



Council on Contemporary **Gender and Millennials** Symposium

March 31, 2017

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CCF Gender and Millennials Symposium

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Executive Summary: Gender, Politics, and Millennials

**Executive summary prepared for CCF by Virginia Rutter, Professor of Sociology, Framingham State University, and Megan Peterson, CCF Public Affairs and Social Media Intern, Framingham State University.*

CCF's Gender and Millennials Online Symposium presents new research on how Millennial men and women are changing—and how they are not changing. Countering the recent trend of ignoring inconvenient facts, this symposium makes it clear that attitudes about gender equality are more complex than either supporters or opponents of feminism often admit.

AUSTIN, TX. March 31, 2017. The Council on Contemporary Families has released a [Gender and Millennials Online Symposium](#) revealing that young adults have become less supportive of gender equality at home over the past two decades—though not in Europe, where work/family policies are more generous. Yet the benefits of egalitarian marriages, for both partners, have increased during the same time frame.

In this eight-part series, there's the old news: women and men are more likely to endorse gender equality than ever—and they live lives that express that. Then there's the not-so-old news: progress toward gender equality has slowed since the 1990s. Some call it a stall. And there's new news: youthful gender attitudes are more variable than we thought, and at least among younger Millennials, a continued endorsement of equality at work has been accompanied by a dip in support for equality at home. And therein lies the complex set of reports that comprise the Council on Contemporary Families [Gender and Millennials Online Symposium](#), released today.

The keynote essay, “[Trending Towards Traditionalism? Changing in Youths' Gender Ideology](#),” by sociologists Joanna Pepin (University of Maryland) and David Cotter (Union College), reports that when it comes to work and politics, young adults are increasingly egalitarian. But when it comes to home life, the 40-year-long move toward gender equality has stopped or reversed in recent years.

The trends: Specifically, Pepin and Cotter report:

- In 1994, 42 percent of high-school seniors felt that the best family was one where the man was the outside achiever and the woman took care of the home. In 2014 this had gone up to 58 percent.
- In 1994, 48 percent of high school seniors said a mother who works cannot establish as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work. In 2014, the share disagreeing went up to about 60 percent.

While young people endorse at rates of 90 percent or higher the idea that men and women should be equal at work, Pepin and Cotter see a trend in greater traditionalism at home. They call this “egalitarian essentialism”—a concept that seems to go a long way in describing the complex trends in gender attitudes presented today. In her overview essay “[CCF Gender and Millennials Online Symposium: Overview](#),” historian Stephanie Coontz defines egalitarian essentialism as combining “a commitment to equality of opportunity with the belief that men and women typically *choose* different opportunities because men are ‘inherently’ better suited to some roles and women to others.” Coontz explains, “Egalitarian essentialism assumes that as long as women are not *prevented* from choosing high-powered careers, or *forced* out of them upon parenthood, their individual choices are freely made and are probably for the best.”

Nika Fate-Dixon identifies similar trends among young people in the 18-25 age group, using data collected since 1977. In “[Millennials Rethinking the Gender Revolution? Long-Range Trends in Views of Non-Traditional Roles for Women](#)” she found that by 1994, 84 percent disagreed with the claim that a

woman's place was in the home. In 2014, however, the percent disagreeing had dropped to three-quarters. While Pepin and Cotter found that the backtracking on gender equality occurred among both men and women high-school seniors, Fate-Dixon found a sharp and growing gender gap among people in their early 20s, with men driving most of the decline.

Politics: Young people—ages 18-30—were by far the strongest supporters of Clinton over Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election. However, according to Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg's [“How Gender Mattered to Millennials in the 2016 Election and Beyond.”](#) only 25 percent of the women Millennial voters and 15 percent of the Millennial men identified as feminists. Furthermore, Kawashima-Ginsberg, Director of Tuft University's Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE), Millennials' support for Clinton in 2016 was *ten percentage points lower* than their vote for Obama in 2008, further evidence for a dip in enthusiasm for gender equality.

Other political research presented by political scientist Dan Cassino (Fairleigh Dickinson University) in [“Some men feel the need to compensate for relative loss of income to women. How they do so varies”](#) suggests that some men have reacted negatively to women's economic gains. During the primaries, male voters who were reminded of women's growing economic clout became markedly less likely to express a preference for Hillary Clinton. When Cassino studied men who had actually lost income relative to their wives, however, Republicans and Democrats reacted in different ways. Men who were Democrats became *more* liberal as their share of household earnings fell, while Republican men became more conservative.

Married life: In [“A View From Above: How Structural Barriers to Sharing Unpaid Work at Home May Lead to “Egalitarian Essentialism” in Youth”](#), Dan Carlson, assistant professor of family and consumer studies at the University of Utah, suspects that this backsliding on gender equality is less a product of gender threat than it is due to the absence of work/family policies that make domestic equality possible. Since the 1990s, the historically higher risk of divorce for couples where the wife earns more than her husband has disappeared. And these days, in contrast to the past, couples in which husband and wife equally divide family chores and child-rearing now report higher marital and sexual satisfaction than more traditional couples. Carlson suggests that support for domestic equality continues to strengthen among children of dual-earners when they have access to family-friendly work policies, but that youth who have seen their parents overwhelmed by economic and time pressures may have gotten discouraged.

Research on European countries—where social supports for families are stronger—backs Carlson up. Using European public opinion surveys, Professor Jan Van Bavel (University of Leuven) found no dips in egalitarianism related to home life or work life in [“The Reversal of the Gender Gap in Education and the Continued Push towards Gender Equality.”](#) He writes, “In the more recent round of the European Social Survey, in 2010, the responses tended to be less conservative and *more gender egalitarian* than six years earlier, in 2004.”

Well, maybe “Millennials” isn't such a great category. In [“The Use and Abuse of Millennials as an Analytic Category,”](#) sociologist Frank Furstenberg (University of Pennsylvania) warns against over-generalizations about such a diverse group as the Millennials. He argues that the 18-to-25-year-olds interviewed in 2014 are not really comparable to those interviewed in 1994: They are far less likely to be married or employed in permanent jobs than this age group 20 or 40 years earlier. In her overview essay, historian Coontz notes that CCF Board President [Barbara Risman](#)'s research supports this warning against stereotyping a generation. In Risman's [interviews with Millennials](#) for a forthcoming book, she was struck by the contradictory expectations about gender and family life expressed even within a single conversation. Furstenberg and Van Bavel suggest that as youths enter married life, and especially if they gain access to family-friendly work policies, they may well change their views. But Pepin and Cotter warn that this is by no means inevitable.

Update: After this symposium was posted, 2016 data from the General Social Survey became available. The latest numbers show a sharp rebound in young men's disagreement with the claim that male-breadwinner families are superior. GSS two-year trends are exceptionally volatile, due to the small size of the sample, and the overall decade averages still confirm a rise in traditionalism among 18-to-25-year-olds since the 1990s. But the new data shows that this rise is no longer driven mainly by young men, as it appeared to be in the General Social Survey results from 1994 through 2014. Nevertheless, other evidence for a Millennial gender gap still stands, so stay tuned for more updates on this moving target.

This series, available in individual briefs and a full .pdf all linked below, provides multiple graphs illustrating the research findings.

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CCF Gender and Millennials Online Symposium Overview

A symposium overview prepared for the Council on Contemporary Families by Stephanie Coontz, CCF Director of Research and Education, and Professor of History, The Evergreen State College.

March 31, 2017

The 2016 election occasioned much debate about how strongly Americans support gender equality. Was this election “a referendum on gender,” as a [Newsweek article](#) claimed, one that “women lost”? Or was it just bad luck and campaign missteps? Now that Women’s History Month is over, the [Council on Contemporary Families](#) takes a look at the complexities involved in assessing the *future* of gender equality.

One reason political forecasters did poorly last year was that they ignored growing alienation among their traditional supporters. New research by sociologists Joanna Pepin of the University of Maryland and David Cotter of Union College [suggests](#) that those who have been counting on the younger generation to complete the gender revolution may be making the same mistake. For CCF’s Gender and Millennials Online Symposium, Pepin and Cotter summarize their findings in the lead briefing paper, and five other researchers comment.

Whoa! Looks like young adults are less supportive of equality at home than at work. People frequently attribute the dramatic increase in support for gender equality since 1977 to generational replacement, assuming it will continue as the so-called Millennials, born between 1982 and the early 2000s, come to dominate the population. But examining almost 40 years of surveys taken of high-school seniors, Pepin and Cotter report that *fewer* youths now express support for gender equality than did their Gen-X counterparts back in the mid-1990s.

Since the 1990s, nearly 90 percent of every class of high-school seniors has supported the principle that women should have exactly the same opportunities as men in business and politics. However, when it comes to *home* life, youths have become more conservative since the mid-1990s. In 1994, only 42 percent of high-school seniors expressed the belief that the best family was one where the man was the outside achiever and the woman took care of the home. In 2014, 58 percent said this was true.

Black high-school seniors and females, in general, were more likely than White males to give egalitarian answers throughout the years of the survey, but all sectors of students became more conservative between 1994 and 2014. Pepin and Cotter suggest that this across-the-board increase in support for traditionalism helps explain [the stall in women’s workforce participation](#) and in occupational desegregation.

A growing gender gap among youth in their early 20s. CCF research intern Nika Fate-Dixon [examined](#) the General Social Survey (which has reported on the same questions for 40 years and breaks the answers down by age) to see whether similar changes had occurred among the next-oldest age group, those 18-to-25. She found that by 1994, 84 percent had come to disagree with the claim that a woman’s place was in the home. In 2014, however, the percent disagreeing had dropped to three-quarters.

In the GSS survey, the decline in egalitarianism was driven primarily by young men, who went from 83 percent rejecting the superiority of the male-breadwinner family in 1994 to only 55 percent doing so in 2014. Women’s disagreement with this claim fell far less sharply, and their confidence that an employed

woman could successfully parent a preschool child increased slightly over the period, while men's confidence dropped.

A dip in gender egalitarianism revealed by the election? As for the larger group of young adults aged 18 to 30, they were the only age group to decisively favor Hillary Clinton in the election. Yet according to [an analysis of exit polls](#) prepared for this symposium by Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Director of Tuft University's Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE), *their support for a White woman in 2016 was 10 percentage points lower than their vote for a Black man in 2008*, suggesting a dip in enthusiasm for gender equality here as well. Only 25 percent of the women Millennial voters and 15 percent of the males identified as feminists.

Are new cultural values on the rise? Pepin and Cotter argue that most Americans have rejected the ideology of inherent gender difference that dominated American culture from the early 19th century up through the 1950s and remained embedded in law well into the 1970s. According to this view, women were best suited to raise children and society should protect home life by limiting women's access to the public sphere of work, politics, and higher education.

But although Americans now overwhelmingly agree that society has no right to deny opportunities to individuals on the basis of their sex, many are uncomfortable with the idea that men and women can be interchangeable in the tasks they perform at home and at work. Pepin and Cotter suggest that the changing views of high school seniors since 1994 reflect the growing appeal of a hybrid ideology they call "egalitarian essentialism." This combines a commitment to equality of opportunity with the belief that men and women typically choose *different* opportunities because men are "inherently better suited to some roles and women to others." Egalitarian essentialism assumes that as long as women are not *prevented* from choosing high-powered careers, or *forced* out of them upon parenthood, their individual choices are freely made and are probably for the best.

CIRCLE's 2016 exit polls found that only 20 percent of Millennial women disagreed with the statement that feminism "is about personal choice, not politics." This represents a sharp departure from the 1970s feminist slogan "the personal is political," with its insistence that personal choices often reflect political and economic constraints that should be removed.

...or have women's gains provoked a backlash? Other contributors propose alternative interpretations of the decline in support for egalitarian domestic arrangements. Political scientist Dan Cassino [suggests](#) that the growth in women's earnings power may have led some threatened males (and sympathetic females) to seek other ways to shore up masculine identity. Youth who have witnessed financial role reversals in their own families or communities may have felt a renewed need to validate men's leadership in family finances and decision-making. Cassino's research shows that many men react negatively to women's economic gains. During the 2016 primaries, he asked prospective voters questions designed to direct their attention to how many women now earn more money than men. Men who were reminded of this threat to traditional masculine identity became less likely to express a preference for Hillary Clinton, though not for Bernie Sanders.

When masculinity is threatened, Republican men get more conservative, Democrats more liberal.

Not all men react to threats to traditional masculine identity in the same way, however. In another study, Cassino was able to identify marriages in which a husband's earnings fell substantially relative to his wife's. And he was also able to track changes in these husbands' responses to two political questions that generally divide liberals and conservatives. He found that men who were Democrats became *more* liberal as their share of household earnings fell, while Republican men became more conservative, perhaps explaining the increase in "strong" agreement with traditional values that Fate-Dixon describes. (Interestingly, Democratic men whose earnings *rose* substantially compared to their wives also became

more conservative, illustrating the feedback effect between changing structural conditions and changing values.)

But wait: Married couples are less threatened by women’s gains than in the past. Is support for traditionalism a reaction to inadequate social policies?

University of Utah assistant professor of family and consumer studies Dan Carlson [objects](#) that Millennials who have embarked on family life seem *less* threatened by women’s gains relative to men than were couples in earlier decades. Since the 1990s, the higher risk of divorce for couples where the wife earns more than her husband has disappeared. And in contrast to the past, couples where husband and wife equally divide family chores and child-rearing now report the greatest marital and sexual satisfaction.

Carlson argues that the increase in young adults’ agreement that male-breadwinner families “are better for everyone concerned” may reflect the difficulties many families have had in sustaining egalitarian relationships in the current political and economic climate. When a man loses his job and the family *reverses* the conventional male-breadwinner arrangement, with the woman becoming the breadwinner and the man taking care of the family, this tends to create high levels of marital dissatisfaction. In other cases, young people may have watched the conflicts that arise when their parents struggle to share breadwinning and child-raising in the absence of supportive work-family policies and concluded that, whatever their ideal preferences, the reality of trying to share responsibilities is too stressful.

This interpretation finds some support in University of Leuven researcher Jan Van Bavel’s [examination](#) of European public opinion surveys. In Europe, where substantial [public investments](#) in affordable childcare and guaranteed paid leaves are now the norm, support for gender equality has continued to rise among all age groups. Van Bavel predicts this will continue. He argues that as women increasingly come to marriage with more education than their partners *and* have access to policies allowing them to integrate work and family responsibilities, they are less likely to cut back their work commitments after having children, further eroding the cultural norm of male breadwinning.

Even in the United States, the seeming stall in women’s workforce participation may mask important changes, according to a [new paper](#) by economists Claudia Goldin and Joshua Mitchell. As women enter motherhood at a later age, they work longer before taking time off for parenting. And the longer women work prior to having children, the longer they tend to work once they return. Furthermore, fewer women actually *quit* their jobs after a first birth, and more take leaves that make it easier for them to return to full-time employment in the same job. The proportion of women who quit their jobs around the time of the birth of their first child decreased from 30 percent in the 1980s to 22 percent in the early 2000s.

The problem with claims about “the” Millennials. Sociologist Frank Furstenberg [criticizes](#) the over-generalizations often made about “the” attitudes of such a diverse group as the Millennials and notes that the 18-to-25-year-olds interviewed in 2014 are not really comparable to those interviewed in 1994, being far less likely to be married or employed in permanent jobs. Their attitudes could go either way, depending on the economic and political changes that occur over the next several years.

Finally, as CCF Board President [Barbara Risman](#) observes, people are full of inconsistencies that may not be captured in their responses to single issues. When Risman did lengthy [interviews with Millennials](#) for a forthcoming book, she was struck by the wildly contradictory expectations about gender and family life that many of them expressed over the course of a single conversation. “You can read through a life history interview,” she reports, “and really not believe the same person is talking about themselves, what they think others expect of them because they are male or female, and what they expect from others in their relationships.” Those contradictions in people’s worldviews and sense of identity, Risman argues, offer opportunities for youths to imagine new possibilities as they encounter new experiences and new

ideas. But as Pepin and Cotter warn, they also open the way to nostalgia for gender arrangements of the past, especially if youths continue to believe that their personal choices are not political.

Update: After this symposium was posted, 2016 data from the General Social Survey became available. The latest numbers show a sharp rebound in young men's disagreement with the claim that male-breadwinner families are superior. GSS two-year trends are exceptionally volatile, due to the small size of the sample, and the overall decade averages still confirm a rise in traditionalism among 18-to-25-year-olds since the 1990s. But the new data shows that this rise is no longer driven mainly by young men, as it appeared to be in the General Social Survey results from 1994 through 2014. Nevertheless, other evidence for a Millennial gender gap still stands, so stay tuned for more updates on this moving target.

