

ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN'S FAMILIAL ROLES: Changes in the United States, 1977-1985

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Changes between 1977 and 1985 in women's and men's attitudes toward women's familial roles were examined using National Opinion Research Center General Social Survey data. Despite speculation that a backlash against feminism occurred during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and evidence from past studies of a possible slowdown in gender-role attitude change, the data show a significant increase in profeminist views of the wife and mother roles among both women and men. More of this change occurred within cohorts than through cohort succession. With the exception of college-graduate women, whose support for gender equality was high at both periods, the profeminist trend occurred about equally in all sociodemographic subgroups of the population, although even in 1985, men were less feminist in orientation than women.

This article examines the extent to which Americans have changed their view of women's roles since the mid-1970s. The late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed a revolution in attitudes toward the roles of women and men in the United States (Ferree 1974; Mason, Czajka, and Arber 1976; McBroom 1986; Schreiber 1978; Tallichet and Willits 1986; Thornton and Freedman 1979). Whether public support for gender equality continued to grow after the mid-1970s is unclear. Some studies report unabated change through 1980 (McBroom 1986;

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Thornton, Alwin, and Camburn 1983), but others indicate a marked slowing of change after 1975 (Cherlin and Walters 1981; Helmreich, Spence, and Gibson 1982). No study of which we are aware has followed gender-role attitude change into the mid-1980s. Thus it is unclear whether the increase in public support for gender equality seen during the late 1960s and early to mid-1970s has continued into the mid-1980s. Also unclear is whether women's and men's views of gender roles have converged during this period.

In addition to ascertaining the extent and direction of change in gender-role attitudes since the mid-1970s in the United States, the current article addresses two questions. The first is whether gender-role attitude change—or a lack thereof—has occurred uniformly across all social and demographic subgroups of the U.S. population. This question is of interest partly because of speculation that, starting in the mid-1970s, an antifeminist backlash arose in some segments of the population, for example, among self-identified political conservatives. It is also of interest because it provides potential insight into the processes giving rise to gender-role attitude change and hence the likely extent and nature of future change. Especially important here is whether change occurred through a succession of birth cohorts or through the alteration of views within birth cohorts. The latter is a more revolutionary process than is the former, in that change occurs more rapidly. However, course reversals are also more likely should social and political conditions alter.

The other question we address is whether men's attitudes changed as rapidly as women's between 1977 and 1985, and whether men in the United States today support domestic gender equality as strongly as women do. Past studies have reported contradictory data. As Quarm (1983) has noted, studies of U.S. college students have typically found women to be more supportive of gender equality than men (Helmreich et al. 1982; Martin, Osmond, Hesselbart, and Wood, 1980; Osmond and Martin 1975), but other samples have had mixed results, some finding no gender differences and others finding women more supportive of equality than men *and vice-versa*. Most recent studies of gender-role attitude *change* have focused on college populations and hence cannot tell us whether women and men in the general population have changed their outlook toward gender roles. The studies of college students have also had contradictory findings. Some (for example, Tallichet and Willits 1986) have found as much change in men's attitudes as in women's, while others (e.g., Helmreich et al. 1982) have found greater change among men than among women.

According to the Helmreich study, support for gender equality among college women *lessened* during the late 1970s. In light of these contradictory results, one focus of the analysis that follows is how attitudes and changes therein differ for women and men.

THEORETICAL EXPECTATIONS

The U.S. popular press, more than the sociological literature, has argued that the late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a backlash against feminism, something that if true should be reflected in public attitudes toward the roles of the women and men. The defeat of the equal rights amendment at the end of the 1970s, the election of Ronald Reagan as president, the rise to public prominence of the moral majority and new right—these political events have fueled speculation that increasing numbers of Americans reject the feminist movement's call for gender equality in the family. The apparent disaffection of some women with the feminist ideal of combining occupational careers and family life (e.g., *Newsweek* 1986) has led to similar speculations. If these speculations are correct, then it would not be surprising to see a slowing or even a reversal in gender-role attitude change during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Support for gender equality may also no longer be building as rapidly as it once was for reasons other than a conservative political climate or women's disillusion with holding down two full-time careers. One possibility is a phenomenon observed in some Third World family planning programs, in which couples prone to adopt contraception do so quickly once a family planning program is established, leaving for future conversion the relatively unmotivated. According to this model, the individuals who were most ready for the feminist movement in 1970, when it first achieved widespread media attention (Mason et al. 1976), may have changed their views of gender roles relatively quickly, leaving available for change the individuals whose support for the traditional division of labor was more thoroughly entrenched. If this process holds, the rate at which the population as a whole shifted from a traditional to a feminist view of women's familial roles would slow.

