women but greater civic virtue to men. Women were hailed as guardians of private morality while men were regarded as the protectors of the public good. These cultural and ideological inventions were responses to a fundamental institutional transition, the movement of economic activity out of households into independent enterprises. The concept of separate spheres legitimated women's exclusion from the public realm, although it gave them some autonomy and authority within their homes.

Women's status was not stagnant in this period. The cultural wedge driven between women's and men's worlds obscured diverse and significant changes that did erode inequality. The state gave married women the right to control their property and income. Jobs became available for some, mainly single, women, giving them some economic independence and an identity apart from the household. Secondary education similar to that offered to men became available to women, and colleges began to admit some women for higher learning. Divorce became a possible, though still difficult, strategy for the first time and led social commentators to bemoan the increasing rate of marital dissolution. In short, women's opportunities moved slowly forward in diverse ways.

From 1890 to 1940 women's opportunities continued to improve, and many claimed that women had won equality. Still, the opportunities were never enough to enable women to transcend their subordinate position. The passage of the Woman Suffrage Amendment stands out as the high point of changes during this period, yet women could make little headway in government while husbands and male politicians belittled and rejected their political aspirations. Women entered the labor market in ever-increasing numbers, educated women could get white-collar positions for the first time, and employers extended hiring to married women. Still, employers rarely considered women for high-status jobs, and explicit discrimination was an accepted practice. Although women's college opportunities became more like men's, professional and advanced degree programs still excluded women. Married women gained widespread access to effective contraception. Although popular opinion expected women to pursue and enjoy sex within marriage, social mores still denied them sex outside it. While divorce became more socially acceptable and practically available, laws still restricted divorce by demanding that one spouse prove that the other was morally repugnant. Movies portrayed glamorous women as smart, sexually provocative, professionally talented, and ambitious, but even they, if they were good women, were driven by an overwhelming desire to marry, bear children, and dedicate themselves to their homes.

Writing at the end of this period, the sociologist Mirra Komarovsky captured its implications splendidly. After studying affluent college students during World War II, Komarovsky concluded that young women were beset by "serious contradictions between two roles." The first was the feminine role, with its expectations of deference to men and a future focused on familial activities. The second was the "modern" role that "partly obliterates the differentiation in sex," presumably because the emphasis on education

made the universal qualities of ability and accomplishment seem the only reasonable limitations on future activities. Women who absorbed the egalitarian implications of modern education felt confused, burdened, and irritated by the contrary expectations that they display a subordinate femininity. The intrinsic contradictions between these two role expectations could only end, Komarovsky declared, when women's real adult role was redefined to make it "consistent with the socioeconomic and ideological modern society."¹

Since 1940, many of these contradictions have been resolved. At an accelerating pace, women have continually gained greater access to the activities, positions, and statuses formerly reserved to men.

Despite the tremendous gains women have experienced, they have not achieved complete equality, nor is it imminent. The improvement of women's status has been uneven, seesawing between setbacks and advances. Women still bear the major responsibility for raising children. They suffer from lingering harassment, intimidation, and disguised discrimination. Women in the United States still get poorer jobs and lower income. They have less access to economic or political power. The higher echelons of previously male social hierarchies have assimilated women slowest and least completely. For example, in blue-collar hierarchies they find it hard to get skilled jobs or join craft unions; in white-collar hierarchies they rarely reach top management; and in politics the barriers to women's entry seem to rise with the power of the office they seek. Yet when we compare the status of American women today with their status in the past, the movement toward greater equality is striking.

While women have not gained full equality, the formal structural barriers holding them back have largely collapsed and those left are crumbling. New government policies have discouraged sex discrimination by most organizations and in most areas of life outside the family. The political and economic systems have accepted ever more women and have promoted them to positions with more influence and higher status. Education at all levels has become equally available to women. Women have gained great control over their reproductive processes, and their sexual freedom has come to resemble that of men. It has become easy and socially acceptable to end unsatisfactory marriages with divorce. Popular culture has come close to portraying women as men's legitimate equal. Television, our most dynamic communication media, regularly portrays discrimination as wrong and male abuse or male dominance as nasty. The prevailing theme of this recent period has been women's assimilation into all the activities and positions once denied them.

This book [this reading was taken from] focuses on the dominant patterns and the groups that had the most decisive and most public roles in the processes that changed women's status: middle-class whites and, secondarily, the white working class. The histories of gender inequality among racial and ethnic minorities are too diverse to address adequately here.² Similarly, this analysis neglects other distinctive groups, especially lesbians and heterosexual women who avoided marriage, whose changing circumstances also deserve extended study.

While these minorities all have distinctive histories, the major trends considered here have influenced all groups. Every group had to respond to the same changing political and economic structures that defined the opportunities and constraints for all people in the society. Also, whatever their particular history, the members of each group

understood their gender relations against the backdrop of the white, middle-class family's cultural preeminence. Even when people in higher or lower-class positions or people in ethnic communities expressed contempt for these values, they were familiar with the middle-class ideals and thought of them as leading ideas in the society. The focus on the white middle classes is simply an analytical and practical strategy. The history of dominant groups has no greater inherent or moral worth. Still, except in cases of open, successful rebellion, the ideas and actions of dominant groups usually affect history much more than the ideas and actions of subordinate groups. This fact is an inevitable effect of inequality.

THE MEANING OF INEQUALITY AND ITS DECLINE

We will think differently about women's status under two theoretical agendas. Either we can try to evaluate how short from equality women now fall, or we can try to understand how far they have come from past deprivations.

Looking at women's place in society today from these two vantage points yields remarkably different perspectives. They accentuate different aspects of women's status by altering the background against which we compare it. Temporal and analytical differences separate these two vantage points, not distinctive moral positions, although people sometimes confuse these differences with competing moral positions.