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Trending Towards Traditionalism? Changes in Youths' Gender Ideology

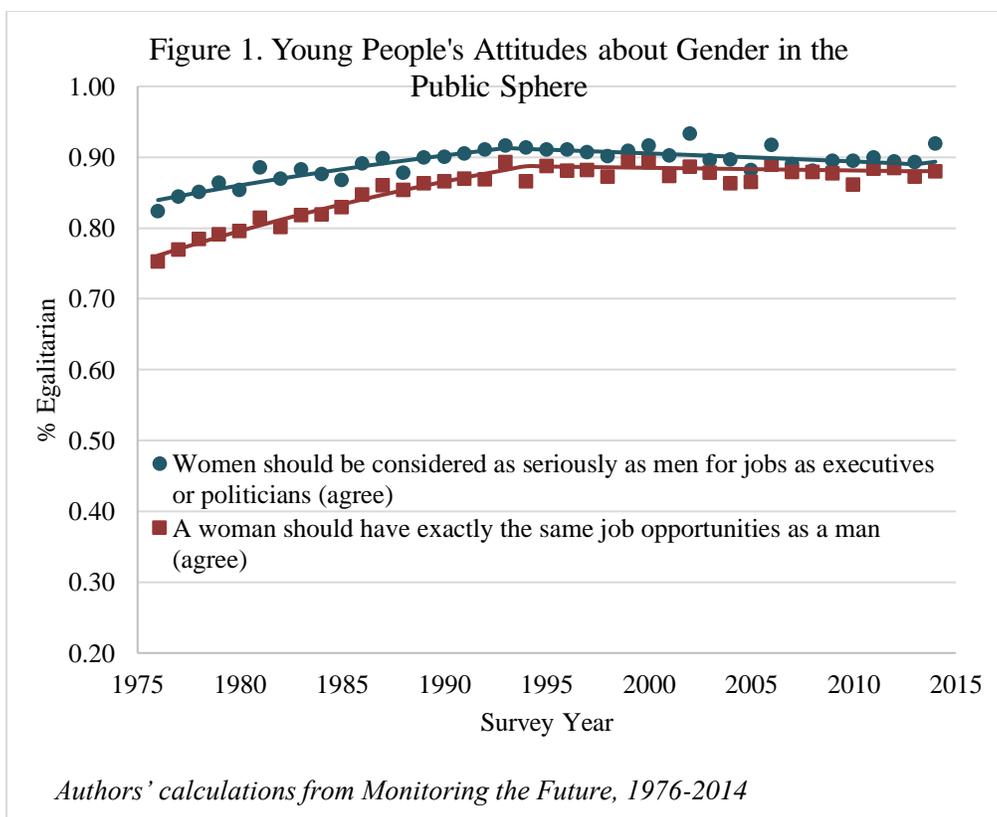
A briefing paper prepared for the Council on Contemporary Families by Joanna R. Pepin, Department of Sociology, University of Maryland and David A. Cotter, Professor of Sociology, Union College.

March 31, 2017

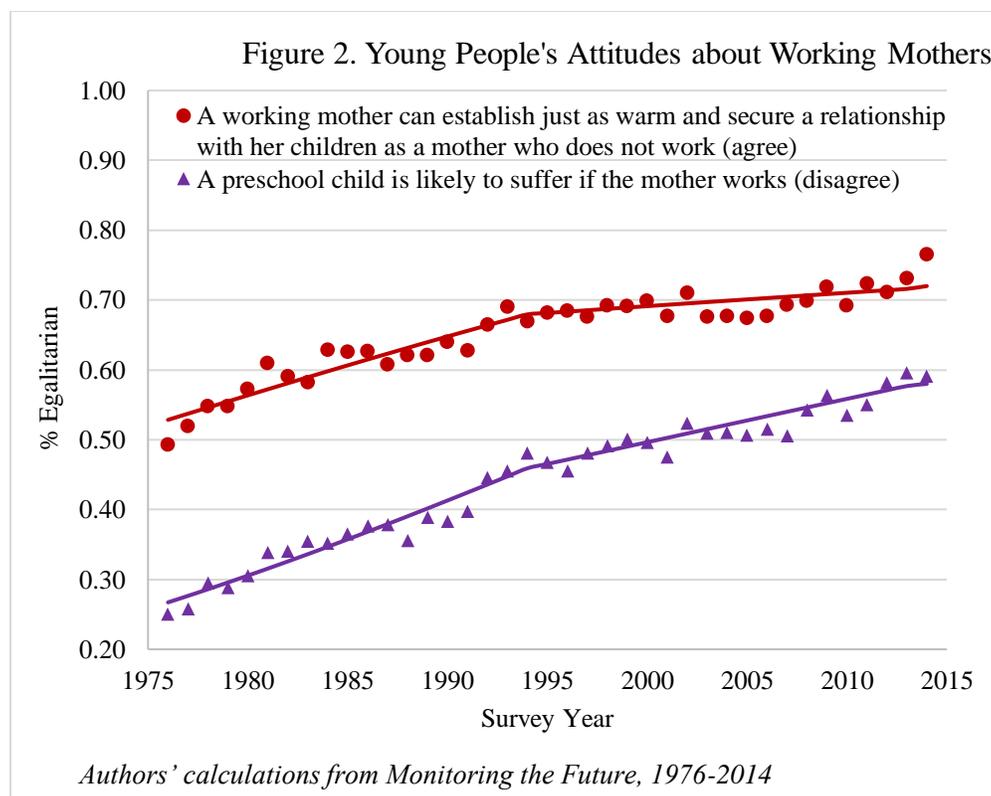
Overview. We often think that each generation becomes more modern, egalitarian, and tolerant than the last. And frequently this is correct—as it generally has been with changing attitudes about gender, work and family. Recently, though, [our research](#) has shown a surprising twist to that pattern. Looking at a [survey that for nearly 40 years](#) has asked high school seniors a series of questions about how men and women should be treated at work, what responsibilities at home should look like, and whether mothers' employment harms their children, we see that on *some* of those questions the answers have indeed continued to become more egalitarian. But on others, what had been a trend toward equality stopped or even reversed in the mid-1990s.

We focused on youth because their values are important for predicting future trends. Youths' attitudes capture changing cultural ideals that are less likely to have been reconciled with adulthood realities, such as unpaid maternity leave and the expenses of childcare, making their opinions of gender unique views from below. Although these adolescents have not yet entered the labor force full-time, the youth in our analyses had diverse experiences with their families, including witnessing their mothers' work pathways and, for many, the dynamics of their parents at home.

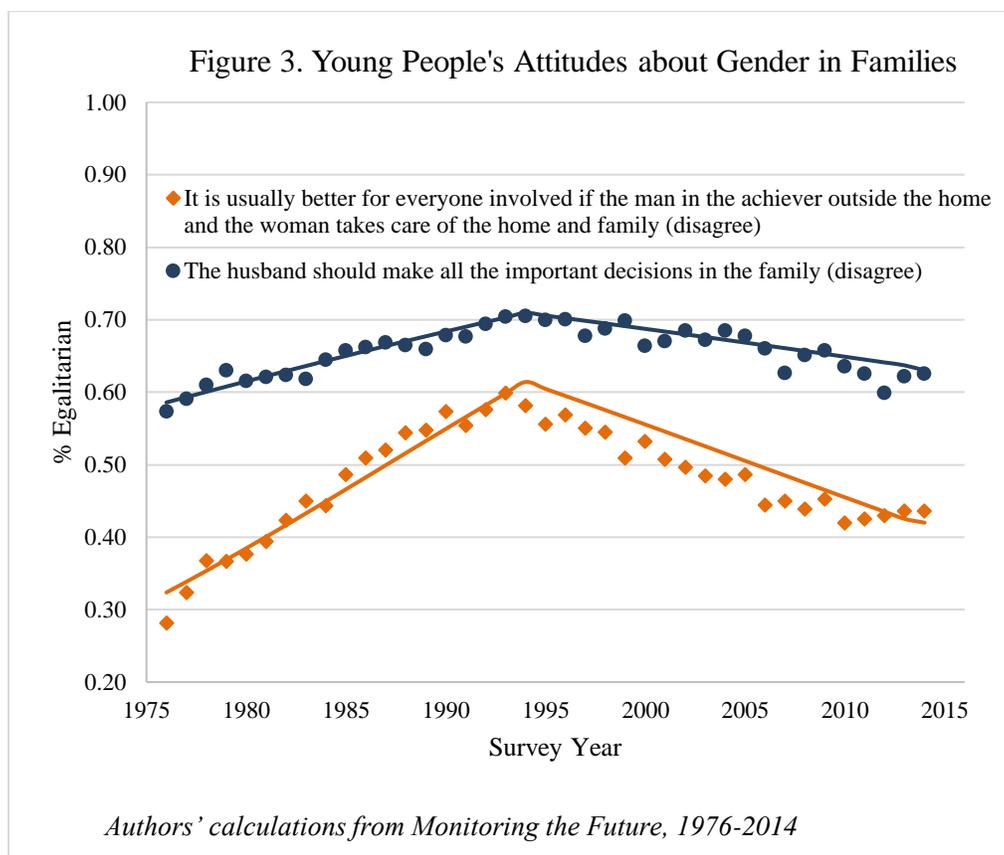
The data in three charts. When we looked at the changing patterns of responses among high school seniors from the mid-1970s to today, we found that trends in attitudes about gender equality in the public realm increasingly diverged from those regarding gender relations within families (see Figure 1). In reference to the public sphere—employment opportunities and leadership abilities—youth have indeed become more egalitarian, increasing their support for the idea that men and women have equal abilities and should be afforded equal opportunities. In 1976, 82 percent of high school seniors already agreed or strongly agreed that “women should be considered as seriously as men for jobs as executives or politicians.” By 1994, that had risen to 91 percent, a high that was sustained for the next two decades. Similarly, in 1976, 76 percent agreed that “A woman should have exactly the same job opportunities as a man.” This rose to 89 percent in 1994 and has remained stable through 2014. Essentially, starting in the mid-1970s, youth's attitudes became more egalitarian and plateaued at a high level of egalitarianism since the mid-1990s.



Young people's attitudes with regard to employed mothers' relationship with their children show greater variability over the period (see Figure 2). We observed high school seniors becoming more supportive of employed mothers from 1977 through 1994, with their support slowing for a period thereafter, and then becoming more supportive again in the mid-2000s. When asked whether "a working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work," only about half (49 percent) of high school seniors agreed in 1976, but this had risen to more than two-thirds (68 percent) by 1994 and three-quarters (76 percent) by 2014. In 1976, about three-quarters of high school seniors agreed that "a preschool child is likely to suffer if the mother works." By 1994, however, nearly half (48 percent) disagreed, and by 2014 about 60 percent disagreed. This dramatic change suggests that the "mommy wars" and similar controversies seem to have abated. There appears to be broad and growing acceptance of mothers' employment.



But a very different and surprising trend is evident in attitudes about gender dynamics in families (in Figure 3). After becoming more egalitarian for almost twenty years, high school seniors' thinking about a husband's authority and divisions of labor at home has since become substantially more traditional. In 1976, when they were asked whether "it is usually better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family," fewer than 30 percent of high school seniors disagreed. By 1994, disagreement with the claim that the male breadwinner–female homemaker family is the best household arrangement had almost doubled, rising to 58 percent. By 2014, however, it had *fallen back* to 42 percent—a decline of 16 percentage points since its peak in 1994. In 1976, a majority of high school seniors (59 percent) disagreed with the statement that "the husband should make all the important decisions in the family." This rose to 71 percent by 1994 but fell back to 63 percent by 2014.



In our analyses of these trends, we found that while young men have consistently been less egalitarian than young women, the *relative difference* between them has not narrowed on any of the attitudes covered in the surveys. Also, Black youth have consistently been more egalitarian than their White counterparts, but again we saw no evidence of either convergence or divergence between White and Black youths' beliefs about gender. Black high school seniors exhibited the same initial trend toward more equality in household arrangements and later trend toward more traditional views.

These results are puzzling because population demographics are changing in ways that might be expected to produce greater support for egalitarian principles. The population is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, and at the same time, religiosity is declining overall. Families are increasingly likely to count on mothers' employment for economic stability, whether youth grow up in dual-earner households or single-mother families. We expected that as women's educational attainment and married women's labor force participation increased in the 1980s and early 1990s, youths would be increasingly exposed to feminist beliefs, leading them to adopt egalitarian attitudes even if their own families maintained conventional arrangements. Yet our findings showed an initial rise in egalitarian beliefs, followed by slippages that we could not explain by accounting for demographic and background factors such as race, region of the country, religiosity, family structure, or the respondent's mother's education and employment, as well as contextual factors such as aggregate mothers' employment and education. Even though youth with more highly educated mothers and/or consistently employed mothers were more egalitarian than their peers, and the percentages of youth with these educated and employed mothers increased over time, this population change did not fully account for the attitude trends.

We are left, then, searching for explanations in the realm of culture. For this we turn to the concept of "egalitarian essentialism" as an [emergent framework](#) for understanding shifts in gender ideology. Back in

the nineteenth century, as the worlds of “work” and “home” were increasingly spatially separated, a doctrine of “separate spheres” developed to ideologically justify, and reinforce, the division between the masculine public sphere and feminine private sphere. It is telling here that what was considered “work” included only that which took place in the public sphere—waged employment, politics and the like—excluding all of the labor that took place in the home. The tasks of caring for children and maintaining a household were seen as an extension of love and motherhood, with a built-in [intrinsic reward for women](#). This “separate spheres” ideology experienced a resurgence in the post-WWII era and was the primary ideology against which the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s reacted.

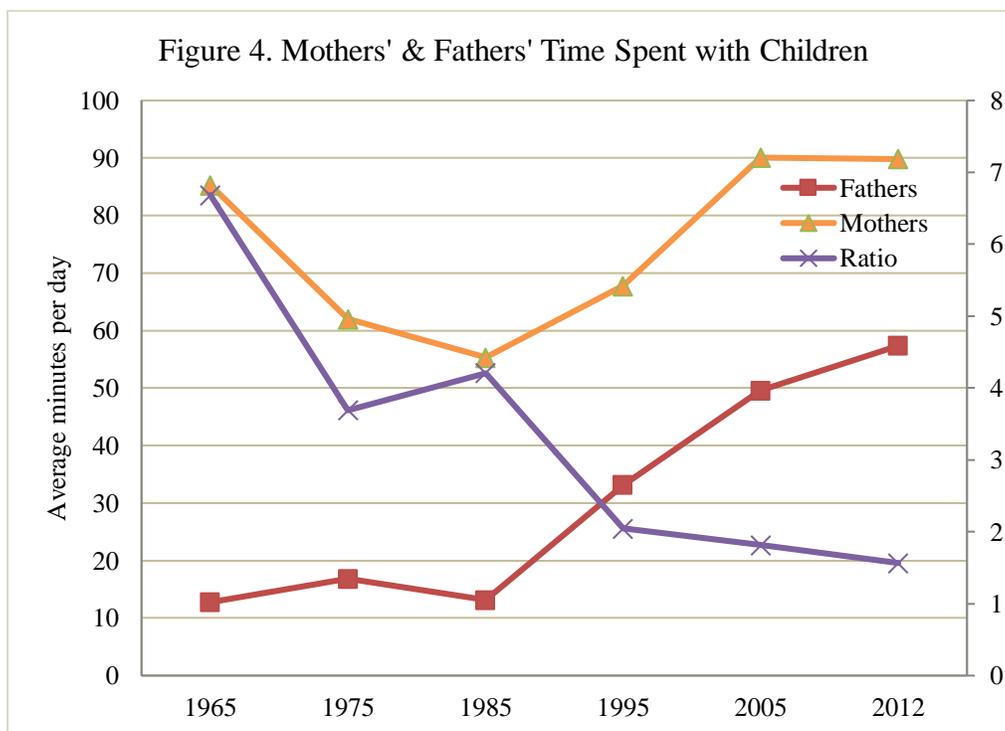
But the question became what would *replace* that ideology? Some feminists pushed for a more androgynous conception of equality, disrupting beliefs about the oppositeness of men and women. In the 1980s and early 1990s, people seemed to be moving toward the idea that women and men could work equally well in both the public and private spheres. Yet the [narrative that eventually emerged](#) became a hybrid of the two approaches, promoting women’s choice to participate in either sphere while trying to equalize the perceived value of a home sphere that was still seen as distinctively female. The egalitarian essentialist perspective mixed values of equality (men and women should have equal opportunities, gender discrimination is wrong) alongside beliefs about the essential nature of men and women (men are naturally or inherently better suited to some roles and women to others).

The revised kind of egalitarianism that rapidly increased after 1994 is rooted in ideology compatible with American cultural ideals of individualism, beliefs associated more with the public sphere than rooted in families. Tellingly, the pattern of increased though incomplete equality in the workplace and persistent though lessened inequality at home is present not only in the realm of attitudes but also when we look at objective measures like occupational segregation and housework. The percentages of men and women who would have to change occupations for all occupations to have equal numbers of men and women declined from about two-thirds (64 percent) of workers in 1950 to about 50 percent by the 1990s, and has been stalled ever since (authors’ calculations from [Census PUMS/ACS](#)). Similarly, the gender gap in time spent in core housework activities (e.g., cooking, cleaning, laundry) steadily declined from the 1960s to the mid-1990s and then stagnated.