Although there are several reasons to think that public support for gender equality may have leveled off or declined during the late 1970s, there are at least two models suggesting it may have continued to grow. The first is an intergenerational model of rising expectations, in which it is argued that desirable gains made in one generation are

likely to result in a desire for even greater gains in the next. For example, Mare's (1980) work on the growth of schooling during the twentieth century suggests that one reason for this growth was the improved education of parents and their rising expectations for children's schooling. To the extent that women have improved their legal, social, and economic position during the past half-century, they may have experienced rising expectations of gender equality for their daughters. As a result, younger female cohorts may have adopted increasingly feminist outlooks.

The so-called exchange model of gender-role attitudes (Morgan and Walker 1983) also suggests the likelihood of continued growth in the public's support for equality during the late 1970s and early 1980s. In this model, support for gender-role equality is premised on an expectation of profit from such equality or on the increasing costs of traditional roles. As several scholars have noted (Davis and van den Oever 1982; Morgan and Walker 1983), rising divorce rates, declining fertility, and the increase in women's participation in the paid work force are trends that make women's traditional roles more costly to them and that thereby set the stage for women's adoption of an egalitarian ideology. The income that men with wives employed in the labor market gain, or their indoctrination by their wives, mothers, or daughters, may likewise have increased men's support for gender equality (Smith 1985; although see Crosby and Herek 1986).

Because women's labor force participation rate increased during the 1970s, especially among mothers of young children (O'Connell and Bloom 1987), and because divorce rates remained high and fertility rates low, increasing support for gender-role equality throughout the 1970s and early to mid-1980s is, according to this model, likely. The exchange and the rising-expectations models also suggest that women's support for gender-role equality should be stronger than men's. Men may benefit from women's increased labor force participation, but many observers (Davis and van den Oever 1982; Goode 1982) argue that men feel they are better off under the traditional division of labor and have resisted change in behavior (Juster 1985). According to these models, then, men's support for gender equality may have grown in recent years, but not as much as women's.

DATA AND METHODS

The data used are from two national samples of the U.S. population, one interviewed in 1977 and the other in 1985. They were

collected by the National Opinion Research Center as part of the General Social Survey (GSS), an ongoing project in which Americans' attitudes in a variety of spheres are measured in successive national probability cross-sectional samples.¹ In 1977, the GSS for the first time included four questions centrally concerned with the roles of wife and mother, items that were replicated in 1985. Two of these items asked about the desirability of the traditional division of labor and power between husband and wife in which women take a subordinate, domestic role in relation to the husband. The remaining two asked about the consequences for their children of women's employment outside the home, an issue that in the past has provided a major rationale for the traditional division of labor between spouses. (Item wordings are shown in Table 1 in the Findings section.) Each item was read as a statement with which respondents were asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree.

The four GSS items (as well as several other GSS items we do not analyze in this article) leave much to be desired from the point of view of understanding the totality of recent gender-role attitude change. Not only do they ignore many aspects of women's familial roles and power; they ignore men's roles as husbands and fathers completely. Furthermore, the items contain hidden assumptions that may bias responses. For example, the use of the word *work* to refer to paid employment implies that women's traditional domestic responsibilities do not involve work. Likewise, the reference to mothers having warm and secure relationships with their children, with no reference to fathers having such relationships, may reinforce the view that it is women, rather than men, who are responsible for emotional closeness to children. Nevertheless, the four items analyzed here are more detailed and sophisticated than the other GSS gender-role items, and are similar to items used in many other surveys (Mason et al. 1976). Their replication at two points in time makes them uniquely suited to the study of recent attitude change.

The items were analyzed as follows. First, we examined the percentages agreeing or disagreeing with each item at the two points in time, separated by gender, in order to ascertain the direction and extent of gender-role attitude change for the population as a whole and among women *versus* men. (Individuals giving "don't know" responses—between 1.0 and 3.5 percent of the combined 1977-1985 sample—were excluded from the analysis.) We then examined variation in responses according to age, as well as gender and year, in order to explore the extent to which overall attitude change occurred

because successive cohorts held different attitudes. Here, and in the remaining analysis, we focused on a summary scale formed by summing responses to the four items, each item scored from 1 for the strongly traditional response to 4 for the strongly feminist response. The summary scale thus had a theoretical range from 4 (the most traditional responses) to 16 (the most feminist).²

After examining attitude change within age groups, we examined other subgroup differences in attitudes using ordinary least squares regressions. We focused here on differences between women and men and whether they were significant once other social and demographic factors were taken into account. We first looked at overall subgroup differences in attitudes at both points in time combined, then turned to the question of subgroup changes in attitudes by introducing interactions between year and the other predictors of attitudes.