If we want to assess and criticize women's disadvantages today, we usually compare their existing status with an imagined future when complete equality reigns. Using this ideal standard of complete equality, we would find varied shortcomings in women's status today. These shortcomings include women's absence from positions of political or economic power, men's preponderance in the better-paid and higher-status occupations, women's lower average income, women's greater family responsibilities, the higher status commonly attached to male activities, and the dearth of institutions or policies supporting dual-earner couples.

Alternatively, if we want to evaluate how women's social status has improved, we must turn in the other direction and face the past. We look back to a time when women were legal and political outcasts, working only in a few low-status jobs, and always deferring to male authority. From this perspective, women's status today seems much brighter. Compared with the nineteenth century, women now have a nearly equal legal and political status, far more women hold jobs, women can succeed at almost any occupation, women usually get paid as much as men in the same position (in the same firm), women have as much educational opportunity as men, and both sexes normally expect women to pursue jobs and careers.

As we seek to understand the decline of gender inequality, we will necessarily stress the improvements in women's status. We will always want to remember, however, that gender inequality today stands somewhere between extreme inequality and complete equality. To analyze the modern history of gender inequality fully, we must be able to look at this middle ground from both sides. It is seriously deficient when measured against full equality. It is a remarkable improvement when measured against past inequality.

Notes

1. Mirra Komarovsky, "Cultural Contradictions and Sex Roles," pp. 184, 189. Cf. Helen Hacker, "Women as a Minority Group."
2. For studies of these various groups see, e.g., Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*; Alfredo Mirande and Evangelina Enriquez, *La Chicana*; Evelyn Nakana Glen, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride*; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*.

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■ READING 8***What Do Women and Men Want?***

Kathleen Gerson

Young workers today grew up in rapidly changing times: They watched women march into the workplace and adults develop a wide range of alternatives to traditional marriage. Now making their own passage to adulthood, these "children of the gender revolution" have inherited a far different world from that of their parents or grandparents. They may enjoy an expanded set of options, but they also face rising uncertainty about whether and how to craft a marriage, rear children, and build a career.

Considering the scope of these new uncertainties, it is understandable that social forecasters are pondering starkly different possibilities for the future. Focusing on a comparatively small recent upturn in the proportion of mothers who do not hold paid jobs, some are pointing to a "return to tradition," especially among young women. Others see evidence of a "decline of commitment" in the rising number of young adults who are living outside a married relationship. However, the 120 in-depth interviews I conducted between 1998 and 2003 with young adults from diverse backgrounds make it clear that neither of these scenarios does justice to the lessons gleaned from growing up in changing families or to the strategies being crafted in response to deepening work/family dilemmas.

Keenly aware of the obstacles to integrating work and family life in an egalitarian way, most young adults are formulating a complicated set of ideals and fallback positions.

Women and men largely share similar aspirations: Most wish to forge a lifelong partnership that combines committed work with devoted parenting. These ideals are tempered, however, by deep and realistic fears that rigid, time-demanding jobs and a dearth of child-care or family-leave options block the path to such a goal. Confronted with so many obstacles, young women and men today are pursuing fallback strategies as insurance in the all-too-likely event that their egalitarian ideals prove out of reach.

These second-best strategies are not only different but also at odds with each other. If a supportive, egalitarian partnership is not possible, most women prefer individual autonomy over becoming dependent on a husband in a traditional marriage. Most men, however, if they can't have an equal balance between work and parenting, fall back on a neotraditional arrangement that allows them to put their own work prospects first and rely on a partner for most caregiving. The best hope for bridging this new gender divide lies in creating social policies that would allow new generations to create the families they want rather than the families they believe they must settle for.

GROWING UP IN CHANGING FAMILIES

In contrast to the conventional wisdom that children are best reared in families with a homemaking mother and bread-winning father, the women and men who grew up in such circumstances hold divided assessments. While a little more than half thought this was the best arrangement, a little less than half thought otherwise. When domesticity appeared to undermine their mother's satisfaction, disturb the household's harmony, or threaten its economic security, the adult children surveyed concluded that it would have been better if their mothers had pursued a sustained commitment to work or, in some instances, if their parents had separated.

Many of those who grew up in a single-parent home also express ambivalence. Slightly more than half wished their parents had stayed together, but close to half believed that a breakup, while not ideal, was better than continuing to live in a conflict-ridden home or with a neglectful or abusive parent. The longer-term consequences of a breakup had a crucial influence on the lessons children drew. The children whose parents got back on their feet and created better lives developed surprisingly positive outlooks on the decision to separate.

Those who grew up in dual-earner homes were least ambivalent about their parents' arrangements. More than three-fourths thought their parents had chosen the best option. Having two work-committed parents not only provided increased economic resources for the family but also promoted marriages that seemed more egalitarian and satisfying. Yet when the pressures of parents working long hours or coping with blocked opportunities and family-unfriendly workplaces took their toll, some children came to believe that having overburdened, time-stressed caretakers offset the advantages of living in a two-income household.

In short, the generation that grew up in this era of changing families is more focused on how well parents (and other caretakers) were able to meet the twin challenges of providing economic and emotional support rather than on what forms households took. Children were more likely to receive that support when their parents (or other guardians)

could find secure and personally satisfying jobs, high-quality child care, and a supportive partnership that left room for a measure of personal autonomy.