One possible reason egalitarian ideology is highly endorsed in the marketplace is that occupational segregation permits the embrace of equal opportunity ideals without challenging beliefs that men and women are innately and fundamentally different. Even though “a woman should have exactly the same job opportunities as a man,” women may be thought to *choose* different types of work because those occupations feel more consistent with their identity as women. The path to blending a belief in equality with a belief in inherent differences between men and women at home is less obvious, which may explain the return to non-egalitarian gender attitudes within families. For example, arriving at gender parity in time spent in housework may require redefining what counts as “men’s chores” and “women’s chores.” It is notable that *most* of the narrowing of differences in time spent on chores noted above came from [reductions in women’s time](#) spent on these tasks. Achieving equity within families requires men to take on tasks that are culturally devalued (cleaning, laundry, and to a lesser extent cooking). In other words, women entering the workforce felt they were *gaining* something valuable, just as fathers stepping up participation in parenting felt they were *gaining* something valuable, but everybody hates housework.

A potential argument against our cultural explanation could be the fact that gender equalization appears to be continuing apace with regard to child-rearing. As noted above, [fathers continue to increase their time spent with children](#) (see Figure 4), even as they lag behind in matching women’s housework time. Mothers’ earnings are increasingly thought of as essential to the family, rather than considered supplemental income. Although we can only speculate, these developments may be better explained by

rising economic insecurity than by a continued progression of commitment to androgynous parenting. Economic necessity may be associated with increased support for mothers' employment, even as more young people began to report a preference for the male breadwinner–female homemaker model starting in the mid-1990s.



Authors' calculations from American Heritage Time Use Study (AHTUS-X)

It has long been assumed that progress for women in the public sphere would result in improvement for women in the family. However, our findings, [along with other scholarship](#), suggest that advances for women in the public sphere may increase many people's desire to reinforce gender essentialist ideology in the family. Perhaps surprisingly, we didn't find a pairing of egalitarian and essentialist ideology among survey respondents, where high school students endorsed the male breadwinner arrangement but also equal decision-making at home. Instead, the increase in agreement with the statement "the husband should make all the important decisions in the family" suggests that a significant minority of youths have reverted to an endorsement of male supremacy, at least within the family realm. So long as essentialist beliefs about innate differences in men and women persist, efforts to equalize women's standing with men may remain stalled.

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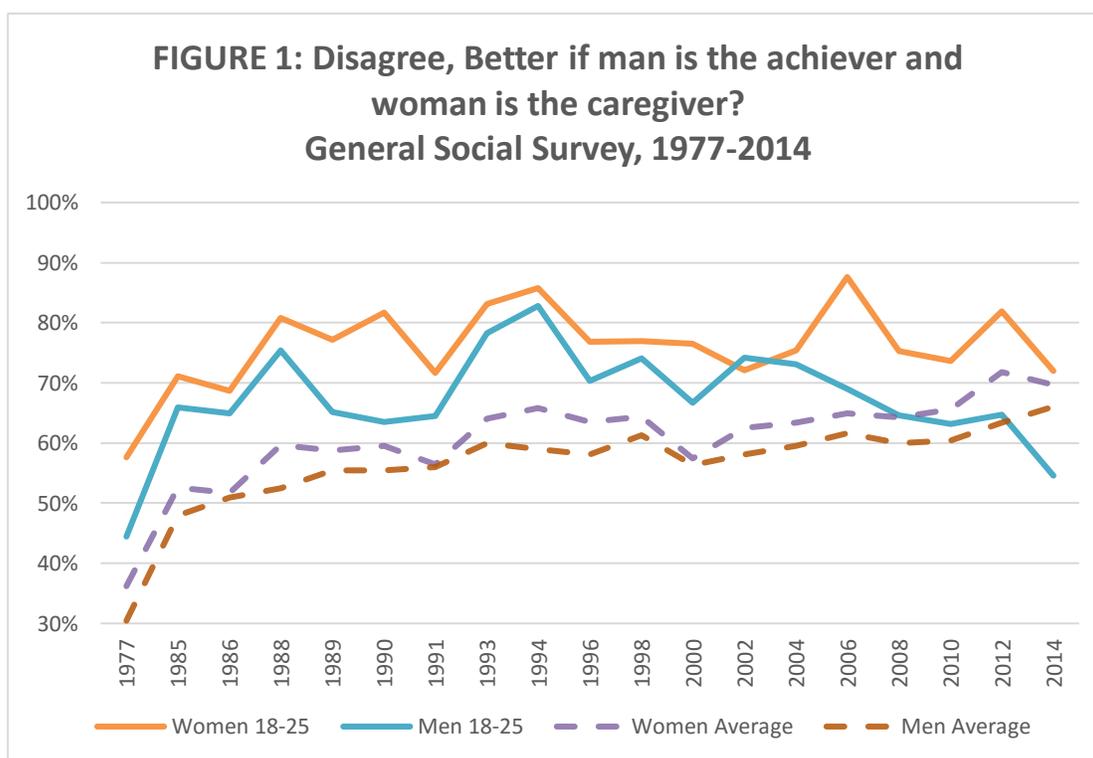
Are Some Millennials Rethinking the Gender Revolution? Long-Range Trends in Views of Non-Traditional Roles for Women

A briefing paper prepared for the Council on Contemporary Families by Nika Fate-Dixon, The Evergreen State College.

March 31, 2017

Since 1977, the General Social Survey has asked Americans their opinion about the best expressions of gender in private and public life, and especially about the presence of mothers in the workforce. Overall, there has been a tremendous increase in the public’s endorsement of equality at home and in the workplace over the past 40 years. The latest data available from 2014 confirm that on the whole progress continues. However, the average gains between 1977 and 2014 obscure certain setbacks since the mid-1990s, concentrated, somewhat surprisingly, among a segment of young adults aged 18 to 25, who in 2014 seem to be more conservative on a few issues than their comparable age group was in 1994.

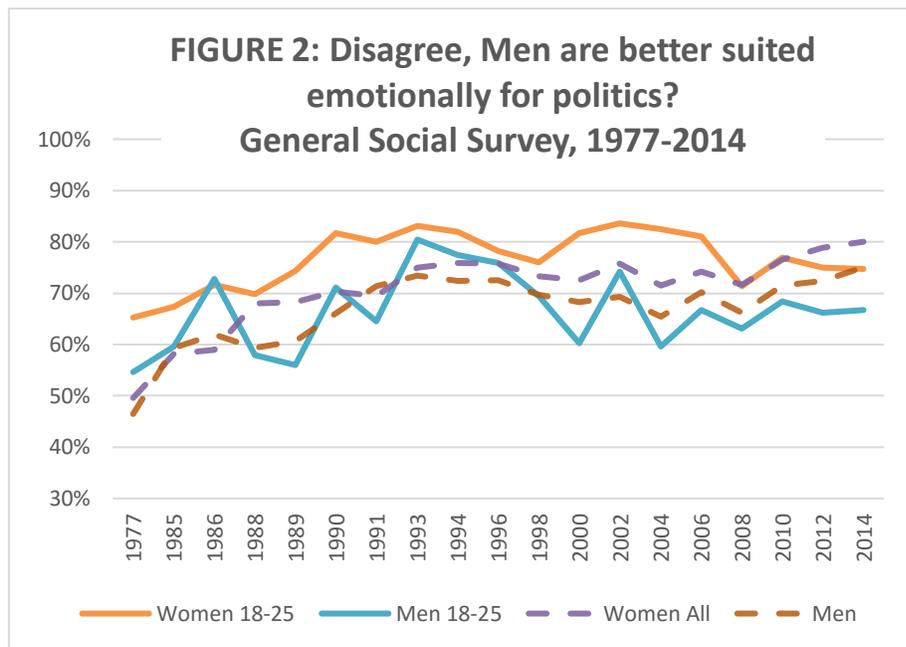
I analyzed a set of GSS questions, including “It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family,” looking at data from 1977 to 2014, inspired by [Pepin and Cotter’s](#) study of gender attitudes in the Monitoring the Future data that they so provocatively revealed. For my study, I looked at people ages 18 to 25, and I found a fascinating record of change—and a few puzzles.



We have undeniably come a long way since 1977. In that year two-thirds of Americans agreed that “it is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family” (see Figure 1). Nearly two-thirds of respondents believed that preschool children were harmed if their mother worked outside the home (see Figure 3), and slightly less than half thought a working mother could develop as warm a relationship with her children as a stay-at-home mother (see Figure 4). Fewer than half thought women and men were equally suited for a career in politics (see Figure 2).

Yet over time, values shifted. By 1994, a majority of Americans believed that men and women were equally capable of succeeding in work and politics and that this did not necessarily harm a mother’s relationship with her children. Opinions about gender roles at home had been turned upside down. Now two-thirds of those surveyed *disagreed* with the claim that the male breadwinner/female homemaker was the ideal arrangement. By 1994, fewer than half still believed that preschoolers were negatively affected when their mothers worked, and 69 percent thought that mothers who worked *could* have as warm of a relationship with their children as mothers at home. Almost three-quarters of respondents believed that

women and men were equally suited for politics, as seen in Figure 2.



The next decade saw [some backsliding in](#) support for gender equality. By 2000 the proportion of Americans agreeing that a woman's place was in the home had ticked up by six percentage points, as had the proportion expressing the belief that working mothers caused their preschoolers harm, which can be seen in Figure 3. In 2000, the number of people that said working

mothers could not have as warm a relationship with their children as full-time homemakers went up by eight percentage points compared to 1994 (See Figure 4). And the numbers saying that women were not as suited for politics as men rose by four percentage points.

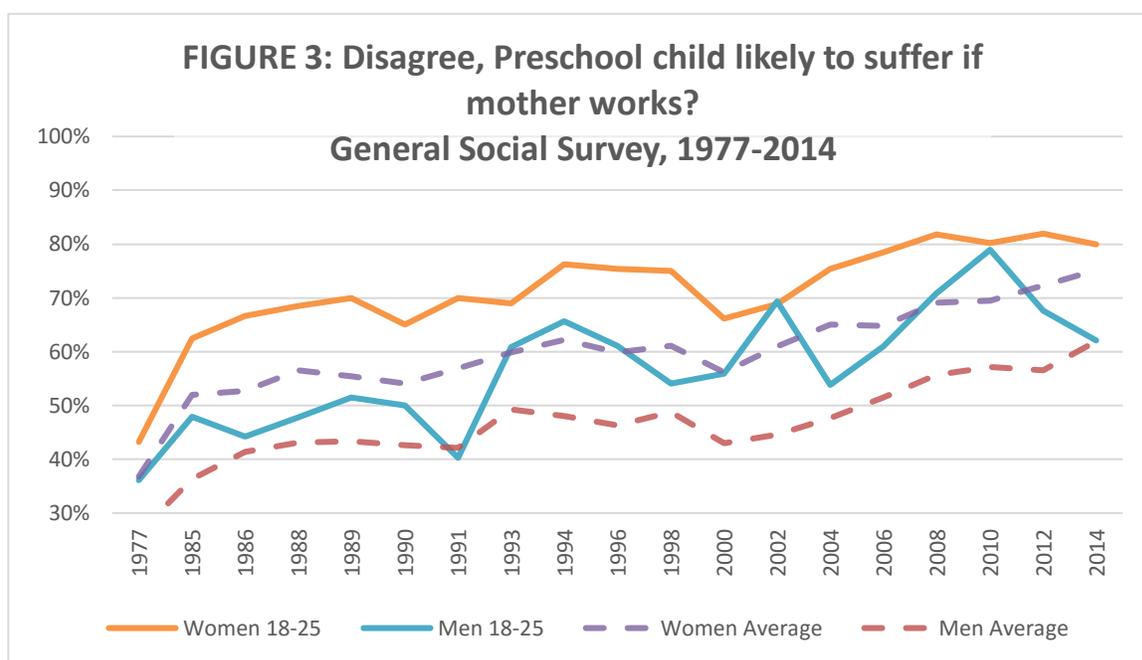
However, acceptance of gender equity seemed to [rebound](#) in the next decade. The proportion of Americans [who rejected the superiority of the male breadwinner family](#) climbed to 68 percent in 2014. The number of Americans disagreeing that [working mothers harmed their preschool children](#) rose from about half in 2000 to about two-thirds in 2014.

By 2014 less than a quarter of the population – a record low – expressed the view that [working moms could not be as close to their children as stay-at-home moms](#). The year 2014 also set a record high for

most Americans thinking that [women were equally capable as men](#) in politics, with 78 percent endorsing this view.

Beneath this overall progress, there was one exception to the upward trend in support for gender equality, and that was among young adults aged 18 to 25. After 1994, and especially after 2010, this age group saw a stall, and in some cases a fall-off, in the proportion supporting gender equality in the home, particularly on questions about men's and women's roles in the family and the abilities of employed mothers to successfully raise children. As noted below, the GSS findings for that age group are based on a rather small sample, and thus relatively minor changes among those interviewed from year to year may exaggerate the amount of change, but the trends in those samples do suggest that the high school seniors discussed in the lead briefing paper by [Pepin and Cotter](#) don't simply represent a blip on the historical radar.

By 1994, 71 percent of 18-to-25-year-olds rejected the claim that preschool children suffer if their mother works out of the home. In other words, more than 70 percent of young adults thought women could combine employment and family without harming their children. In the years following, however, this steadily declined to a low of 62 percent in 2000. It then oscillated back and forth between 65 and 75 percent between 2004 and 2012, reaching a one-time high of almost 80 percent in 2010. But it then fell

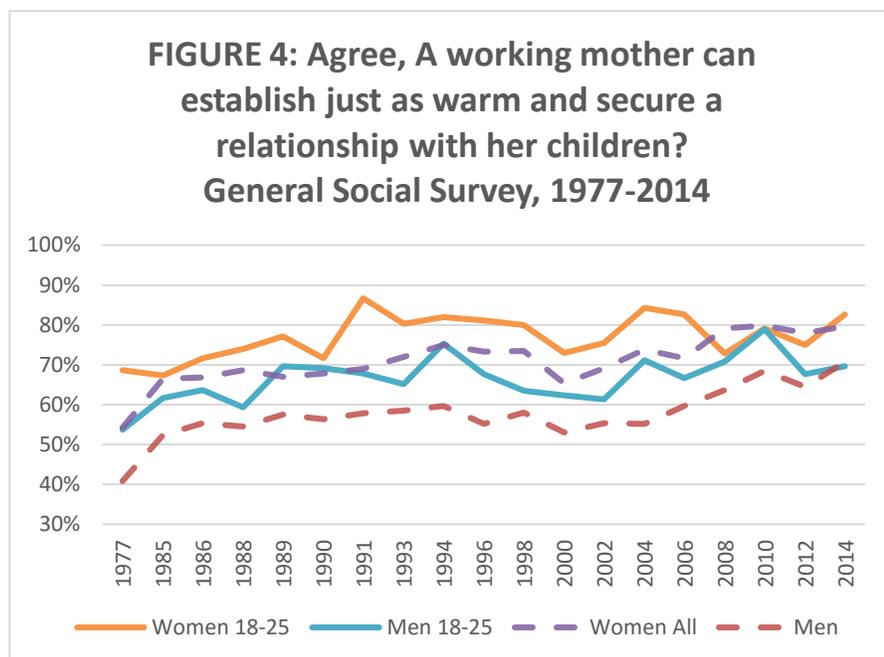


back to 72 percent in the next four years, only a point higher than 1994.

In 1994, 79 percent of 18-to-25-year-olds said that employed mothers could develop as warm a relationship with their children as stay-at-home moms. By 2000, that had fallen to 68 percent. Between 2004 and 2012, it wavered between a high of 78 percent and a low of 71, ending at 77 percent in 2014--three points lower than 1994.

This is still a far cry from the suspicion towards employed mothers expressed during the 1970s and 1980s. But declines in young men's support for working mothers accounted for most of the stall in the

first question and the fall in the second. In 1994, almost 66 percent of young men said that employed mothers did not harm their preschool children. In 2014, only 62 percent of young men took the same position, four points lower than in 1994. Similarly, in 1994, almost 75 percent of young men said that a mother who worked out of the home could have as warm a relationship with her children as a stay-at-home mom. After bouncing up and down over the next 18 years, from a low of 62 percent in 2000 to a high of almost 80 percent in 2010, this fell to 70 percent in 2014—four points lower than in 1994.



So unlike the survey results reported by Pepin and Cotter, the attitude changes in the GSS between 2010 and 2014 revealed a striking gender gap among 18-to-25-year-olds, with young men accounting for the average decrease in support for working mothers. The percentage of young women disagreeing that preschool children suffered when their mothers worked remained at a solid 80 percent in 2010 through 2014. And the number of young women who affirmed that working mothers could have just as warm a relationship with their children remained at about 80 percent or slightly higher.

The most significant drop in support for gender equity occurred on the issue of what is the ideal family arrangement. By 1994, an overwhelming majority (84 percent) of 18-to-25-year-olds disagreed that the male breadwinner/ female homemaker family was superior to other family arrangements. But by 2014 only three-quarters of youth disagreed.

Here the decline was especially dramatic in the case of young men, who went from 83 percent disagreeing in 1994 to only 55 percent disagreeing in 2014, a drop of 28 points in over the past 20 years. In contrast, 85 percent of young women disagreed in 1994 and despite some slippage since then, by 2014 a strong majority of 72 percent of young women still disagreed that the traditional male-breadwinner arrangement was preferable.