In addition to gender, subgroups of the population formed by nine variables were considered. These were age, women's paid employment, marital status, number of children, education, religion, attendance at religious services, political views, and race. Many studies have found age, women's paid employment, and education to be strong predictors of gender-role attitudes or attitude change during the 1970s (Huber and Spitze 1981; Mason and Bumpass 1975; Mason et al. 1976; McBroom 1986; Molm 1978; Morgan and Walker 1983; Smith and Fisher 1982; Tallichet and Willits 1986; Thornton et al. 1983). The evidence for marital status, number of children, attendance at religious services, and race is somewhat less consistent, although at least one study has found each of these to be a significant predictor of gender-role attitudes (Huber and Spitze 1981, 1983; McBroom 1986; Morgan and Walker 1983; Peek 1982; Peek and Brown 1980; Powell and Steelman 1982; Ransford and Miller 1983; Thornton et al. 1983). Political views—specifically whether individuals label themselves liberal, moderate, or conservative—were included because of speculation that the conservative political climate of the late 1970s produced an antifeminist backlash among self-identified conservatives.

FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the percentages of women and men giving a profeminist response to the four gender-role items in 1977 and 1985 and the amount of change in these percentages over the eight-year period. Contrary to speculation about an antifeminist backlash in the United States, both women and men showed a substantial increase in the profeminist direction between 1977 and 1985. The smallest of

TABLE 1
 Percentage Giving a Profeminist Response to
 Four Gender-Role Attitude Items (by year and gender)^a

<i>Attitude Item</i>	<i>Women</i>			<i>Men</i>		
	<i>1977</i>	<i>1985</i>	Δ	<i>1977</i>	<i>1985</i>	Δ
It is much better for everyone if the man is the achiever and the woman takes care of the home and family (disagree)	36.8 (823)	53.4 (833)	16.6	31.0 (680)	49.3 (669)	18.3
It is more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself (disagree)	39.3 (812)	62.4 (814)	23.1	47.3 (660)	62.6 (658)	15.3
A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work (agree)	55.1 (824)	67.3 (836)	12.2	41.6 (681)	52.8 (682)	11.2
A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works (disagree)	37.5 (821)	53.1 (828)	15.6	26.9 (677)	37.3 (671)	10.4

SOURCE: Based on National Opinion Research Center General Social Surveys.

a. Numbers in parentheses are base n's for the percentages above them. "Don't knows" and "no answers" are excluded.

these increases was 10 percentage points, the largest, 23 points. Thus, as of 1985, not only had there been no apparent backlash in attitudes toward women's marital and maternal roles; change in a feminist direction was continuing unabated.

Differences between women and men in Table 1 vary according to the item considered. On the first two items, which are concerned with the division of labor and power between spouses, men are almost as feminist in their responses as are women. Indeed, in 1977, though not

in 1985, men were *more* likely than women to disagree that wives should help their husbands' careers rather than have careers themselves.

For the two items concerned with the consequences of mothers' paid employment for children's well-being, however, men are considerably more traditional than women are, even in 1985. On the issue of whether mothers employed outside the home can have relationships with children as warm and secure as those that mothers working in the home presumably enjoy, in 1985 only a bare majority of men agreed with this idea while two-thirds of the women did so. The disparity was even greater on the issue of whether the preschool-age children of mothers with paid jobs "suffer." Here, only slightly more than one-third of the men in 1985 disagreed, as opposed to more than half the women. Thus, although men are about as likely as women to endorse the principle of equal work and careers for wives, they are considerably less likely to endorse the idea that a mother's employment outside the home is without serious negative consequences for her children. This finding suggests that for many men, support for equal family roles is highly qualified. In their view, it may be acceptable for a wife *without* children to pursue a career or employment outside the home, but not for one with children, especially preschool-aged children. Many men in the United States apparently continue to regard "mothering" as the exclusive responsibility of women, a view perhaps encouraged by the wording of the items and the absence of items on "fathering."