NEW IDEALS, PERSISTING BARRIERS

So what do young adults want for themselves? Grappling with their own family experiences has led most young women and men to affirm the intrinsic importance of family life, but also to search for ways to combine lasting commitment with a substantial measure of independence. Whether or not their parents stayed together, the overwhelming majority of young adults I interviewed said they hope to rear their children in the context of a lifelong intimate bond. They have certainly not given up on the value or possibility of commitment. It would be a mistake, however, to equate this ideal with a desire to be in a traditional relationship. While almost everyone wants to create a lasting marriage—or, in the case of same-sex couples, a “marriage-like” relationship—most also want to find an egalitarian partnership with considerable room for personal autonomy. Not surprisingly, three-fourths of those who grew up in dual-earner homes want their spouses to share breadwinning and caretaking; but so do more than two-thirds of those from more traditional homes, and close to nine-tenths of those with single parents. Four-fifths of women want egalitarian relationships, but so do two-thirds of the men. Whether reared by traditional, dual-earning, or single parents, the overwhelming majority of women and men want a committed bond where both paid work and family caretaking are shared.

Amy, an Asian American with two working parents, and Michael, an African American raised by a single mother, express essentially the same hopes:

AMY: I want a 50–50 relationship, where we both have the potential of doing everything—both of us working and dealing with kids. With regard to career, if neither has flexibility, then one of us will have to sacrifice for one period, and the other for another.

MICHAEL: I don’t want the ’50s type of marriage, where I come home and she’s cooking. She doesn’t have to cook; I like to cook. I want her to have a career of her own. I want to be able to set my goals, and she can do what she wants, too, because we both have this economic base and the attitude to do it. That’s what marriage is about.

Young adults today are affirming the value of commitment while also challenging traditional forms of marriage. Women and men both want to balance family and work in their own lives and balance commitment and autonomy in their relationships. Yet women and men also share a concern that—in the face of workplaces greedy for time and communities lacking adequate child care—insurmountable obstacles block the path to achieving these goals.

Chris, a young man of mixed ancestry whose parents shared work and caretaking, thus wonders: “I thought you could just have a relationship—that love and being happy was all that was needed in life—but I’ve learned it’s a difficult thing. So that would be my fear: Where am I cutting into my job too much? Where am I cutting into the relationship too much? How do I divide it? And can it be done at all? Can you blend these two parts of your world?”

A NEW GENDER DIVIDE

The rising conflicts between family and work make equal sharing seem elusive and possibly unattainable. Most young adults have concluded that they have little choice but to prepare for options that are likely to fall substantially short of their ideals. In the face of these barriers, women and men are formulating different—and opposing—fallback strategies.

In contrast to the media-driven message that more women are opting for domestic pursuits, the vast majority of women I interviewed say they are determined to seek financial and emotional self-reliance, even at the expense of a committed relationship. Most young women—regardless of class, race, or ethnicity—are reluctant to surrender their autonomy in a traditional marriage. When the bonds of marriage are so fragile, relying on a husband for economic security seems foolhardy. And if a relationship deteriorates, economic dependence on a man leaves few means of escape.

Danisha, an African American who grew up in an inner-city, working-class neighborhood, and Jennifer, who was raised in a middle-class, predominantly white suburb, agree:

DANISHA: Let's say that my marriage doesn't work. Just in case, I want to establish myself, because I don't ever want to end up, like, "What am I going to do?" I want to be able to do what I have to do and still be OK.

JENNIFER: I will have to have a job and some kind of stability before considering marriage. Too many of my mother's friends went for that—"Let him provide everything"—and they're stuck in a very unhappy relationship, but can't leave because they can't provide for themselves or the children they now have. So it's either welfare or putting up with somebody else's crap.

Hoping to avoid being trapped in an unhappy marriage or abandoned by an unreliable partner, almost three-fourths of women surveyed said they plan to build a non-negotiable base of self-reliance and an independent identity in the world of paid work. But they do not view this strategy as incompatible with the search for a life partner. Instead, it reflects their determination to set a high standard for a worthy relationship. Economic self-reliance and personal independence make it possible to resist "settling" for anything less than a satisfying, mutually supportive bond.

Maria, who grew up in a two-parent home in a predominantly white, working-class suburb and Rachel, whose Latino parents separated when she was young, share this view:

MARIA: I want to have this person to share [my] life with—[someone] that you're there for as much as they're there for you. But I can't settle.

RACHEL: I'm not afraid of being alone, but I am afraid of being with somebody who's a jerk. I want to get married and have children, but it has to be under the right circumstances, with the right person.

Maria and Rachel also agree that if a worthy relationship ultimately proves out of reach, then remaining single need not mean social disconnection. Kin and friends

provide a support network that enlarges and, if needed, even substitutes for an intimate relationship:

MARIA: If I don't find [a relationship], then I cannot live in sorrow. It's not the only thing that's ultimately important. If I didn't have my family, if I didn't have a career, if I didn't have friends, I would be equally unhappy. [A relationship] is just one slice of the pie.

RACHEL: I can spend the rest of my life on my own, and as long as I have my sisters and my friends, I'm OK.

By blending support from friends and kin with financial self-sufficiency, most young women are pursuing a strategy of autonomy rather than placing their own fate or their children's in the hands of a traditional marriage. Whether or not this strategy ultimately leads to marriage, it appears to offer the safest and most responsible way to prepare for the uncertainties of relationships and the barriers to men's equal sharing.

Young men, in contrast, face a different dilemma: Torn between women's pressures for an egalitarian partnership and their own desire to succeed—or at least survive—in time-demanding workplaces, they are more inclined to fall back on a modified traditionalism that recognizes a mother's right (and need) to work but puts a man's claim to a career first.

Despite growing up in a two-income home, Andrew distinguishes between a woman's "choice" to work and a man's "responsibility" to support his family: "I would like to have it be equal—just from what I was exposed to and what attracts me—but I don't have a set definition for what that would be like. I would be fine if both of us were working, but if she thought, 'At this point in my life, I don't want to work,' then it would be fine."