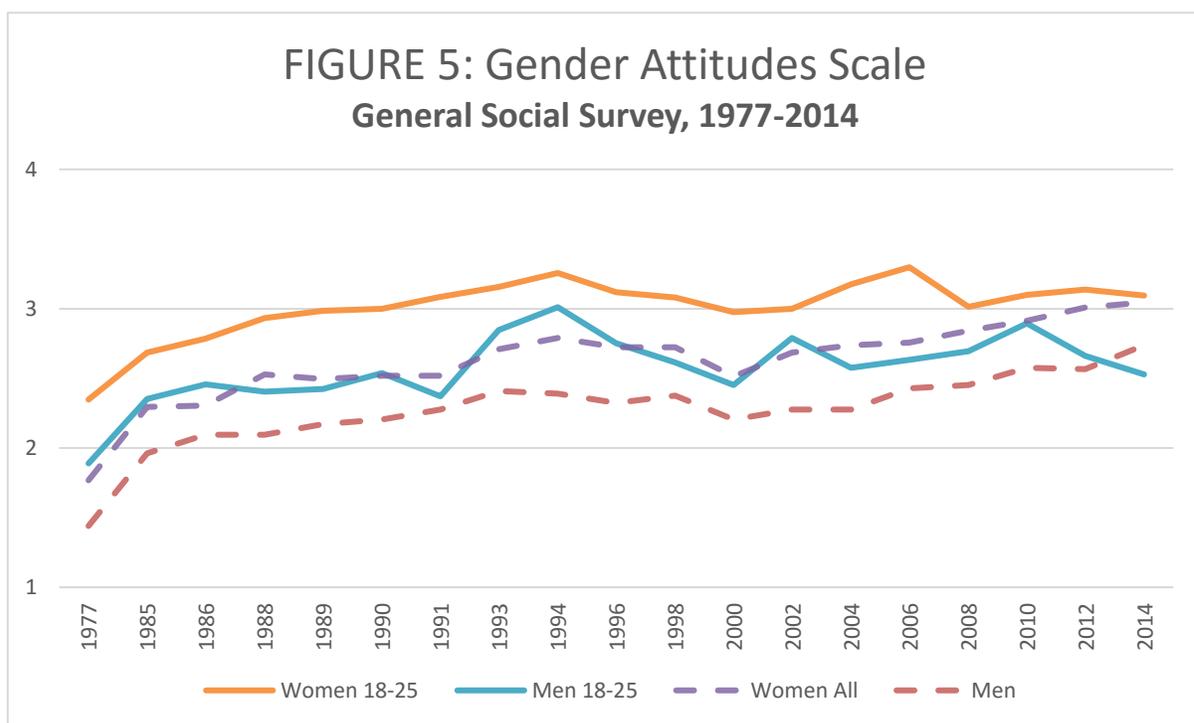
In fact, as of 2014, men aged 18 to 25 were *more likely than their older counterparts* to agree with the “old-fashioned” notion that it is better for women to take care of the home and for men to be the achievers in the outside world. In the 2014 survey, 67 percent of American men older than age 25 rejected the claim that the male breadwinner marriage is the ideal family form. But only 55 percent of men aged to 18-25 did so.

The sample size of 18-25-year-olds in the GSS data is only about 200 respondents in any given year. Because of this small number, any year-by-year shifts in attitude among this relatively small number of respondents manifest as dramatic percentage changes that probably exaggerate overall shifts in opinion.

Nevertheless, there does seem to be a real and significant downward trend in support for egalitarian home-life arrangements among males in this age group.

What are we to make of these findings? If these survey results are accurate, do they represent a long-term trend toward rejection of the feminist goal of equal sharing at home and at work, as the Pepin and Cotter findings might suggest? Or does this dip represent a particular confluence of family and school experiences for a significant group of Americans whose teenage years were haunted by the housing crisis and onset of the Great Recession? The classic definition of millennials, [Frank Furstenberg](#) points out in his contribution to this symposium, is young people born in the 1980s and 1990s, although the category has recently been extended forward to include youths born in the early 21st century. Men and women aged 18 to 25 in 2014 would have been born between 1989 and 1996, turning 13 between 2002 and 2009. Are these young adults reacting to an adolescence where financial tensions pushed families into conventional gender arrangements or heightened tensions among dual-earner families in integrating work and family roles, as Dan Carlson suggests? Or as increasing number of millennials [move back home](#), are they re-evaluating their parents' experiences or their own options for the future? Or is something else entirely going on?

It is important to put the decline in young people's support for non-traditional family arrangements in perspective. If we follow [Cotter, Hermsen, and Vanneman's model](#) in their 2014 paper and combine all four questions into a cumulative score, as illustrated in their Chart 2, upward progress is evident. Between 1977 and 1994, Americans' egalitarian answers increased by 36 percentage points (See Figure 5). The small fluctuations between 1994 and 2010 cancel out to a one percent increase, supporting the description of this period as a stall. Yet when we consider all age groups together, between 2010 to 2014, support for egalitarian family arrangements rose by 5 percentage points and became the highest score on record. Since 1977, Americans have increased their support of non-traditional family arrangements by 45 percentage points.



But if the next set of surveys confirms a continued stall or fall-off in support for gender equity among the young, it is certainly possible that we will see even more growth of the neo-traditionalist attitudes discussed by Pepin and Cotter. Or perhaps the polarization of politics, combined with continued relative losses in men's contributions to family incomes, will create even more divisions among young Americans over traditional vs. egalitarian attitudes toward women, as [Cassino's](#) findings suggest. Or maybe these so-called millennials will confound our expectations once again as they step closer to marriage and family life.

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3/31/2017

Some men feel the need to compensate for relative loss of income to women. How they do so varies.

A briefing paper prepared for the Council on Contemporary Families by Dan Cassino, Professor of Political Science, Fairleigh Dickinson University.

March 31, 2017

As [Pepin and Cotter's](#) new work shows, attitudes towards gender equality across different domains have diverged. Although young people hold increasingly egalitarian views about women's role in the workplace, the increase in their support for egalitarian attitudes about women's role in the household has stalled and even seems to have slid.

Why the lag? Old masculinity scripts, perhaps. Part of the reason for this divergence may be that changes in the labor force have driven changes in how men view women's roles at home. As women get closer to equal footing outside of the home, men may be compensating by stressing the importance of traditional women's roles in the home. In essence, saying that women should be the primary caregivers in the household may be a powerful way for young men to assert their masculinity and for women to assert their support of traditional gender roles in a world in which the dominant economic role of men is no longer a given.

In a 2012 [article](#), Yasemin Besen-Cassino and I showed that men who earned less money than their wives did less housework than those men who earned the same or more than their wives. Interestingly, and in a twist on other research in the same area, we found that this behavior was conditional on total rather than relative income – men were threatened only by high-earning wives, regardless of their own income – and that the reduction occurred in only one type of housework -- cleaning. They made up for their cutbacks in cleaning by an increase in cooking, a behavior that has become effectively de-gendered in recent years.

We theorized that this was likely the result of men's adopting symbolic masculinities in response to a gender role threat: In this case, the threat was the loss of their traditional economic dominance within the household, and the symbolic response was a reduction in the amount of time spent on cleaning. Men who experienced income loss relative to their wives did not cut back on the total time they spent on housework but only in the type of housework most traditionally associated with the feminine role.

Our finding that relative income only mattered when a wife had relatively high earnings may have implications for the recent slippage in support for male breadwinning families noted by Pepin and Cotter. A wife who earns more than her husband only constitutes a threat if she actually earns what is an objectively high amount of money. All of this means that, until recently, direct economic threat to men was limited to a relatively small group. However, as women gain standing in the workplace, and men increasingly view the world as being slanted towards women economically (whether it is or not), that small group has been growing. Of course, high school seniors are unlikely to have been directly threatened by women's higher earnings, so they may be absorbing the message that male privilege is under assault from media accounts or the experiences of others in their family or community.

Refusing to clean the house is just one way in which men can symbolically express their masculinity in response to earning less money than their spouses: The political and social realms may offer men an even more potent way to display their masculinity to themselves and others, something that we may be seeing in the exit polls analyzed by [Kawashima-Ginsberg](#). In a survey [experiment](#) carried out last year, my colleagues at the PublicMind poll and I primed men to think about how, in an increasing number of

households, women now earn more money than their husbands. Men who were made to think about this sort of gender threat became dramatically less likely to support Hillary Clinton in a head-to-head match-up with Donald Trump, though no less likely to support Bernie Sanders. This suggests that when men are nudged to think about situations in which they lose traditional economic sources of masculine prestige, they become less willing to accept women's political leadership, at least from women who embrace non-traditional gender roles.

However, qualitative research shows that not all men adopt traditionally masculine roles in response to gender role threat. Some men may instead go the other way, creating new masculine roles. For instance, instead of seeking alternative ways to buttress traditional masculinity, they may begin to stress their roles as fathers, or craftsmen, or activists as *alternative* sources of masculinity. Still others, as [Sullivan](#) (2011) has argued, may not feel threat at all.

Men's political views polarize more when it seems like they are losing ground. Men might also be more or less threatened because of their pre-existing social and political outlooks. To examine this, I made use of the 2006-2008-2010 General Social Survey Panel Study, which contacted 2000 Americans up to three times during those years, and looked for changes in men's political and social views that were associated with changes in their relative earnings within the household. The panel design is ideal for this sort of study, as it means that we're not looking at whether men support or oppose abortion rights, for instance, but whether they've become more or less supportive over the last two years. The period is also perfect for this sort of analysis, given the economic disruptions suffered by many households over the course of the 2008 recession.

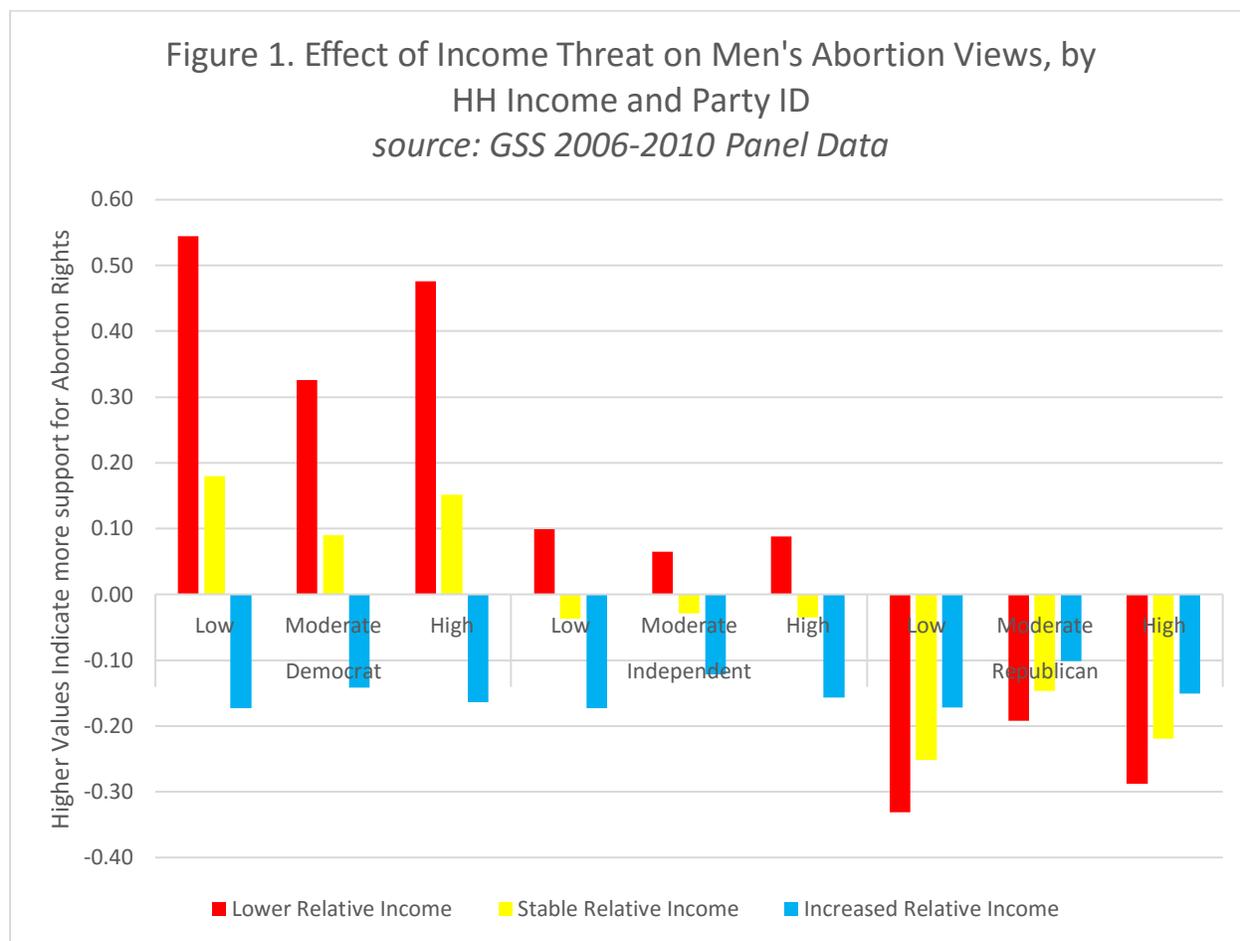
I expected that men would feel the greatest gender role threat – and therefore, the greatest need to compensate for it by expressing symbolic masculinities – when they had lost larger amounts of income relative to their spouses. For example, I found that over a period of two years, 10 percent of respondents ended up contributing about 40 percentage points less towards the household income than at the start of the period, dropping, say, from 60 percent of the household income to 20 percent. Such men, I reasoned, were far more likely to feel a great deal of gender role threat arising from their economic status than men who maintained or improved their share of household income over the two-year period. This is slightly different than the sort of threat induced in the survey experiment above (where we primed respondents to think about women getting ahead) – men here were threatened by their loss of earnings, rather than the gains of women, but the type of economic threat to breadwinner status is the same in both cases.

To test the effects of this sort of gender role threat on men's political and social views, I looked for changes in their views on two issues that have a significant liberal-conservative divide: support for abortion rights and support for government financial aid to African-Americans.

Republican and Democratic men changed in different ways. For one group of respondents, the results confirmed the long-standing belief that men who experience gender role threat become more supportive of traditional ideals and conservative politics. Men who started the period as Republicans but ended up contributing less to their household income compared to their wives at the end of the two years became significantly less supportive of abortion rights over the period. While other Republican men also tended to become less supportive, the decline was largest for men who lost the most income relative to their spouses. (See Figure 1.)

But among Democratic men, the results were strikingly different. Those who lost income relative to their wife over the period became, on average, 0.5 points *more* supportive of abortion rights. While conservative men came to hold more conservative views on abortion under conditions of economic gender role threat, liberal men come to hold *more* liberal views.

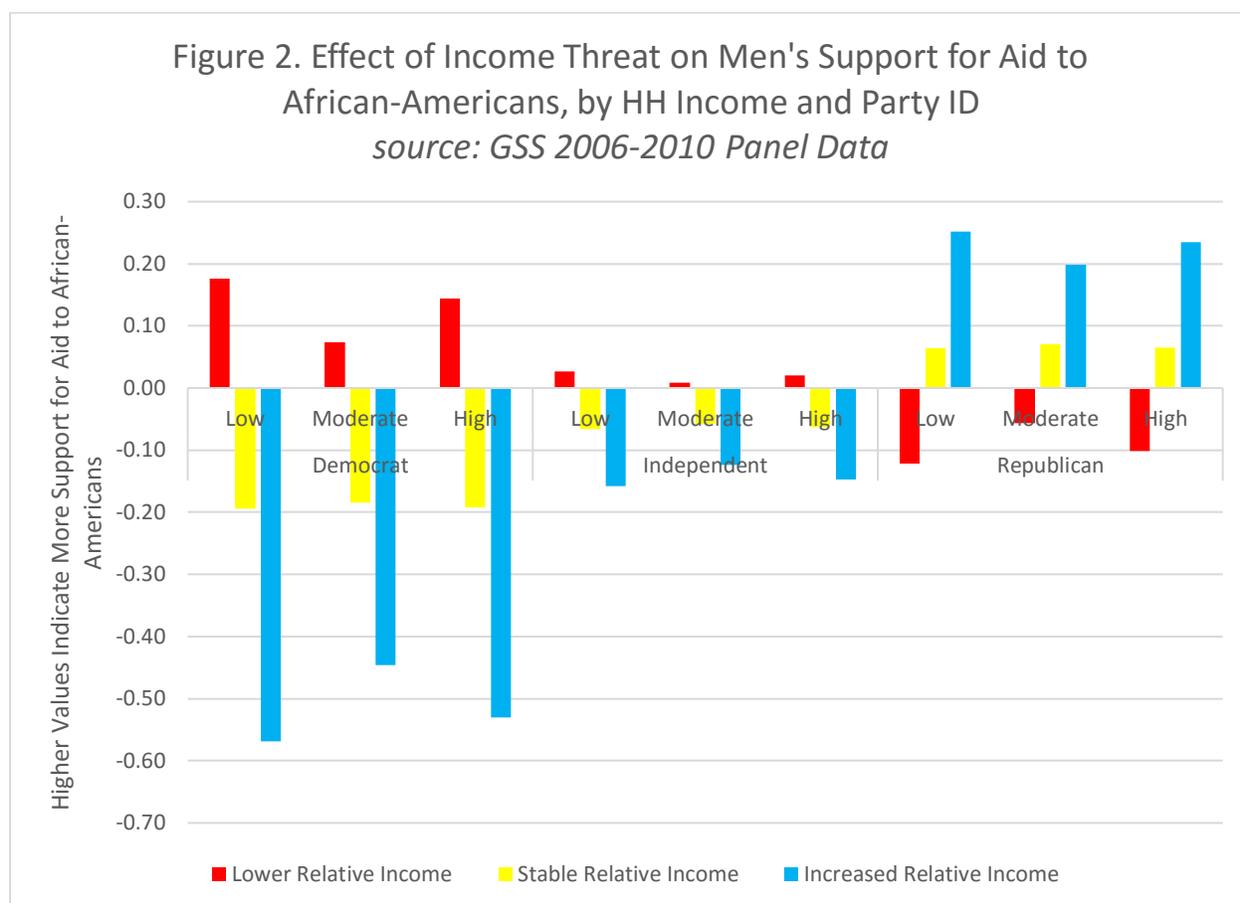
To add to the complication, Democratic men who gained income relative to their spouses actually became *less* supportive of abortion. Among liberal men, it seems, those who came to fill the traditional role as a breadwinner became more conservative in their views as well as their economic role in the household.