Although the changes in Table 1 for both women and men are substantial enough to make it unlikely that they occurred entirely through cohort succession—in eight years, only a small portion of the population "ages out" and is replaced by new cohorts of young adults—it nonetheless is of interest to ask whether cohort succession played a role in creating this change. An earlier study (Mason et al. 1976) found little evidence of cohort succession as the basis for the attitude change occurring during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The change occurring in that period was truly revolutionary, in the sense that it involved a changed outlook toward gender roles in all age groups. Is the same the case in the period since 1977? Table 2 presents mean summary scale values according to age, year, and gender. The columns in this table labeled $\Delta 1$ show the results of comparisons of the same age group at the two time periods, while the columns labeled $\Delta 2$ show how each age group changed from 1977 to 1985 (what we have termed *revolutionary change*).

TABLE 2
 Mean Gender-Role Attitude Scale Values (by gender, year, and age)^a

Age Group	Women				Men			
	1977	1985	$\Delta 1$	$\Delta 2$	1977	1985	$\Delta 1$	$\Delta 2$
18-25	10.5	11.8	1.3	—	9.9	10.8	0.9	—
26-33	10.6	11.9	1.3	1.4	10.4	11.0	0.6	1.1
34-41	9.9	11.9	2.0	1.3	9.4	10.3	0.9	-0.1
42-49	9.3	11.3	2.0	1.4	8.5	10.5	2.0	1.1
50-57	9.2	10.4	1.2	1.1	8.2	9.0	0.8	0.5
58-65	8.4	9.4	1.0	0.2	7.9	8.7	0.8	0.5
66/+	7.6	9.0	1.4	0.6	7.5	8.6	1.1	0.7
Mean Change ^b	—	—	1.5	1.0	—	—	1.0	0.6
Base n's								
18-25	115	97	212	—	97	91	188	—
26-33	144	158	302	273	109	129	238	226
34-41	119	136	255	280	96	102	198	211
42-49	86	81	167	200	93	71	164	167
50-57	111	77	188	163	82	74	156	167
58-65	95	90	185	201	71	80	151	162
66/+	113	154	267	249	86	86	172	157

SOURCE: Based on National Opinion Research Center General Social Surveys.

a. The columns labeled $\Delta 1$ show intercohort change. Those labeled $\Delta 2$ show intra-cohort change.

b. These means are unweighted.

If there was no change in attitudes within cohorts, that is, if overall attitude change occurred entirely because younger cohorts differed in attitudes from older ones, then we would expect the mean change shown in the $\Delta 2$ column to be zero, while the mean change in the $\Delta 1$ column was some greater amount. On the other hand, if cohort succession was irrelevant to the overall change in attitudes, then we would expect the mean change *within* cohorts to be large and young age groups to have the same attitudes as older ones. Table 2 suggests that both cohort succession and within-cohort change in attitudes played a role in the overall change in gender-role attitudes between 1977 and 1985. Among women, the average amount of intracohort change was 67 percent as large as the amount of change in the population as a whole (1.0/1.5), while among men, it was 60 percent as large. (These percentages were similar when the four attitude items were analyzed separately.) This finding suggests that a surprisingly large portion of the change occurring between 1977 and 1985 is

attributable to cohort succession. The larger mean levels of change in column $\Delta 1$ than in column $\Delta 2$, however, suggest that more change occurred because cohort members altered their outlooks than through cohort succession. Thus each age group's continued shift of attitudes toward an egalitarian stance in this period does not suggest the existence of an antifeminist backlash, but the new importance of cohort succession as a source of gender-role change in the United States may portend a slowing in the future.

In order to understand how social and demographic subgroups of the population other than those defined by gender and age differ in their attitudes toward women's family roles, we regressed the attitude summary scale onto a series of dummy variables representing the population subgroups described earlier, plus a dummy for year. This regression was estimated with ordinary least squares for the combined 1977 and 1985 samples. Predicted means on the summary scale estimated by this equation are shown in Table 3. Thus, in this table, we ignore possible variation over time in subgroup differences in attitudes, focusing instead on the question of how, on average, subgroups differ in their view of women's family roles.

The first two lines of Table 3 show that women in the GSS display significantly more feminist views of domestic roles than do men, when other factors are taken into account. This is consistent with the exchange model of gender-role attitude change, since it is women, more than men, whose occupational opportunities and rewards are restricted by their domestic obligations. American men have become more willing to endorse the principle of gender equality in the abstract, including the principle of equality between spouses in career achievement, but the benefits to them of women's traditional responsibility for child care apparently makes them less interested than women in endorsing the idea that maternal employment is without serious negative consequences for children.