This model makes room for two earners, but it positions men as the breadwinning specialists. When push comes to shove, and the demands of work collide with the needs of children, this framework allows fathers to resist equal caretaking, even in a two-earner context. Although Josh's mother became too mentally ill to care for her children or herself, Josh plans to leave the lion's share of caretaking to his wife:

All things being equal, it [caretaking] should be shared. It may sound sexist, but if somebody's going to be the breadwinner, it's going to be me. First of all, I make a better salary, and I feel the need to work, and I just think the child really needs the mother more than the father at a young age.

Men are thus more likely to favor a fallback arrangement that retains the gender boundary between breadwinning and caretaking, even when mothers hold paid jobs. From young men's perspective, this modified but still gendered household offers women the chance to earn income and establish an identity at the workplace without imposing the costs of equal parenting on men. Granting a mother's "right" to work supports women's claims for independence, but does not undermine men's claim that their work prospects should come first. Acknowledging men's responsibilities at home provides for more involved fatherhood, but does not envision domestic equality. And making room for two earners provides a buffer against the difficulties of living on one income, but does not challenge men's position as the primary earner. Modified traditionalism thus appears to be a good compromise when the career costs of equality remain so high. Ultimately, however, men's desire to protect work prerogatives collides with women's growing demand for equality and independence.

GETTING PAST THE WORK/FAMILY IMPASSE?

If the realities of time-demanding workplaces and missing supports for caregiving make it difficult for young adults to achieve the sharing, flexible, and more egalitarian relationships most want, then how can we get past this impasse? Clearly, most young women are not likely to answer this question by returning to patterns that fail to speak to either their highest ideals or their greatest fears. To the contrary, they are forming fallback strategies that stress personal autonomy, including the possibility of single parenthood. Men's most common responses to economic pressures and time-demanding jobs stress a different strategy—one that allows for two incomes but preserves men's claim on the most rewarding careers. Women and men are leaning in different directions, and their conflicting responses are fueling a new gender divide. But this schism stems from the intensification of long-simmering work/family dilemmas, not from a decline of laudable values.

We need to worry less about the family values of a new generation and more about the institutional barriers that make them so difficult to achieve. Most young adults do not wish to turn back the clock, but they do hope to combine the more traditional value of making a lifelong commitment with the more modern value of having a flexible, egalitarian relationship. Rather than trying to change individual values, we need to provide the social supports that will allow young people to overcome work/family conflicts and realize their most cherished aspirations.

Since a mother's earnings and a father's involvement are both integral to the economic and emotional welfare of children (and also desired by most women and men), we can achieve the best family values only by creating flexible workplaces, ensuring equal economic opportunity for women, outlawing discrimination against all parents, and building child-friendly communities with plentiful, affordable, and high-quality child care. These long overdue policies will help new generations create the more egalitarian partnerships they desire. Failure to build institutional supports for new social realities will not produce a return to traditional marriage. Instead, following the law of unintended consequences, it will undermine marriage itself.

■ READING 9

The Conservative Christian Family and the “Feminist Revolution”

Andrew Greeley and Michael Hout

INTRODUCTION

The battle cry of the politically involved Conservative Christians is “family values.” . . . [T]he precise meaning of that shibboleth seems rather flexible. It applies to certain forms

of abortion and to homosexuality but apparently not to a regular sexual partner and cohabitation. Equally important, if not more so, are the norms, roles, and mores that structure the daily lives of men and women. Traditional models of the proper roles of men, and women in and out of family relationships have been recast by the women's movement. One supposition is that the "family values" cry of the Christian right is a call to resist those changes. . . . [I]n this [reading we] ask to what extent traditional convictions about family life have survived the feminist revolution—or more accurately, the technological and demographic changes that are articulated in the theories of the women's movement.

Others have been over this ground before. Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher (2000) considered it in their *Case for Marriage* (also see Goldschieder and Waite 1991). The specific issues of family values, religion, and feminism are central to research articles by Duane Alwin (1986), John Barkowski (1997), and Clem Brooks (2002). Of these, Brooks's analysis is the most relevant for our purposes. Reviewing data collected between 1972 and 1996, he found a steady increase in the frequency with which people cited elements of "family decline" as the nation's "most important problem." He considered explicit mentions of "family decline" itself, of course, but included mentions of divorce, single-parent families, inadequate child rearing, and child poverty as well. The fraction of U.S. voters mentioning any of these aspects of family decline was tiny prior to 1984 when it was 2 percent.¹ From that low point it increased steadily to 9.4 percent in 1996. That may sound like family decline was still far from a burning issue. However, this is not a forced choice question. Respondents can (and do) say anything that is on their minds. The sheer variety of answers is impressive. Moreover, the increase was most intense for Conservative Protestants and frequent churchgoers, with an added boost among Conservative Protestants who attended church weekly. Brooks does not present the observed percentages, but the coefficients in his model 2 imply that over 40 percent of Conservative Protestants attending church weekly in the most recent year (1996) cited family decline as the nation's most important problem when less than 8 percent of their fellow Americans thought it was that important. Now Conservative Protestants who attend church weekly are but a small segment of the U.S. electorate, but their focus on the family is both impressive and distinctive.