Similar effects hold for views on government aid to African-Americans in the same GSS panel data. The [specific question](#) asked respondents whether African-Americans should “work their way up,” rather than receiving “special favors,” an item that has frequently been used to measure support for government aid to African-Americans¹. In general, Democratic men became a little less supportive of such aid over a two-year period, and Republican men became a little more supportive, a result indicative of expected reversion to the mean. However, men who lost income relative to their spouses moved in a direction

¹ The questions used in the GSS panel survey ask respondents: “Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with the following statement: Irish, Italians, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without special favors.” Responses range from “Agree Strongly” (27percent in first year) to “Disagree Strongly” (4 percent in first year), along a 5 point scale, in which higher responses indicate more support for aid to African-Americans, and lower responses indicate less support. Overall, the sample in the GSS panel was 73 percent white, 14 percent African-American, and 13 percent belonged to other racial categories.

different than the rest of their fellow political thinkers. Republican men who lost income became even less supportive of government aid to African-Americans, while Democratic men in this position became even more supportive. (See Figure 2.)



Results like this suggest a few conclusions. First, a variety of political and social views, not limited to those involving gender, can serve as symbolic masculinities, allowing men to bolster their gender identities by adopting certain attitudes. They may become less supportive of abortion rights, or parental leave laws, or less likely to support a woman candidate for high office.

Second, instead of uniformly making men more conservative, gender role threat seems to lead to attitude polarization, with men who start off with more liberal views becoming more liberal, and those who start off holding more conservative views becoming more conservative. Men who have a more generally liberal worldview seem to react to threats to traditional masculine identity by further rejecting traditional masculinity, while conservative men react by becoming embracing it more.

Third, this sort of compensating mechanism doesn't work equally well for all men. Men without strong political views to start with (political independents in the results described above) don't seem to change their political attitudes very much in the face of economic gender role threat. It seems that if politics isn't very important to you, you can't compensate for a loss of relative income by embracing one set of political views or another. This isn't to say that these men aren't compensating in some way – but they may be doing it in some fascinating new way that we just haven't noticed or yet recognized as compensatory behavior.

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3/31/17

A View From Above: How Structural Barriers to Sharing Unpaid Work at Home May Lead to “Egalitarian Essentialism” in Youth

A briefing paper prepared for the Council on Contemporary Families by Daniel L. Carlson, Assistant Professor of Family, Health, and Policy, University of Utah.

March 31, 2017

[Pepin and Cotter](#) make a major contribution to family research by challenging the current practice of treating people’s attitudes about gender as a unitary construct called a “gender ideology.” Instead, they show us that people’s attitudes about gender are multidimensional, complicated, and at times contradictory. Most of us hold multiple gender ideologies or views simultaneously, depending on what aspects of life we are thinking about.

In the process of disentangling people’s attitudes about different gender issues or distinct aspects of changing gender relationships, Pepin and Cotter show us that at least some of the gains made toward gender equality since the 1970s may be under serious threat. On the one hand, support for giving women the same job opportunities as men remains high, and attitudes about the impact of mothers’ labor force participation on their children have continued to liberalize since the 1970s. But among high school seniors -- the next generation of parents -- support for egalitarian sharing of unpaid household work and decision-making has actually slipped since reaching a high point in 1994.

Pepin and Cotter contend that a new ideology of “egalitarian essentialism” lies behind the revival of support for differentiated gender roles at home, and that these beliefs explain the stalled revolution in gender equality as defined by the lack of gender parity in labor force participation, the persistent gender wage gap, and women’s continued responsibility for childcare and housework in families. They also suggest that such beliefs about gendered family roles at home may be leading many women to internalize the notion that doing the bulk of unpaid work is just and fair, making them unlikely to ask for change. This modernized notion of separate but equal spheres for men and women thus legitimizes and perpetuates an unequal labor burden on women in families, which in turn limits their progress outside the home. Although Pepin and Cotter point to a causal role of attitudes in shaping the social behaviors and structures associated with the stall in the gender revolution, they have trouble explaining why these attitudes have changed.

Cause and consequence. My own work and that of others would suggest that the retreat from egalitarian behaviors and values in many families likely reflects the obstacles couples face in pursuing an egalitarian division of financial and family responsibilities – an arrangement that the majority of U.S. couples state is [very important](#) to a successful marriage (Pew 2016) and that researchers find to have increasingly positive consequences for couples’ well-being.

Previous research on adult subjects has shown that people’s attitudes are shaped by their experiences and options. Gender ideologies and choices about gender arrangements in the home are just as much the *product* of larger structural conditions related to gender inequality as they are the *source* of those conditions. My [work](#) with Jamie Lynch (2013) has demonstrated as much, showing that gender ideologies are both the cause and consequence of the division of housework in marriage. Sharing housework leads to more egalitarian attitudes and vice versa. Additionally, Pedulla and Thébaud (2015) have recently [shown](#) just how malleable gender attitudes can be to variations in paid work arrangements and workplace

policies. When provided the option of supportive work-family policies, they find that individuals overwhelmingly prefer egalitarian arrangements. But when supportive policies are absent, preferences for egalitarianism decline for most men and women.

Pepin and Cotter acknowledge that adults' attitudes are shaped over time through their experiences, but they suggest that the attitudes of high school seniors constitute a "unique view from below" -- as if these attitudes represent an unadulterated set of beliefs unsullied by the onerous decisions about family leave, childcare, housework, and career investment forced upon adults. Yet, the gender ideologies of youths are forged in interaction with the structural and cultural milieus surrounding them. Children's gender ideologies are [derived from their parents](#), not just from the messages they are explicitly given but from their own observations of their parents' experiences (Carlson and Knoester 2011). Pepin and Cotter acknowledge this by pointing out that youths with educated working mothers are more likely to embrace equal family roles at home. They contend that this makes the shift toward conventional attitudes all the more perplexing since demographic shifts toward greater employment, education, and single parenting among mothers' in the population would suggest more egalitarian beliefs.

It's the policies. How, then, do we understand the retreat from egalitarian values about domestic roles among youths? Although Pepin and Cotter ask the right questions, they look in the wrong place for the answer. I would argue that two structural factors must be taken into account. First, rising valuation of, and attempts to achieve, egalitarianism from the 1970s to the 1990s were not met with sufficient changes in the workplace or in public policy to accommodate couples' desires to share family responsibilities. In the face of unresponsive workplaces and role conflict, many adults have likely reverted to conventional gender arrangements and traditional beliefs, transmitting their attitudes to their teenage children.

Alternatively, some youths who saw their parents experiencing disagreements and stresses as they tried to integrate work and family without supportive policies may have concluded that a male-breadwinner arrangement would have made family life easier. This could explain Pepin and Cotter's findings about the more positive views of children of educated working mothers, who generally have better jobs and support systems for family life. But, even so, educated couples often [privilege men's careers](#), leaving women with incredibly difficult decisions about pursuing careers and raising children (Stone 2007).

A second possible reason for a reversion toward traditional beliefs about family roles and decision-making may lie in the recent increases in *counter-conventional* family arrangements – arrangements that actually *reverse* rather than more equally divide traditional household arrangements, with women taking the larger share of breadwinning and men taking on the larger share of homemaking. Indeed, the [number of women](#) who earn as much or more than their male partners has increased substantially over the past 30 years (Schwartz and Gonalons-Pons 2016) while [the number](#) of stay-at-home fathers has doubled since 1990 (Pew Research 2014).

Some of these role reversals reflect many men's increasing desire to be more involved at home, but they also reflect real economic stressors for poor and working-class families, resulting from men's increasingly precarious position in the post-industrial service economy (Pew Research 2014). My [research](#) (Carlson, Miller, Sassler, and Hanson 2016) demonstrates that although most couples who adopt a non-traditional *egalitarian* division of housework find that it enhances marital and sexual satisfaction, most couples who *reverse* the traditional division of housework find it quite unsatisfactory. When men are primarily responsible for housework, both men and women report the highest feelings of inequity and the greatest dissatisfaction with their housework arrangements. This translates into less sexual intimacy and lower relationship quality. It seems plausible that teens who see their parents or neighbors react negatively to such counter-conventional gendered arrangements may conclude that traditional arrangements with a man as head of the household are "better for everyone involved."

Looking ahead. Most couples do not appear ready for role reversals, and many have difficulty meeting the increased flexibility demanded of them over the past decade. To the extent that these couples have experienced tension and conflict over these changes, no wonder some children have become less optimistic about the consequences of upending gender conventions than their predecessors in the 1990s.

But this does not mean that the gender revolution has failed or will continue to lose ground. Despite the stall in the gender wage gap and the desegregation of occupations, we have seen a notable leap forward in the ways that egalitarianism benefits people's personal lives. Indeed, one could argue that the greatest emissary for gender equality is the improvement it leads to in the lives of couples. Unlike the past, today's egalitarian couples look better on a wide range of indicators than other couples. For example, equally-educated partners now have the [lowest odds](#) of divorce, and when a wife has more education than her husband this no longer raises the risk of divorce (Schwartz and Han 2014). Equal-breadwinning couples used to have the highest [rates of divorce](#), but women's earnings are no longer related to divorce risk (Schwartz and Gonalons-Pons 2016).

Perhaps most important for what more and more children will observe as they grow up, an equal sharing of unpaid labor – both housework and childcare -- is increasingly associated with positive advantages for couples' relationships. In our analysis comparing the association of housework arrangements with mid- to low-income parents' sense of equity, sexual intimacy, and relationship quality, we found that since the mid-1990s traditional arrangements have increasingly been seen as less fair and egalitarian arrangements increasingly as more fair. Unequal sharing of housework, though initially unrelated to relationship quality, has steadily come to undermine it, while the advantages of conventional arrangements for sexual intimacy have disappeared. In fact, over the time span we observed, sexual frequency declined for all couples *except* those who shared housework. In addition to the rising benefits of sharing housework, we find also that having partners equally share childcare responsibilities is associated with greater sexual and relationship satisfaction compared to having mothers shoulder the majority of care.

Taken together, it is difficult to reconcile a narrative of a stalled revolution due to a retreat from egalitarian beliefs with our findings that egalitarianism increasingly benefits couples and is seen as the most satisfying and fair arrangement. I suggest that we have seen a polarization in family life that is likely a counterpoint to the polarization in access to good jobs and stable benefits. Relationship stability and quality has been enhanced for the fortunate minority who manage to achieve egalitarian relationships without sacrificing their work or family obligations. But for those who cannot – for the too many who are forced into conventional and counter-conventional arrangements because of financial and time constraints – egalitarian beliefs have been abandoned to defend against cognitive dissonance and the risk of psychological distress. These struggles and reconciled beliefs are then likely transmitted to their kids.

Pepin and Cotter's important findings call to mind the image of a canary in a coal mine, warning us that if things do not change, the promise of gender equality may suffocate and die. Yet it's important to remember that there may be light and fresh air at the end of the tunnel. Because youths have increasingly [delayed](#) their movement into marriage and parenthood since the 1970s, the attitudes of today's high school seniors are measured an average of eight to ten years before most will [begin family](#) formation (Mathews and Hamilton 2009; Payne 2012). For these youths, several years remain before they will make decisions about how to arrange the paid and unpaid labor in their marital or cohabiting partnerships. Much will likely change, both personally and socially, in the interim.

Still, Pepin and Cotter's study shows that our current lack of supportive institutions and policies to help families integrate work and family life has begun to take its toll. If something is not done soon to

structurally support the egalitarian arrangements that research now shows to be best for most relationships, people may no longer want them to begin with.

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3/31/2017

How Gender Mattered to Millennials in the 2016 Election and Beyond

A briefing paper prepared for the Council on Contemporary Families by Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Director of CIRCLE Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University.

March 31, 2017

In this study, I use the National Exit Poll and Tisch College/CIRCLE's nationally representative tracking poll of Millennials to explore how young men and women differed in their vote choice in 2016, how they chose their candidates, and how they seem to be responding to the outcome of the election.

When it comes to voting, youths are politically more liberal than older age groups, and young women more liberal than young men. Yet although young adults aged 18 to 29 were more likely to support Clinton in 2016 than any other age group (55 percent overall), youth support overall for Democratic candidates has declined since 2008 and 2012. As I explain below, this was largely due to shifts in the allegiances of politically moderate young men and to the increased representation, and likely rising turnout, of the strongest Trump-supporter group among youth: White men without a college degree.

Reflecting the gender difference in vote choice, Millennial men and women have different views of the new Trump Administration and what risks and opportunities it presents. Women are overall much less optimistic, and more worried about people's rights. Yet they do not report feeling motivated to become more involved in politics. Therefore, even though Millennial women perceive biases and injustice against women connected to the rise of this new administration, they may not choose to address these issues by becoming politically involved.

On the other hand, historical analysis suggests that young people's commitment to equality rises during Republican administrations, something that was certainly the case during the George W. Bush Administration. If this pattern applies, we may see a significant rise in youth civic and political engagement in the near future.

Youth Vote 2008-2016: Men and Women, Once United, Now Divided. In 2016, Hillary Clinton won 55 percent of voters under age 30, a higher percentage than any other age group. Despite the decisive youth support for Mrs. Clinton, her victory among this group was much lower than that of Barack Obama. In 2008, 66 percent of all youth voted for the Democratic candidate, and a solid 60 percent did so in 2012.

The gender differences in youth support for candidates were larger than in other recent elections. Almost two-thirds (63 percent) of young female voters supported Hillary Clinton, compared to slightly less than half (47 percent) of young men (see Figure 1).² There was also a significant reversal in the turnout of young men and women. In 2004, 2008, and 2012, more young White women voted than did young White men. But in 2016 the opposite was true. While the turnout of young White women remained fairly stable through the last four Presidential elections, 2016 saw the greatest number of votes cast by young White men in the past 12 years -- markedly higher than their female counterparts (see Figure 2).