Soft Patriarchs, New Men by W. Bradford Wilcox (2004) explores the link between religion and family from the family rather than a political perspective. In his comprehensive review of contemporary family ideologies and practices, he shows how Conservative and Mainline Protestant men differ when they approach families. He calls the conservatives "soft patriarchs" in deference to their aspirations to be traditional providers and beacons of virtue, but his main finding is that family trumps patriarchy in the modern Christian household. That means that Conservative Protestant fathers are more emotionally engaged with their wives and children than other men. He labels the Mainline men "new" because they truly value egalitarian family life and even though they fail to achieve it in absolute terms they do a significantly greater share of household labor than other American men. Wilcox's research, and indeed most empirical work on religion and family, leads us to expect a quantitative rather than a qualitative difference between Conservative and Mainline Protestants' gender ideologies. . . .

GENDER ROLES

From the very earliest years of the General Social Survey, the National Opinion Research Center has asked four questions that have constituted a feminism² scale that was designed in the late 1960s as a leading social indicator:

- Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Women should take care of running their homes and leave running the country to the men.
- Do you approve or disapprove of a married woman earning money in business or industry if she has a husband capable of supporting her?
- If your party nominated a woman for President, would you vote for her if she were qualified for the job?
- Tell me if you agree or disagree with this statement: Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women.

In Table 9.1 we consider the average response of four Christian denominations to these four questions in 1996 and 1998 (the most recent years all four questions were asked).

The table demonstrates that contemporary Conservative Protestants are slightly more likely to manifest restraint on women's involvement beyond the home while Mainline Protestants and Catholics are more likely to support the moderate feminist positions encoded in the questions. Afro-American Protestants are moderate on three of the four items but actually more likely than Conservative Protestants to disapprove of married women working if their husbands are capable of supporting them. However,

TABLE 9.1 *Attitudes about the Role of Women by Religion*

<i>Item/Answer</i>	<i>Religion</i>			
	<i>Conservative Protestant (%)</i>	<i>Afro-Amer. Protestant (%)</i>	<i>Mainline Protestant (%)</i>	<i>Catholic (%)</i>
<i>"Women should take care of their homes . . ."</i> ^a Disagree (%)	77	77	86	87
<i>"Married women earning money . . ."</i> ^a Approve (%)	81	73	84	83
<i>"Women for president"</i> ^a Would vote for her (%)	89	94	95	94
<i>"Most men are better suited for politics"</i> ^b Disagree	73	77	77	76

^aSource: General Social Surveys, 1996–1998.

^bSource: General Social Surveys, 2000–2004.

Note: Denominational differences significant (.05 level) for each item.

Conservative Protestants support the feminist position on each item by at least a two-thirds majority. This is the theme that often recurs in the present study—Conservative Protestants are different but not all that different.

These items were hardly avant-garde when they were introduced thirty years ago—surveys generally try to avoid shocking the people they interview—and by now they border on old-fashioned. As society has outpaced the constraints of these questions, feminists and other advocates have introduced new issues.³ Obsolete or not, the questions do provide measures for social change across the three decades, as we see in Figure 9.1.⁴ Change is the dominant message in each figure, though the rate of increase on three of the four items slowed in the 1990s. We should not ascribe the slowdown to its having maxed out, either, as the woman president item—highest from the start—is the one that continued upward until the series was discontinued.

The differences among items hint at the Conservative Protestants' somewhat different take on gender-role equity. On three of the four items—the three that mention politics—Catholics are the most liberal and Conservative Protestants the most conservative in each year. The frequency of feminist responses for both groups increased each year from 1974 to 1992 then leveled off. The average gap between them is 15 percentage points, and the trends neither converge nor diverge. Mainline Protestants are not statistically different from the Catholics (though slightly below) on each item. Afro-American Protestants closely resemble the Conservative Protestants on the first item (leave running the country up to the men), Mainline Protestants on the third item (vote for a woman), and split the difference on the fourth (men better suited).

These trends developed in a context in which women's public roles as elected officials, spokespersons for causes, and administrators in government, the nonprofit sector, and business all expanded exponentially. Opinions about women in public life may have pressured some institutions to open up while the trends gave other institutions the freedom to promote women without fear of public backlash. Yet in all these changes, Conservative Protestant women held back. They did not go off in the opposite direction, they kept up, but they never caught up with Catholics or Mainline Protestants. On each of these three items about women in public life, Conservative Protestants' support looks like Catholic women's support did eight or ten years earlier.

The second question—should women be allowed to take paying jobs—differs from the other three in several ways. First, it makes no mention of public life. Second, religion did not affect answers to this question as much as the others, even in the early 1970s. Third, Afro-American Protestants (the group with the highest married women's labor force participation rate in the first decade of the series) changed the least. Fourth, and most important for our purposes, the Conservative Protestants increased the most on this item so that the gap between them and Catholics and Mainline Protestants is not statistically (or substantively) significant after 1994.

The difference between the three public-sphere items and the private-sphere one suggests that a significant minority of Conservative Protestants dissent from women's growing public prominence. We would suspect partisanship if all prominent women were Democrats. But of course they are not. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and talk show host Ann Coulter arrived too late to affect these trends; the action here is in the 1970s and 1980s. That was when Margaret Thatcher was prime minister of the

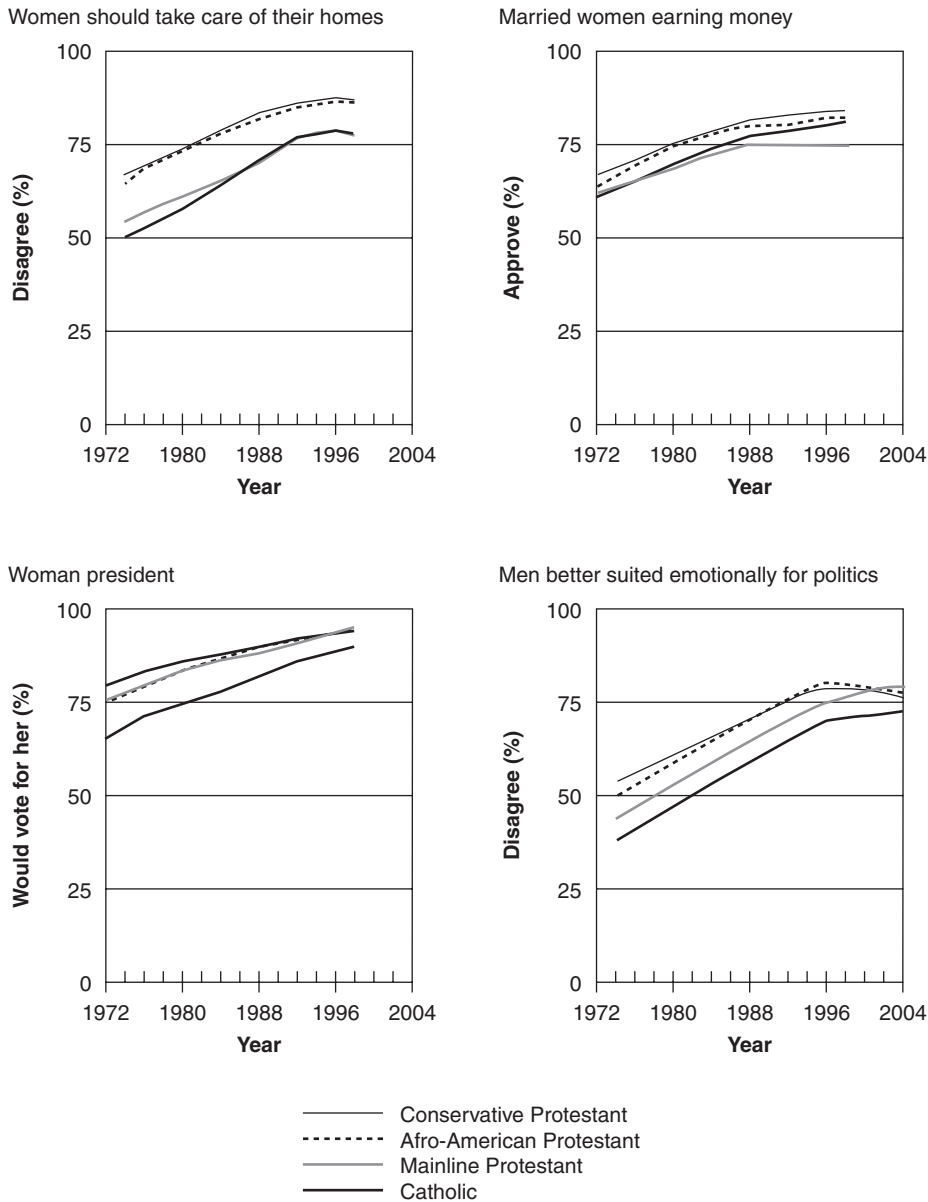


FIGURE 9.1 *Feminism Scale Items by Year and Denomination*

Note: Data-smoothed using locally estimated regression.

United Kingdom, the U.S. Senate had four Republican women; and Peggy Noonan wrote speeches for President Reagan. One can expect therefore as this analysis proceeds that the conservatives will lag behind the Mainline Protestants in their sympathy for the equality of women, but not far behind.

WIFE AND HUSBAND

In 1996 GSS asked three questions that presented paradigms for marital relationships:

- A relationship where the man has the main responsibility for providing the household income and the woman has the main responsibility for taking care of the home and family.
OR
- A relationship where the man and the woman equally share responsibility for providing the household income and taking care of the family.

- Relationship in which the man and the woman do most things in their social life together.
OR
- Relationship where the man and the woman do separate things that interest them.

- A relationship where the man and the woman are emotionally dependent on one another.
OR
- A relationship in which the man and the woman are emotionally independent.

The first and third pairings tap the soft patriarchy that Wilcox (2004) identified. Both render the husband and wife dependent on one another. While a minority of Conservative Protestants chose the male breadwinner/female homemaker model, at 41 percent it is a much more popular option for those families than for others; 24 percent of Afro-American Protestants, 25 percent of Catholics, and 31 percent of Mainline Protestants chose the breadwinner/homemaker model. Likewise a bare majority (52 percent) of Conservative Protestants opted for emotional (inter)dependence over independence while minorities of other faiths made that choice; 45 percent of Afro-American Protestants, 41 percent of Mainline Protestants, and 44 percent of Catholics. Differences by denomination in the middle pairing are not statistically significant.

Combining the two items that do differ into a three-point scale we discover three things: (1) Women in all denominations opt out of the traditional model more than men do. (2) Conservative Protestants differ from other denominations more than the other denominations differ among themselves. (3) The EVANGELICAL scale accounts for only 28 percent of the Conservatives' traditionalism.

Does the traditional paradigm interfere with marital happiness for the Conservative Protestants? It would appear that it does not. Quite the contrary: 70 percent of the Conservative Protestants who accept emotional (inter)dependence say they are very happy as opposed to 57 percent of the conservatives who opt for the emotional independence. Fifty-eight percent of the Mainline Protestants report very happy marriages regardless of their paradigms; marital happiness does not vary by emotional model for the Afro-American Protestants or Catholics either. In an ordered logistic regression analysis, both emotional (inter)dependence and Biblical literacy increase marital happiness for Conservative Protestants.⁵ In some sense, Biblical Christianity seems to work when it underwrites the traditional martial paradigm in a community that stresses both.