² Data from National Exit Polls, CIRCLE Analysis

Figure 1

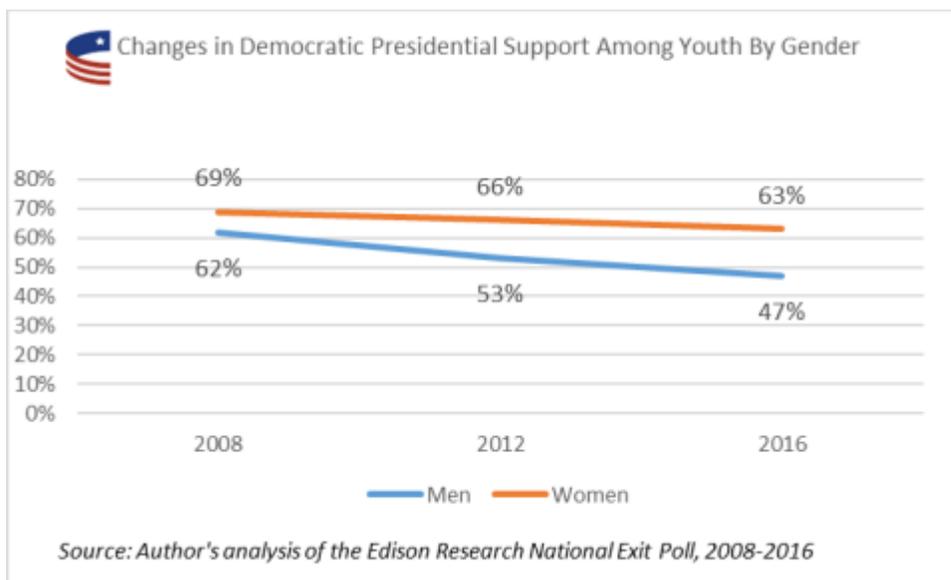
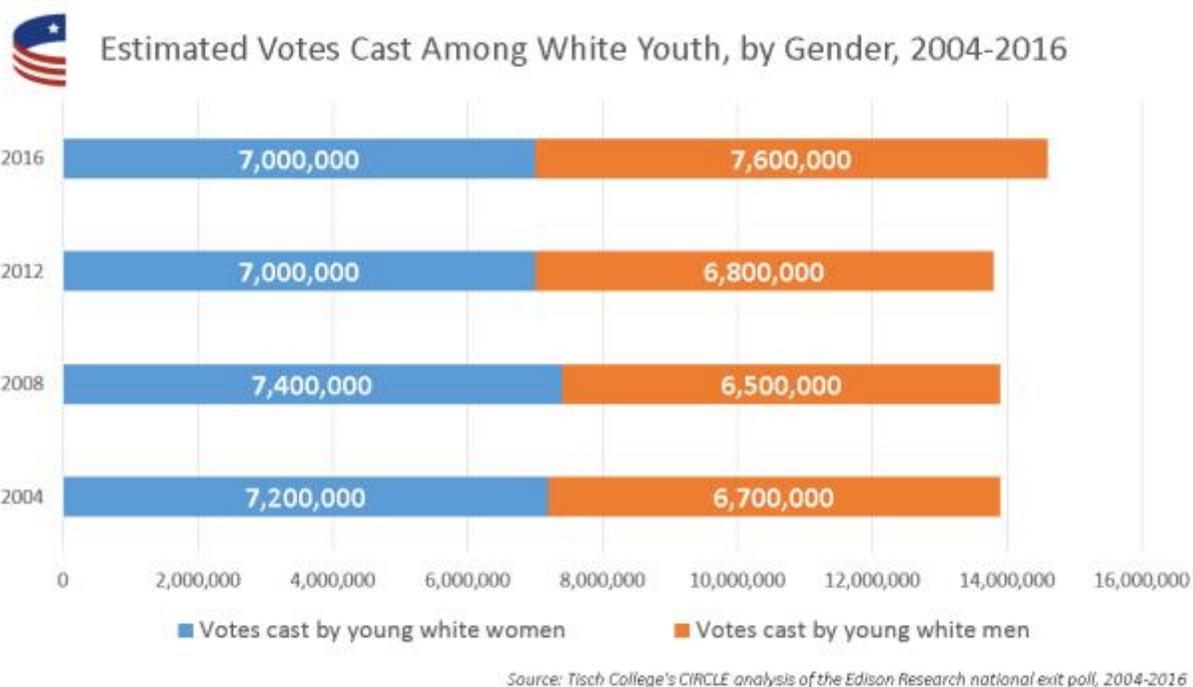
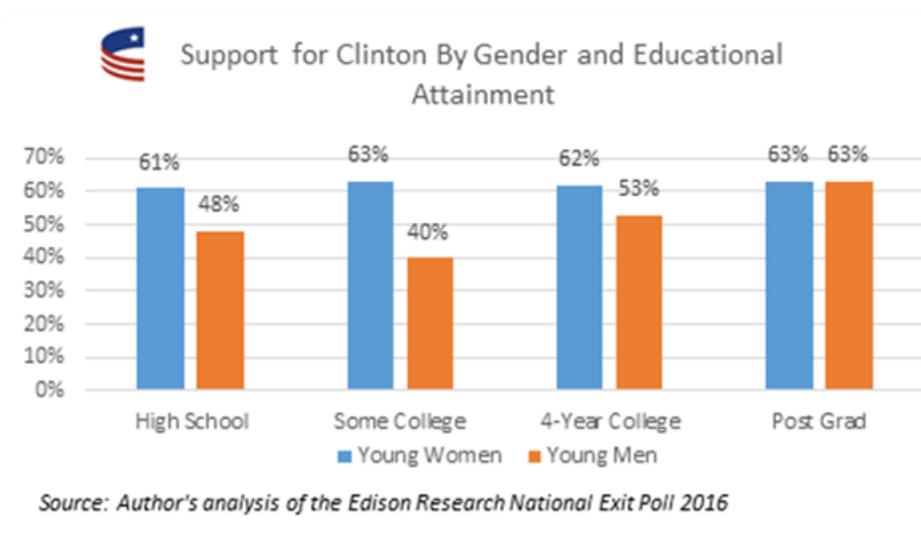


Figure 2



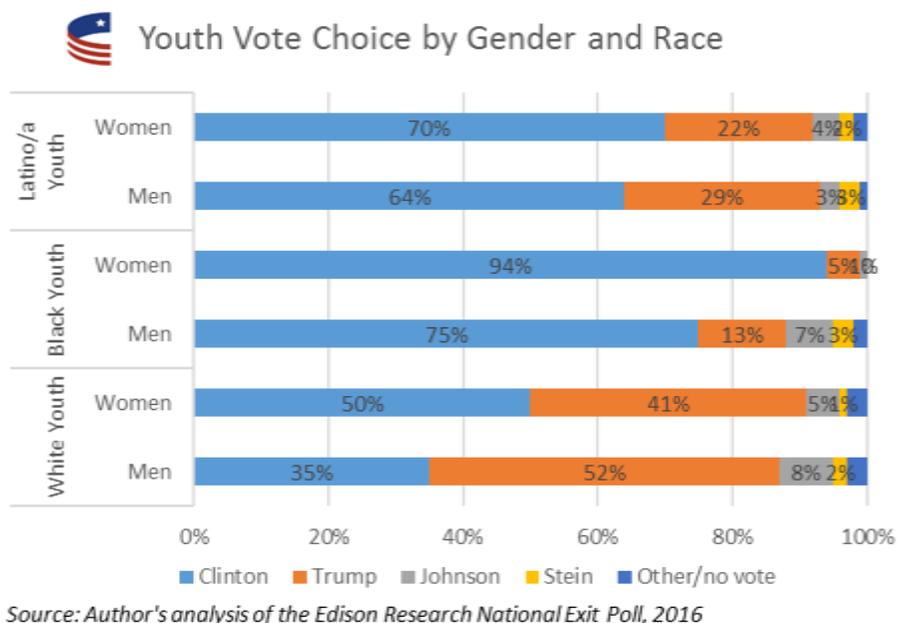
The gender difference in support for Hillary Clinton was largest among youth who had attended college at one point but did not have a degree (see Figure 3). This group includes many current college students along with those who have college experience but do not have a four-year degree.

Figure 3



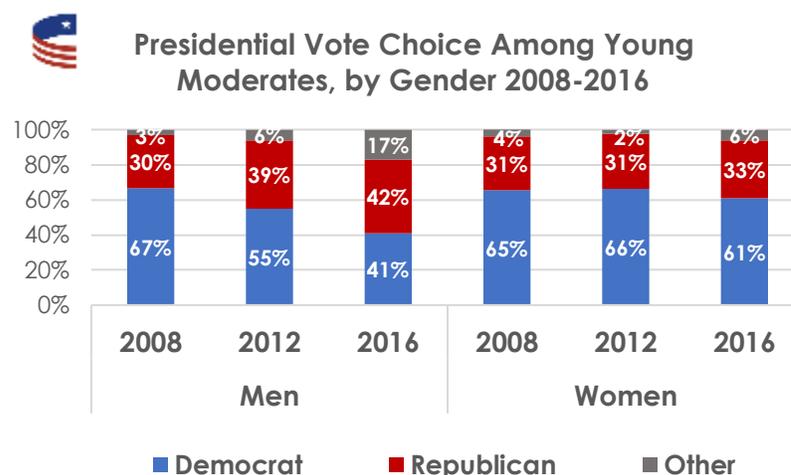
The National Exit Poll also reveals gender differences in support for Hillary Clinton across racial groups. Black and Latina women were more likely to support Hillary Clinton than their male counterparts, often by a substantial margin. But young White men comprised the only youth group that gave majority support to Donald Trump (52 percent for Trump, 35 percent for Clinton). White women were far less likely to vote for Clinton than women of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, but still gave Clinton a 9-point edge over Trump (see Figure 4).

Figure 4



Rapidly declining support for the Democratic presidential candidate from young men who consider themselves political moderates contributed to the overall decline in the proportion of young voters who supported Clinton.³ In 2008, two-thirds of young moderates, both men and women, supported Barack Obama. But in 2016, just 41 percent of young male moderates voted for Hillary Clinton, even though support from young female moderates fell only modestly, from 65 percent in 2008 to 61 percent in 2016 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5



Source: Tisch College's CIRCLE analysis of the Edison Research National Exit Poll, 2008-2016

Shifts in the demographic composition of White youth voters also contributed to the overall decline in youth support for the democratic candidate. As noted above, for many past elections young women's voter turnout surpassed those of young men's, and among White youth, women without a college degree made up the largest share in 2008. Since then, the share of young White votes cast by women without college degree has declined steadily, and in 2016, the share of male voters without college degrees far surpassed that of their female counterparts (and of college-educated youth of either sex, see Figure 6). This shift is important because White men without a college degree overwhelmingly supported Donald Trump, by a staggering 31-point margin (see Figure 7).

Additional analyses, available on request, imply (though not conclusively) that among men, a majority of whom had voted for Obama in 2008 regardless of race, many had become increasingly disillusioned by 2012, and were driven toward Trump in 2016. Young men who had voted in a presidential election before 2016 were far more likely to vote for Trump than the first-time voting men, by a large margin. Vote choice among young women did not differ by previous voting experience.

³CIRCLE (2016). Young Voters in the 2016 Election. <http://civicyouth.org/full-analysis-young-voters-in-the-2016-general-election/>. Medford, MA: Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service, Tufts University

Figure 6

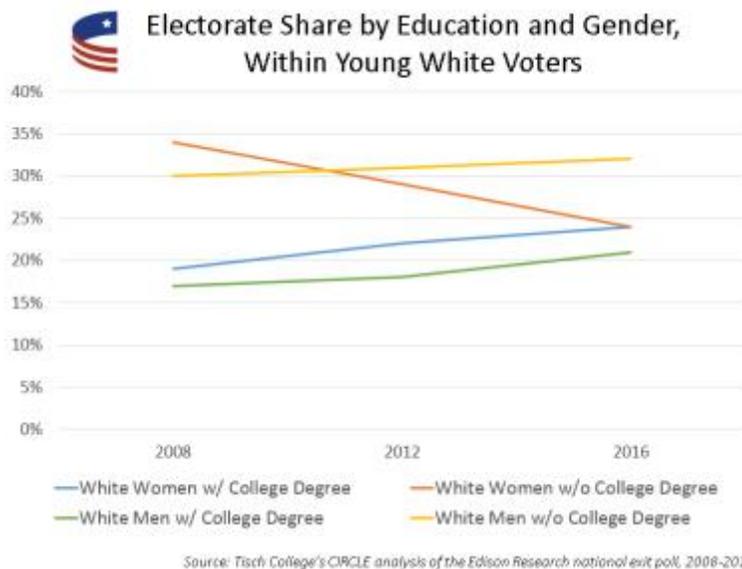
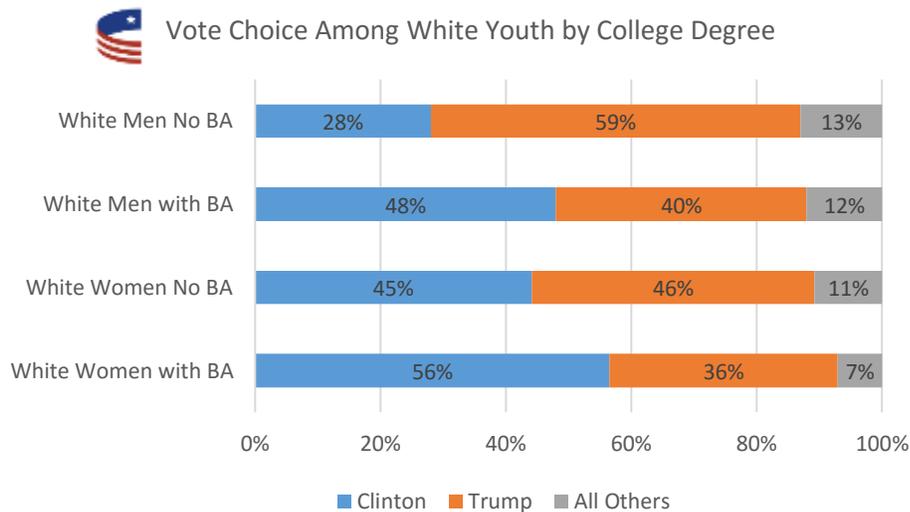


Figure 7

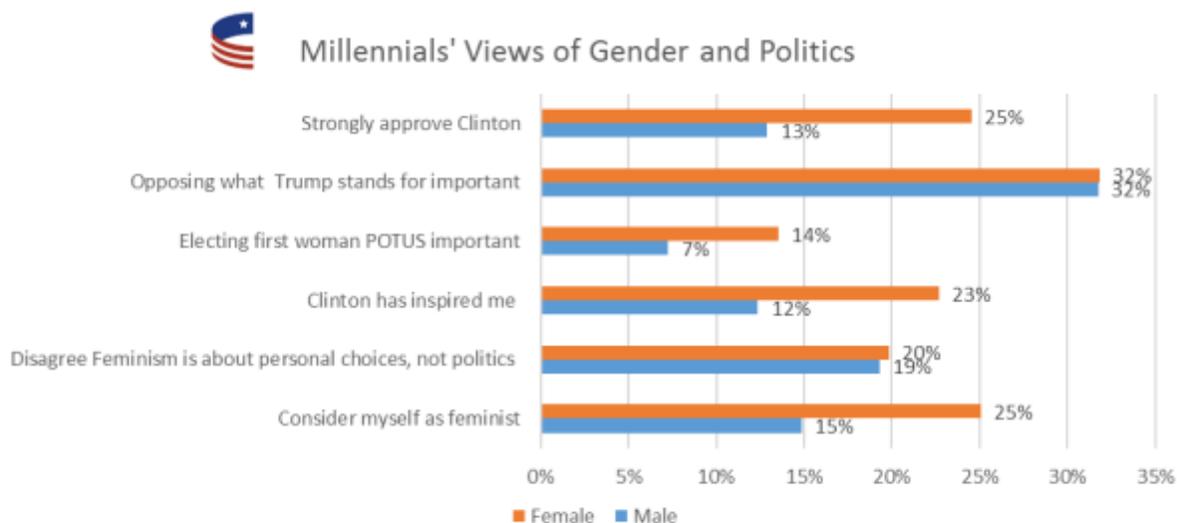


Source: Author's analysis of the Edison Research National Exit Poll 2016

Many Millennials, But Not All, Thought Gender Played a Role This Election. Compared to past cohorts of women, Millennials face relatively few structural and explicit gender barriers. But during the 2016 campaign, 33 percent of Millennial women perceived clear gender biases against Hillary Clinton in

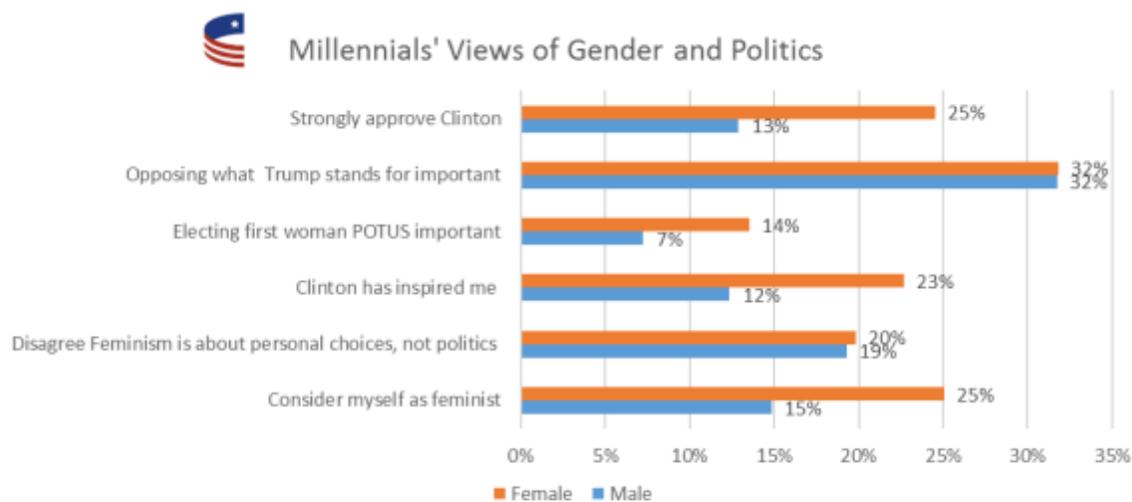
the media, while 30 percent of young men thought that the media was biased in Clinton’s favor. About one month after the election, Millennial men and women were somewhat divided on how they saw the new Trump administration and whether women have the same access to opportunities as men do today. Only one-third of Millennial women considered Donald Trump their president, compared to 44 percent of Millennial men, and also only one-third (34 percent) of Millennial women believed that men and women now had the same opportunities, while half (48 percent) of their male counter-parts thought so (see Figure 8).

Figure 8



Source: Author's analysis of CIRCLE/Tisch College Millennial Tracking Poll 2016

For Millennials, Feminism is Personal, but Not Political. Although women were more likely to think that Hillary Clinton’s gender influenced the election in some ways, data also show that Millennials, including women, tend not to connect gender and politics. Only a quarter of women (and 15 percent of men) in this age group consider themselves feminists. Furthermore, only 20 percent disagree with the statement “Feminism is about personal choice, not politics.” Indeed, just 14 percent of Millennial women said that electing the first female President of the United States was an important factor in their candidate choice (See Figure 9).