In various times since the late 1980s the National Opinion Research Center has administered, as part of the General Social Survey, modules designed by the International Social Survey Program, three of which were about marriage and family life. Two of the items in the 2002 module are somewhat similar to the previous questions asked in the 1996 module.⁶

- When you and your spouse make decisions about choosing weekend activities, who has the final say—mostly me, mostly my spouse, sometimes me, sometimes my spouse, we decide together.
- (Same wording) Buying major things for the house.

Respondents tend to assert that these decisions are made together, regardless of gender. Forty-two percent of the men and 46 percent of the women claim joint decisions on weekends. And 49 percent and 53 percent say that the purchase of major things for the house are joint decisions.

The two variables correlate at .50 so it is not unreasonable to create a factor out of them. The emergent factor tilts in the direction of joint decisions. With the exception of Catholics, women are more likely to insist that the decisions are joint—with the Jewish women the most likely of all. Mainline Protestants are more likely, regardless of gender, to report joint decisions. Fifty-eight percent of the Mainline Protestant women report joint decisions as opposed to 51 percent of the Conservative Protestant women, but this seven-point difference is not statistically significant. Hence whatever paradigms might exist about marital life, they do not seem to create major differences between Conservative and Mainline Protestants about who makes important consumer decisions.

Matters are possibly different, however, when the issue is whether men should do more household work (see Barkowski 1997; Wilcox 2004). Sixty-three percent of male Conservative Protestants think that men should do housework as do women from the same denominational background. However, 74 percent of the Mainline Protestant women think the men should do more work. Thus there is a statistically significant difference between the women of the two denominations with the Mainline Protestants more likely to demand more work from their husbands. There are two possibilities: Conservative Protestant women are less likely to complain about the lack of housework help from their husbands or Mainline Protestants are more likely to complain.

Wilcox finds that housework—and denominational differences in how people think about it—is one of the hinges in the family values debates. Not only is Conservative Protestant theology and iconography deeply patriarchal, according to Wilcox, it is also very sentimental. In contrast to the fire and brimstone of the fundamentalist past, contemporary Conservative Protestantism goes for the soft focus. Emotions are very important (as we have just seen) and women act out their attachments to their families by keeping order at home. In that world, it is equally incumbent on the men to appreciate the work their wives do. Wilcox (2004, 142) points to Christian marriage counselor Gary Smalley who “advises husbands to ‘verbalize’ their ‘thoughts of appreciation.’” Acting out traditional domesticity helps Conservative Christians feel their Christianity because it sets them off from the expectations of society in general and feminists in particular. Mainline

Protestants and Catholics do not think about housework as part of Christian duty and so do not see their religious identities bound up in their daily drudgeries.

Wilcox's interpretations are large relative to the magnitude of the differences they are marshaled to explain (here and in his data that are drawn not only from the GSS but also from other national surveys like the National Survey of Families and Households).

However another question may provide some insight into the issue:

Which of the following best applies to the sharing of work between you and your household partner.

- I do much more than my fair share of household work.
- I do a bit more than my fair share of the household work.
- I do roughly my fair share of the household work.
- I do a bit less than my fair share of household work.
- I do much less than my fair share of household work.

Fifty-three percent of the Conservative Protestant men claim that they do at least their fair share of household work and 62 percent of the Conservative Protestant women argue that they do more than their fair share. Seventy percent of the Mainline men claim at least a fair share while fifty-three percent of Mainline women claim that they do more than their fair share. In both denominational groups men are more satisfied with themselves than women, and the difference between Conservative men and Mainline men is statistically significant.

There are many possible interpretations of the finding. Conservative men might simply be more modest in their claims, or they actually may do less of the housework than do Mainline men. The former reading of the data seems less probable because Conservative women are more likely to say that they do more than their fair share of work.

Another way to measure the impact of the traditional marriage paradigm is provided by responses to a variable we've appropriately labeled MRMOM: *It is not good if the man stays home and takes care of the children and the woman goes out to work.*

Thirty-five percent of Conservative Protestant men reject the Mr. Mom role as do 21 percent of the Mainline Protestant men, a difference that is statistically significant. Twenty-seven percent of the Conservative women and 22 percent of the Mainline women disapprove of Mr. Mom, and the difference is not significant. Two observations are in order—Conservative Protestant men are more likely to disapprove of behavior that is at odds with traditional family paradigms than are Mainline men. Nonetheless, 40 percent of them reject negative judgments about the Mr. Mom solution (the rest decline to either agree or disagree). If some of the Conservative Protestant denominations insist on the traditional paradigm, then that position is being eroded in the attitudes of their membership who are increasingly likely to support more “feminist” positions. On the other hand it would be wrong for those who see Conservative Protestants as enemies of the feminist revolution to write them off as unaffected by the changes it has created—or, more properly, the changes that are subsumed under the label “feminist revolution.”

On one issue of considerable importance—the joint management of family funds (*How do you or your family organize the income that one or both of you receive?*) the Conservative Protestants have decisively chosen to share. Three-quarters answer that they pool the

money and take out what they need—as do the Mainline Protestants. If the use of money is the most serious threat to a marriage—as the literature on the subject contends—then the joint administration of the funds (“we pool the money and each takes out what we need”) is the most likely way to avoid conflicts over discrimination and one that strikes down the traditional assumption that the man as the head of the family should make the money decisions. The data on major purchases also confirm that married Conservative and Mainline Protestants are alike in spending money as couples rather than spending on one partner’s say-so.

Responses to a series of questions in the 1996 family module round out our analysis:

Do you agree or disagree that

- Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can’t seem to work out their marriage problems?
- When there are children in the family parents should stay together even if they don’t get along?
- When there are no children, a married couple should stay together even if they don’t get along?
- Working women should receive paid maternity leave when they have a baby?
- Families should receive financial benefit for child care when both parents work?

Did you ever live with a partner you didn’t marry?