Figure 9

Source: Author analysis of CIRCLE/Tisch College Millennial Tracking Poll 2016

Will Millennial Men and Women Stay Equally Involved in Civic Life in the Future? In short, Millennial men and women are not engaged in the same way and at the same level. Millennial women, generally speaking, are more likely to volunteer and to vote, whereas Millennial men are more likely to aspire to elected office, consume political news, especially through late-night news comedy shows, and discuss political issues with their peers.⁴ Although patterns of individual civic engagement are complex and should not be oversimplified, Millennial women tend to contribute to civic life by supporting civil society (including at local and national elections), while men are more comfortable with political involvement.

But will their engagement levels and patterns stay the same after the unusual election of the 2016? Young men and women differ in their view of the health of U.S. democracy, with men feeling more hopeful than women. However, this does not seem to lead them to report different levels of intent to engage in politics in the near future (see Figure 10). As found in the [recent study](#) from CIRCLE, Clinton voters reported being far more motivated to engage in politics, especially to resist the new Trump administration, than Trump voters. Yet the relative lack of difference between men and women in this analysis indicates that although Millennial women felt less hopeful about U.S. democracy under the Trump administration, they were not yet motivated to take political action shortly after the election. It is worth noting, however, that this polling occurred before the inauguration and the Women's marches that occurred across the country the following day. According to several national polls taken in the second half of February, Trump's disapproval ratings have increased since then.⁵ It is possible that Millennial women may become increasingly willing to engage in politics.

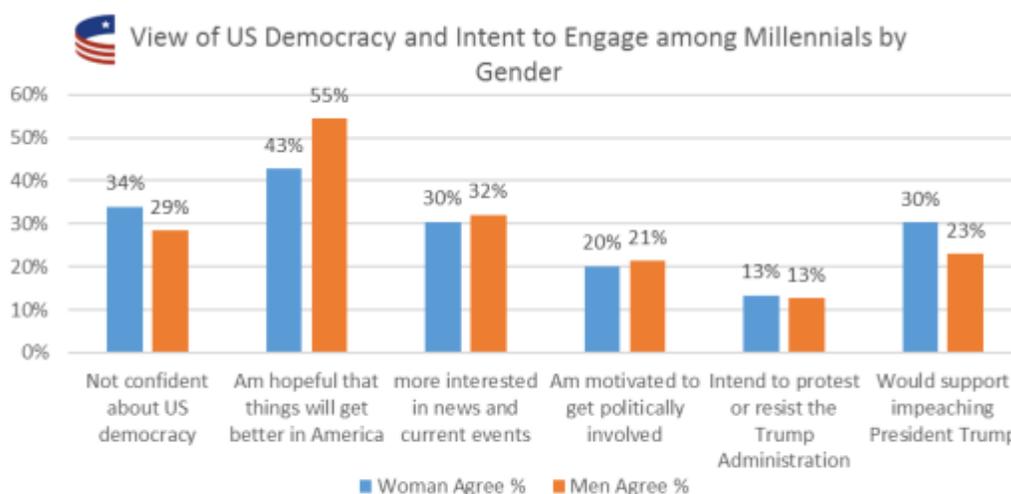
⁴ Thomas, N. & Kawashima-Ginsberg, K. (2015).

<https://www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy/2015/spring/thomas>

⁵ <https://poll.qu.edu/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=2431>;

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/17/upshot/trump-is-down-to-38-approval-how-much-does-it-mean.html>

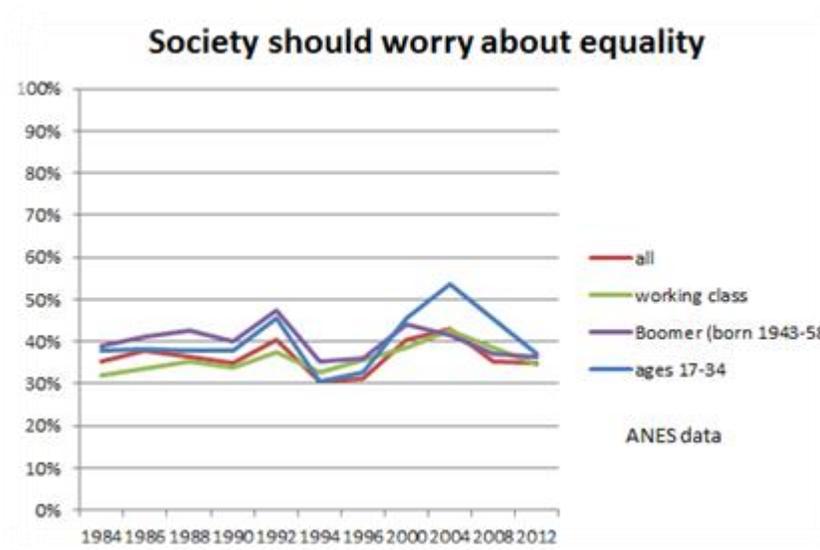
Figure 10



Source: Author's analysis of the Tisch 2016 College/CIRCLE Millennial Election Poll

There is, moreover, some indication that young people, regardless of gender, may become more engaged throughout the current administration. My colleague Peter Levine analyzed the American National Election Survey data from 1984 to the present and found that overall, people’s concerns about equality rises during Republican administration and subsides during Democratic administrations (see Figure 11). This was most pronounced in the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations. It is then reasonable to expect that more young people will become politically engaged in the coming years.

Figure 11



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Conclusion. This gender-centered view into the 2016 presidential election data highlights the complexity and diversity of the Millennial generation, which simply cannot be described as a monolith who hold the same values, believe in the same things, and -- especially when it comes to voting -- lean Democratic. The data tells a story of a generation once united by the rhetoric of “hope and change” in President Obama’s campaign, and solidified by the belief in equality, but now deeply divided and consequently conflicted over who to blame for their disappointment.

The [Pepin and Cotter](#) brief may seem at odds with this paper because it points to an important decline in gender egalitarianism, which is alarming because, if true and enduring, our country could be pedaling back from decades of progress toward gender equity. On the other hand, our data suggest that the large shifts in attitudes and behaviors occurred among a specific demographic group, namely men, and most especially White men without a college degree, a conclusion supported by [Fate-Dickson’s](#) analysis of the GSS findings. As Pepin and Cotter point out, it is possible that “a significant minority of youths have reverted to an endorsement of male supremacy, at least within the family realm” but certainly not all.

That said, the data from Tisch College’s CIRCLE Millennial poll also indicates that relatively few Millennial women explicitly identify as feminists (25 percent) and even fewer men (15 percent) see themselves as such, despite the rise in the number of “stay-at-home dads” noted by [Van Bavel](#). This may seem like a conundrum to seasoned feminists who have long argued that “the personal is political.” But, only one-fifth of Millennials regard feminism as a political rather than just a personal stance. In fact, even among women, just 14 percent named electing the first female President of the United States as an important factor in their vote choice.

Many if not most Millennials believe that men and women *should* have equal access to opportunities and power in general, a trend that’s likely to increase according to their historic patterns. But, as Pepin and Cotter point out, some now believe that *in their families*, it is okay for men to have more power, and that personal choices about gender relationships at home have no bearing on what will happen to the egalitarian political and work opportunities they seem to support. One strategy may be to strengthen civic and community education to help young people understand how their personal choices and decisions are influenced by, and have impact on, our public policies.

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3/31/2017

The Reversal of the Gender Gap in Education and the Continued Push toward Gender Equality

A briefing paper prepared for the Council on Contemporary Families by Jan Van Bavel, Professor of Sociology, University of Leuven.

March 31, 2017

Overview. In their briefing paper, “Trending toward Traditionalism?” [Pepin and Cotter](#) report on a remarkable reversal of the attitudes held by U.S. high school seniors about gender in families: While subsequent cohorts exhibited increasingly egalitarian attitudes until the mid-1990s, they moved back towards more conservative opinions afterwards. [Fate-Dixon](#) found similar trends among 18-to-25 year olds.

Despite these findings, I think that the big structural trends are still pushing towards more gender equality in the U.S. as well as elsewhere in the West. Generations coming of age in the late 20th or early 21st century still grew up in a world that was largely dominated by men, certainly in politics and the economy. However, this is changing among the generations being born in the early 21st century. While couples these days are *most likely* to have the *same* level of education, there is a new pattern among the roughly 40 percent who don’t match. According to a U.S. 2012 study, a woman's educational achievement is now slightly more likely exceed her husband's than vice versa, a trend that seems to be accelerating in many countries. This means that new generations of women are sometimes better educated than their husbands. If that is the case, they are also more often the main breadwinners of their families than in comparable couples where the wives are less or equally educated. While attitudes about gender may stall or even exhibit some conservative backlash, structural forces continue to push towards more gender equality.

U.S. versus Europe. Full-fledged comparison of the American findings by Pepin and Cotter with European attitudes is not possible because the equivalent data for Europe are lacking. Yet, as far as the evidence goes, we see no signs that attitudes about gender are turning less rather than more conservative among Europeans, whatever their age. Figures 1 and 2 below plot the proportion of respondents in the European Social Survey agreeing with each of the following two statements: “Men should have more right to a job than women when jobs are scarce”; and “Women should be prepared to cut down on paid work for sake of family.” We give separate graphs for male and female respondents, and we plot the proportions of people agreeing at different ages, ranging from 15 to 75 year olds, and in two different years (2004 and 2010).

The most striking feature of both figures is that the lines go up dramatically from left to right, implying that younger men as well as women tend to agree much less with conservative statements about gender. Second, in the more recent round of the European Social Survey, in 2010, the responses tended to be less conservative and *more gender egalitarian* than six years earlier, in 2004 – as indicated by the fact that the dashed line is almost always below the solid line; otherwise, the lines just touch, indicating stability over time. While 15 to 20 year-old men tend to agree more often with the conservative statement than 20 to 25 year-old men, the most recent cohort of men below age 20 has taken a more, not less, gender egalitarian stance.

Figure 1. Percentage of Europeans agreeing with the statement “Men should have more right to a job than women when jobs are scarce”; responses in the European Social Survey in 2004 (solid lines) and 2010 (dashed lines), men (left) and women (right) aged 15 to 75

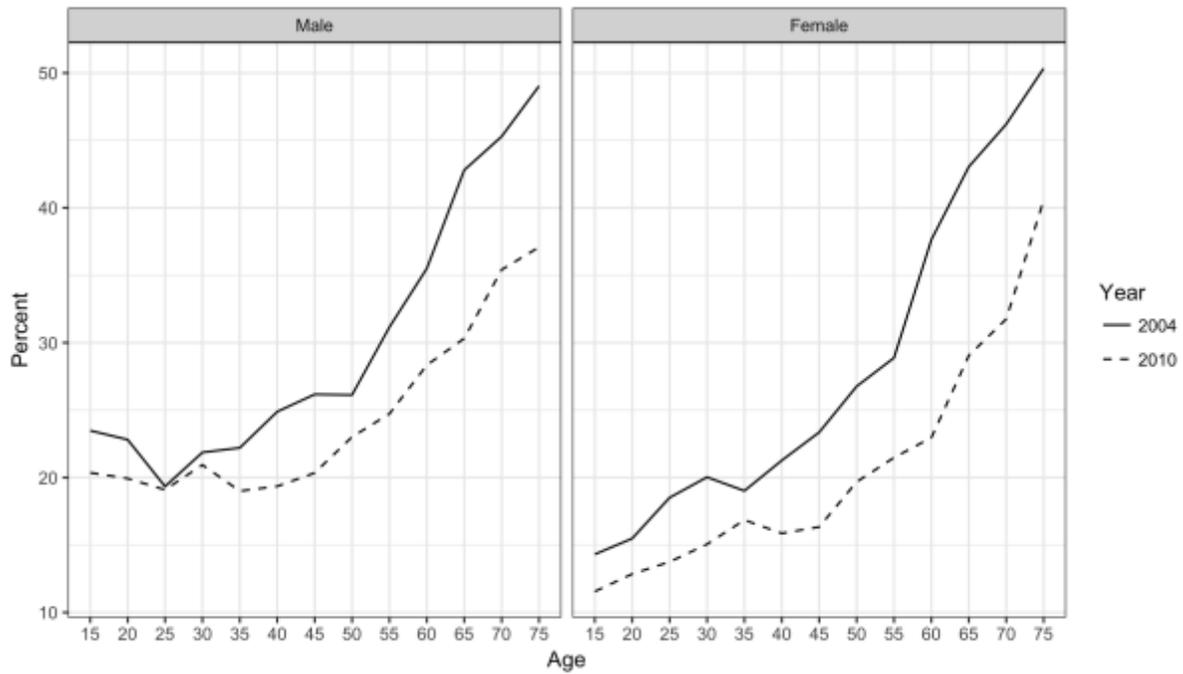
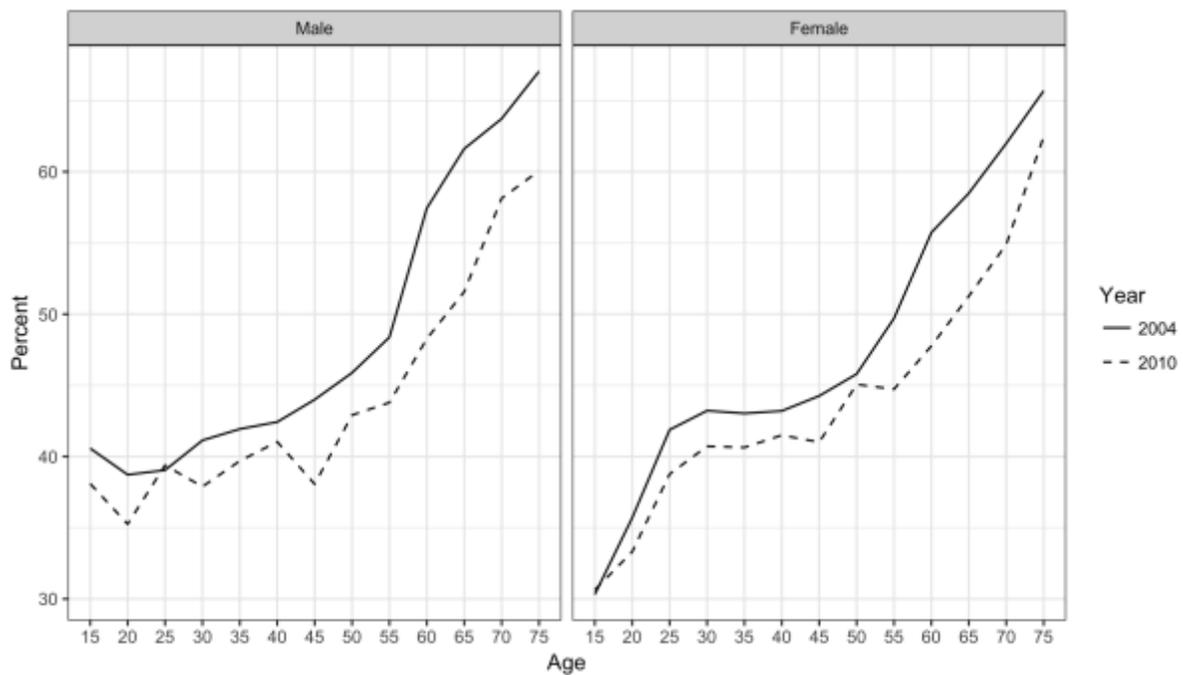


Figure 2. Percentage of Europeans agreeing with the statement “Women should be prepared to cut down on paid work for sake of family”; responses in the European Social Survey in 2004 (solid lines) and 2010 (dashed lines), men (left) and women (right) aged 15 to 75



As far as the evidence goes, the European trends in attitudes do not seem to move in the same direction as was found among high school seniors and 18-to-25-year-olds in the U.S. Despite the turn towards more conservative gender attitudes found by Pepin and Cotter and Fate-Dixon in the latter group, there are good reasons to expect that actual practices and behavior will continue to move towards more gender equality in the U.S. as well as in Europe.

Europe doesn't have the reversal—but what does it mean? In earlier generations, if there was a difference in educational attainment level between mom and dad, it was typically dad who had the higher degree. This was the case in the United States [until about 2012](#). In recent generations of high school graduates who were raised in double-earner families, the father usually had the higher degree in education, giving him the higher income potential, and in fact earning most of the family income. While the mother also typically went out to work for pay and contributed to the family income, her role as economic provider was typically secondary, supportive of his status as the main earner.

Recent studies showed that this is changing, not only [in the West](#) but [globally](#). As populations across the globe become more educated, women tend to accumulate more education than men, leading to a reversal of the gender gap in education to the advantage of women.⁶ This holds also on the couple level: In countries with a reversed gender gap in education, it is more common that the wife has more education than the husband, rather than the other way around.

When women are better educated than men, they may also have higher earnings potential. Yet, the gender gap in *earnings* still remains to men's advantage. Among other things, this is related to the fact that women choose less lucrative study subjects and occupations and that women typically face a *motherhood penalty* on earnings while men rather receive a fatherhood bonus. As explained by Pepin and Cotter, the cultural orientation of gender essentialism may be the explanation, i.e. the idea that men and women hold innately and fundamentally different interests and skills.