Sometimes at work people find themselves the object of sexual advances, propositions or unwanted sexual discussions from the coworkers or supervisors. The contacts sometimes involve physical contacts and sometimes just involve sexual conversations. Has this ever happened to you?

Thirty-eight percent of the Conservative Protestants and 51 percent of the Mainline Protestants opt for the divorce solution. Thirteen percent of the Conservative Protestants and 20 percent of the Mainline Protestants contend that parents should stay together for the children, should there be any. The presumption in favor of the marriage that apparently existed in the middle years of the last century still finds some support among the Conservative Protestants, suggesting that the traditional paradigm still exercises some influence. Whatever the nature of the presumption there is no difference between the Conservative Protestants and the Mainline Protestants in the divorce rate—28 percent of both groups say they have been divorced.

However, Conservative Protestants are certainly on the liberal side of the maternity leave and child care issues. Eighty-one percent support maternity leave and 45 percent support child care programs. The comparable proportions of Mainline Protestants are 73 percent and 46 percent. One would have expected perhaps that the traditional marriage paradigm would have inoculated Conservative Protestants against such “liberal” innovations. However, once money becomes available for these programs, only the narrowly ideological would turn it down for the sake of principles.

Twenty-two percent of the Conservative Protestants lived with a partner before they were married, 17 percent of both groups with a partner they did not marry eventually—a practice that traditionally would have earned them the name of notorious and public

fornicator. Moreover among the Conservative Protestants, living with someone they did not eventually marry makes them much more sympathetic to abortion on demand (a question used only in this module): *a pregnant woman should be able to obtain a legal abortion whatever if for any reason she does not want to have a baby*. Forty-nine percent of those who had cohabited agreed with this item as opposed to 26 percent of those who had not cohabited.⁷ Finally, 36 percent of both denominations report sexual harassment experiences in the work place—a quarter of the men and two-fifths of the women.

In summary, the patterns that emerge so far in this analysis of the Conservative Protestant family turned up evidence of both continuity and change. The Conservatives still tend to lean more in the direction of the traditional marriage and family relations than anyone else. Yet they are by no means traditionalists. The forces that shaped the women's movement have affected them, too. They may derive a spark of oppositional identity when they defy the feminists in the sanctity of their own homes, but they also display commitment to joint decision making. Some Conservative Protestant women would like to see men helping more in the work of the home—which does not mean that the men will deliver it. In a pair of unanticipated findings we learned that Conservative Protestants of both genders support maternity leaves and do not disapprove of Mr. Mom situations.

If we had to boil the work in this section down to one finding it would be the happiness result: tradition makes Conservative Protestants happy in their marriages but does nothing for other Protestants or Catholics.

EXTENDED FAMILY

A question asked from the very beginning of the General Social Survey enables us to measure, however crudely, the existence of extended family networks as part of the Conservative Christian heritage: *How often do you spend a social evening with relatives?*

Thirty-nine percent of the Conservative Protestants report they spend evenings with relatives several times a week versus 31 percent of Mainline Protestants, 44 percent of Afro-American Protestants, and 37 percent of Catholics. While there may be many differences between Catholics and Conservative Protestants, they appear to be alike in acting on a commitment to family. Moreover, they are also more likely to believe that elderly people should live with their children—41 percent versus 37 percent for Mainline Protestants, 49 percent for Afro-Americans, and 48 percent for Catholics.

CONCLUSION

Conservative Protestants are not a socially isolated sect. Though they have some distinctive institutions including thriving specialized media that informs and entertains on radio and television and publishes fiction and nonfiction books, they are a fifth of American society spread (not quite uniformly) across the whole country. As such they are subject to the influences of the larger society just as they endeavor to move it. Conservative Protestant families feel the same economic pressures. They have welcomed the changes

in employment possibilities and better fertility control that gave rise to “second-wave feminism”—the women’s movement of the 1970s that demanded equal partnership in society. Are the Conservative Christians feminists? Surely some of them are. Use a broad enough net and you might conclude that many of them are.

They are not, in other words, totally different from the rest of American society in their family values, but not totally the same either. Wilcox’s soft patriarch model is useful. Conservative Protestant men and women have given up the hard patriarchy of an older generation (though they still use—and advocate—corporal punishment for children) for a still-patriarchal family life that is softened by what Swidler (2002) aptly calls “talk of love.” Soft patriarchy drops “what I say goes” and adopts the organic solidarity of partnership. Spouses contribute in distinct ways but share goals and support each other in the struggle to see their joint project through to success and happiness. It is different than the family life found in other American homes, but neither as different as outsiders imagine nor as different as it could be.

Notes

1. The 1980 and 1982 estimates are less than 1 percent, but Brooks cautions that the question in those two years was different from the question used in all other years of the time series.
2. “Feminist” is not a popular label. Only 12 percent of the men and 28 percent of the women in the United States apply the word to themselves—5 percent of the Conservative Protestant men and 14 percent of the women.
3. The GSS Board of Overseers revised the feminism scale in the late 1990s. Only the fourth item is part of the new feminism scale. The first three items were last asked in 1998.
4. For the purposes of presentation, the data are smoothed using locally estimated regression methods (see Hout et al. 2001 for an exposition on these methods.)
5. Emotional (inter)dependence also helps Catholic marriages, but neither factor matters for the marital happiness of Afro-American or Mainline Protestants.
6. The ISSP practice of limiting replication to two-thirds of a repeat study thwarts our efforts to measure change here.
7. Readers inclined to judgmental language might infer from this finding that the experience of fornication made one more open to abortion. We strongly caution against such an inference since both may be related to some prior cause such as a basic rejection of certain elements of the Conservative Christian sexual ethic.

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