Yet a [recent study](#) indicates that the gender gap reversal in education has the potential to undermine the motherhood penalty. When a wife has a higher degree than her husband, not only are the chances clearly higher that she can become the main earner of the family but it also offsets the motherhood penalty, especially in countries that make it easier for women to combine careers and parenthood.⁷ In Europe, when both partners have a college degree, the share of couples where she earns more than he does is around one in three among childless couples, while it is only around one in five among couples with school-aged children. However, when a wife has a college degree but her husband doesn't, the share of coupled parents where the wife earns more than her husband is just as high as among childless college-educated couples, i.e. around one in three. This suggests that earnings potential and work experience may start to outweigh any cultural preferences of women to cut back at work after having children.

Furthermore, a female advantage in education or earnings (or both) is no longer associated with lower marital stability. This was the case in the past, but this is changing. [One study](#) found that the wife's employment was still associated with a higher risk of divorce in the U.S., but not in European countries nor in Australia. In fact, in Finland, Norway, and Sweden, wives' employment even predicted a *lower*

⁶ Esteve, A., Schwartz, C. R., Bavel, J. Van, Permanyer, I., Klesment, M., & Garcia, J. (2016). The End of Hypergamy: Global Trends and Implications. *Population and Development Review*, 42(4), 615–625. doi:10.1111/padr.12012; De Hauw, Yolien, André Grow, and Jan Van Bavel. 2017. The reversed gender gap in education and assortative mating in Europe, *European Journal of Population*.

⁷ Klesment, Martin and Jan Van Bavel. 2017. The reversal of the gender gap in education, motherhood, and women as main earners in Europe, *European Sociological Review* 33.

divorce risk compared to couples where the wife stayed home.⁸ More detailed study of time trends in the U.S. recently showed that while couples [where she was more educated than he](#) or [where she earned more than he](#) were more at risk of divorce in the past, but not anymore today.⁹

Why have attitudes among American youths shown a more conservative trend in recent years? An obvious explanation could be a romantic kind of backlash. These are the first kids who grew up with two working parents, if not with a single mother, with all the stressful situations this entails, particularly in a society whose institutions and companies are not quite adjusted to the new gender roles yet. Youngsters may romanticize the male breadwinner, female homemaker model, which they may still see in the movies and on television. Their mothers were typically doing extra housework shifts after their work commitments, which may not look like an attractive future for younger generations, especially when despite two working parents the income of the middle classes stopped growing¹⁰ and many families faced difficulties keeping up with the increasing demands of consumer culture.

Even so, it remains to be seen whether the stall or even backlash observed in attitudes in the U.S. will continue. As I noted above, the recent shift in relevant attitudes observed in Europe are still moving in the direction of support for more gender equality. If I had to put my money on it, as the current American high school seniors and under-25 youths grow older, they will experience that their own families will be better off if they can pool and share resources rather than having the wife specializing in unpaid household work and the other in paid market work. As a result, I would expect that the attitudes will adjust to the reality, which is moving in the direction of more gender equality.

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3/31/2017

⁸ Cooke LP, et al. 2013. Labor and Love : Wives ' Employment and Divorce Risk in its Socio-Political Context. *Social Politics*.

⁹ Schwartz, C. R., & Han, H. (2014). The Reversal of the Gender Gap in Education and Trends in Marital Dissolution. *American Sociological Review*, 79(4), 605–629. doi:10.1177/0003122414539682;
Schwartz, C. R., & Gonalons-Pons, P. (2016). Trends in relative earnings and marital dissolution: are wives who outearn their husbands still more likely to divorce? *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 2(4), 218–236. doi:10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004

¹⁰ Autor DH. 2014. Skills, education, and the rise of earnings inequality among the “other 99 percent.” *Science*. 344(6186):843–51

The Use and Abuse of Millennials as an Analytic Category

A briefing paper prepared for the Council on Contemporary Families by Frank Furstenberg, Professor of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania.

March 31, 2017

“Millennials” is a term coined by Neil Howe and William Strauss to refer to the cohort of young people who were entering adulthood at the beginning of the 21st Century. In two best-selling books, these authors described youths born in the 1980s and 1990s as qualitatively different from – and superior to – the preceding Generation X. In fact, in their second [book](#) about Millennials, Howe and Straus equated Millennials with the GI generation—also known as the Greatest Generation—labeling both “hero” generations. Millennials, they opined, had seven core traits. Treated as “special” and “sheltered” while growing up, they became confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving.

Strauss and Howe initially drew the Millennial cohort’s boundaries as the two decades of births spanning from 1982 through the 1990s, but the early boundary has been pushed back to the late 1970s by some writers, and Howe and Strauss later extended it to people born up through 2004.

In other words, the Millennial birth cohort has become larger and larger over time and so have the adjectives used to describe them. A recent Google search produced nearly 40 million references to Millennials, but even the most casual reading of the literature quickly reveals just how promiscuous the term has become and how contradictory are the generalizations made about what they are like and how they will drive social and political change.

What is a cohort, anyway? Demographers and sociologists make an important conceptual distinction between age *cohorts* and age *categories*. There is a simple way of understanding the difference: Birth cohorts have a life span while age categories are a slice of the population at a point in time. People move out of age groups but they remain in their birth cohort.

Karl Mannheim, the eminent political sociologist, conjectured that a birth cohort shares a specific historical experience and *may* form a common identity or consciousness in early adulthood as age peers try to make sense of or adapt to critical political, economic, and social events. This idea was picked up and widely adopted by social scientists in the middle of the last century as the Baby Boom generation emerged.

But Howe and Strauss, and many pundits since, have gone a step further, attributing to each particular age group a unique “personality,” worldview, and set of attitudes or psychological characteristics that is distinct from previous cohorts and common to most members. While this makes for good copy, the assumption that all members of a cohort share some commonality is far from settled.

For example, why should we expect that young adults now in their teens and early twenties share much in common with those in their late-thirties? The oldest of these young adults entered the labor market during the Great Recession while the youngest have yet to even complete their schooling; the oldest witnessed first-hand the tragic events of 9/11 while the youngest were infants or not yet even born on that date. As sociologist Philip Cohen [points out](#), youths born between 1980 through 1984 were in their late twenties when the 2009 recession hit, and many had already begun their childbearing careers. By contrast, youths

born between 1990 and 1994 started their childbearing years at the height of the economic crisis, and at least so far have dramatically lower birth rates.

About Baby Boomers. Similarly, sociologists debate whether it is meaningful or useful to ascribe such commonalities to the Baby Boomers, commonly defined as people born between 1946 and 1964. The oldest of these spent their early years in the politically repressive and rigidly gendered 1950s while the youngest spent their childhoods surrounded by the Civil Rights movement and the early feminist movement of the 1960s, and both groups had significantly different same racial-ethnic, class, or regional experiences. The marriage rate has fallen fairly steadily since its high point in the 1950s and early 1960s. But the sharpest drop, a full 22 percent decline, occurred [within the Baby Boom](#) generation rather than being pioneered by Millennials.

The belief that birth cohorts have particular identities has become popular in marketing and consumer research because young people are especially receptive to adopting new styles of dress, music, and social practices in language and communication. There is no doubt that such tastes are shared among age peers; but there is some doubt about whether these stylistic commonalities persist in later life (probably not), and even more about whether they extend to widely shared world views about politics that are maintained for life (unlikely).

Think, for example, about whether Baby Boomers, who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, have generally held onto to their views of the world as they entered mid- or later-life. On many issues, some have become more conservative, with a disproportionate share supporting Trump. But, a larger majority of Baby Boomers now support gender equality than did their 18-to-25 year old selves in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Another way to look at generations and cohorts. Yes, new values and new behaviors often emerge among younger age groups as they encounter different social, political, technological, and economic conditions from those experienced by people who grew up ten, 20, or 50 years earlier. Some of the new conditions recent cohorts have experienced, different from those of their elders, may help explain why, on average, Americans born in recent decades have different attitudes than older cohorts on issues such as climate change. In a [June 2015 survey](#), 60 percent of 18-29 year-olds said that human activity was causing global warming, almost twice as many as the 31 percent of Americans 65 and older. But, it is not clear whether this change is a distinctive view of the Millennial cohort. Only time will tell.

Another new development that has undoubtedly affected the beliefs and behaviors of younger Americans is that the timetable for growing up was dramatically altered in the second half of the 20th century. It now takes much longer for people to complete their education and attain full economic independence than it did 50 years ago ([Furstenberg, 2010](#)).

Young adults these days tend to [flock to urban environments](#) more than they once did, in part because of this postponement. Values about living arrangements, the pursuit of romantic and sexual relationships, and the timing of marriage have also been affected. But, these changes have been coming about gradually (since the 1980s) with each age group experiencing a later age of entry to adulthood and a larger share of residents in central [urban areas](#). It is not obvious that these preferences are distinctly expressed by Millennials and that they will subside as a new cohort succeeds them.

It is often difficult to make the case that changing attitudes and behaviors are confined to a particular age group or that they will persist over time. Rather, a succession of age groups has responded to the new realities of the need for extended education to find a more secure footing in the labor market. In my [recent research](#) with Sheela Kennedy, we found that the timetable in expectations for coming of age changed not

only among young adults but their parents and grandparents. Demographers would call this a “period effect” (influencing all age groups) rather than a “cohort effect” that is experienced by a single age cohort.

As the briefing papers by [Pepin and Cotter](#) and by [Fate-Dixon](#) show, attitudes about male-breadwinner families and working mothers have shifted away from an egalitarian direction among a significant section of the younger generation, even though acceptance of equal rights as a principle has continued to grow. It remains to be seen whether this trend represents a broader view in the general population that reflects new experiences in family life or whether it is a temporary expression of experiences or challenges occurring during a “stage of life” that is confined to an age grouping. Will it persist as young adults who are not yet in families move into partnership and parenthood? Will it abate if advocates for family-friendly work policies make gains? Or will it spread up the age ladder if economic and political developments make it even harder than it already is for men and women to share breadwinning and parenting? We simply don’t know, but answering these questions will tell us more about what is in store in the coming decades than fanciful generalizations about the identity of “the” Millennials, who are every bit as divided by race, ethnicity, religion, region, gender and sexuality as their elders.

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3/31/2017

Joanna Pepin and David Cotter: Reactions to Other Contributors

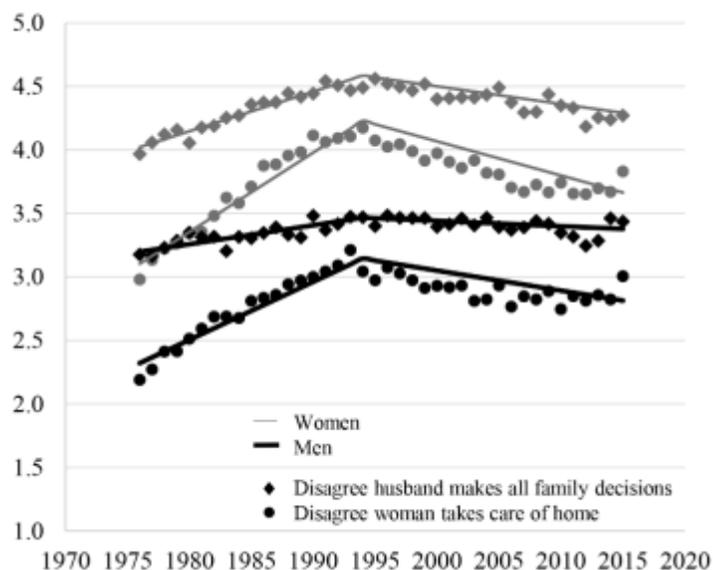
A briefing paper prepared for the Council on Contemporary Families by Joanna R. Pepin, Department of Sociology, University of Maryland and David A. Cotter, Professor of Sociology, Union College.

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Our study of youth's attitudes about gender has left us with an intriguing puzzle. In the last few decades, high-school seniors became increasingly likely to support women's employment, even mother's employment, but we saw a different trend in youth's beliefs about gender in families. Starting in the mid-1970s, youth increasingly supported equal sharing of housework and decision making at home, but in the mid-1990s, the trend toward equality reversed course. To help us make sense of why these attitudes have changed, [Cassino](#) and [Carlson](#) offered insightful reflections about potential explanations for these attitude trends. We also appreciated [Furstenberg](#) and [Kawashima-Ginsberg's](#) thoughtful commentary, which raised some important questions about the implications of our findings. And finally we welcome [Van Bavel's](#) contribution for providing the opportunity to consider whether these changes are restricted to the United States or part of a broader pattern.

Masculinity Backlash? Cassino offers compelling evidence that men's behaviors and attitudes are responsive to perceptions of threats to their masculinity. He also points to research showing that high-earning women are only seen as threats to men when women's earnings are objectively high, and this segment of the population is small but growing. Although youth in our study are too young to have direct experience with these influences, they may be susceptible to the same cultural panic about men's place in society as their parents have. While the proportion of families with women as the primary earner has increased over time, the segment remains relatively small. [According to sociologist Philip Cohen](#), for most families in which women are the higher-earner, women earn 51 percent to 60 percent of the total household. Moreover, in our data, the youth with highly educated mothers and mothers who worked consistently were the most likely to espouse egalitarian ideology. Although we can't test this with our data, these youth may be the most likely to live in a household with mothers as the primary earner. Thus, increases in the proportion of women as the primary earner may be part of the explanation, but we don't think it provides a substantial explanation – at least not at the level of their own families.

What is more perplexing is why young *women's* attitudes tracked in the same overall pattern as young men's. Although men may be reacting to their diminished role as (future) breadwinners, what explains young women's declining endorsement of equality within families? If it is men's perceived threat to their masculinity driving the change, we might expect to see a divergence in attitudes about gender between men and women, as [Fate-Dixon](#) does. Instead, our data shows that although young women were more egalitarian than young men, the gap between their views was consistent across time. As sociologist Virginia Rutter pointed out, there is a similar [lack of change in the gender gap](#) among adults' attitudes.



Data source: Monitoring the Future Survey (1976 -2015)

We also find it difficult to reconcile our findings with sociologist [Kathleen Gerson's research](#) on what young Americans report they want out of relationships. Most young adults (ages 18-32) report they want an equal partnership, but when asked what their ideal family would be like if they were unable to achieve this ideal, men and women report different fallback plans. The majority of these young men reported their fallback plan was the male-breadwinner/female-homemaker model, while most women indicated they would prefer to be self-sufficient, either by not marrying or divorcing. Although the youth in our survey weren't given the option of a male-breadwinner model or to forgo a family relationship entirely, in light of Gerson's findings, it is surprising that we didn't see a gender divergence in attitudes about gender in families.

Structural conditions? Carlson suggests that the retreat from endorsing equality in families may be a reaction to the difficulties couples face pursuing egalitarian partnerships given the persistent structural obstacles to doing so. According to Carlson, the lack of changes such as paid parental leave makes achieving equality at home challenging for families, forcing them into conventional family arrangements which they must reconcile with their beliefs. It is plausible, as Carlson suggests, that some youth witnessed their parent's struggle to achieve equal partnerships and concluded that a male-breadwinner arrangement would have been less stressful. But some also witnessed their father's difficulty finding stable employment with livable wages. Theoretically, these youth may have been more likely to reject a male-breadwinner model, viewing their mother's employment as a valuable resource. Indeed, the continued increase in youth support for mothers' employment in our sample is consistent with this speculation.

We therefore see two population changes happening simultaneously – families striving for egalitarian partnerships but unable to achieve or maintain them because of the lack of structural supports and men finding it increasingly difficult to provide for their families due to changes in the economic climate. But these structural and cultural explanations do little to account for the resurgence in beliefs about men's dominance over women in the home. As Carlson described, research increasingly shows multiple benefits for couples who create egalitarian relationships. An increasing proportion of youth should also be

witnessing these egalitarian relationship dynamics. Why then are youth more likely to reject egalitarian ideals for families than they were two decades ago?

The future. Furstenberg and Kawashima-Ginsberg raise important questions about the implications of our findings. Furstenberg wonders if youth carry these egalitarian-essentialist beliefs with them as they move into partnerships and become parents. Kawashima-Ginsberg questions what might happen to youth's beliefs about gender in families during the Trump administration. If youth do not see the personal as political, as Kawashima-Ginsberg suggests, how will the structural changes that Carlson argues are needed come about?

Is it just the U.S.? The question posed by Van Bavel is an especially important one. Knowing whether the changes happened in one country, or a limited subset of countries, as opposed to more broadly, would be particularly interesting because it would point our search for explanations in different directions. Van Bavel's findings suggest that the stagnation or retrenchment on gender ideologies is not only uneven by domain, but limited to the United States. However, other scholars have suggested that there has been a plateauing in [Australia](#) and some European [countries](#). So while the gender, work-family policies, and demographic patterns in those countries may point toward continued progress toward gender equality, we note that these tend to be more limited in the United States, and that they are at best a few decades old in most countries.

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For Further Information

Stephanie Coontz was convener and editor of this symposium and is available for further information.

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Founded in 1996 and now based in the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Miami, the Council's mission is to enhance the national understanding of how and why contemporary families are changing, what needs and challenges they face, and how these needs can best be met. To fulfill that mission, the Council holds annual conferences, open to the public, and issues periodic briefing papers and fact sheets.

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