The remaining results in Table 3 seem, with few exceptions, consistent with either the exchange model of attitude change or with a sociopolitical model of change. Women currently working for pay and the men married to such women endorse domestic gender equality more frequently than others do. Since gainfully employed women—and their husbands—have at least partially rejected the traditional domestic division of labor, that their support for this division is relatively weak fits the exchange model. So, too, does the somewhat less egalitarian outlook of currently married compared with formerly or never married individuals. More anomalous vis-a-

TABLE 3
Means on the Gender-Role Attitude Scale
Predicted by an Additive Regression Equation^a

<i>Predictor Variable</i>	<i>Predicted Mean</i>	<i>Base n</i>
Gender		
women	10.1*	1,576
men	9.5	1,267
Age		
18-25	10.5*	400
26-33	10.5	540
34-41	10.2	453
42-49	9.9	331
50-57	9.3	344
58-65	9.0	336
65 or older	8.9	439
Woman's paid employment		
current	10.4*	1,214
past	9.5	913
never or no wife	9.3	716
Marital status		
currently married	9.7*	1,715
formerly married	10.0	671
never married	10.1	457
Number of children		
none	9.8	756
one or two	9.9	1,106
three or more	9.8	981
Education		
16 or more years	10.7*	459
13-15 years	10.2	538
12 years	9.7	963
less than 12 years	9.3	883
Religion		
Protestant or other	9.8*	1,876
Roman Catholic	9.8	725
Jewish or no religion	10.3	242
Religious attendance		
less than once a year	10.2*	605
two or three times a year	10.1	751
monthly or weekly	10.1	580
more than once a week	9.2	907

(continued)

TABLE 3 Continued

<i>Predictor Variable</i>	<i>Predicted Mean</i>	<i>Base n</i>
Political self-identification		
liberal	10.3*	753
moderate	9.9	1,052
conservative	9.4	1,038
Race		
black	10.1*	301
other	9.8	2,542
Year		
1985	10.4*	1,427
1977	9.3	1,416
Mean of dependent variable	9.8	2,843
Coefficient of determination	.33*	2,843

SOURCE: Combined National Opinion Research Center General Social Surveys for 1977 and 1985.

a. The regression equation contains all of the predictor variables shown in the table. In this equation, all predictors were represented by dummy variable classifications.

*Classification or coefficient of determination is significant at the .05 level.

vis the exchange model is a lack of variation in gender-role attitudes according to number of children. In particular, those without children are no more likely to endorse an egalitarian domestic arrangement than are those with children, despite their greater freedom from the domestic obligations that often encouraged a reliance on the traditional gender-based division of labor.

More readily interpreted in terms of a sociopolitical model of attitude change than the exchange model are the results in Table 3 for education, religion, religious attendance, and political self-identification. Net of their employment status (or their wives' employment status), women and men who are college-educated hold more egalitarian views of women's domestic roles than do the less educated. Although college-educated women have a higher earning potential than other women, and may thus find the traditional husband-wife exchange less attractive, that it is college-educated men as well as college-educated women who are most egalitarian in outlook seems consistent with the general liberality of attitudes displayed by college-educated individuals in the United States. The relatively egalitarian outlook of Jews, of those with no religious affiliation, and of those who attend religious services infrequently also seems consistent with a sociopolitical model of gender-role attitude determination, as do

the more egalitarian views of self-proclaimed political liberals.

Although the statistically significant race effect shown in Table 3 is consistent with a sociopolitical model of attitude change (especially since this effect occurs net of a control for women's employment status), it should be noted that when women and men and the four attitude items were analyzed separately, the only statistically significant race difference observed was for men on the issue of whether maternal employment harms preschool-aged children. In other words, although blacks usually have a more egalitarian view of women's domestic roles than other individuals do, racial differences in outlook usually are small.

The patterns seen in Table 3 were in most cases also found in separate analyses of women and men, and for responses to each of the four attitude items. One exception occurred for men's responses to the item on preschool children suffering if the mother works. For this one item, among men only, almost none of the social differentials observed in Table 3 was significant. As noted earlier, only race differentiated men's responses to this item, with black men rejecting the idea that maternal employment harms preschool-aged children more often than did other men. Men's insistence on women's inherent responsibility for the care and emotional well-being of young children is widespread in American society, not only in the sense that a majority of men endorse this idea but also in the sense that it is endorsed almost equally by men from all walks of life. If white American men can be said to form a social group united by a shared ideology, then the assignment to women of day-to-day responsibility for small children is surely a key element in this ideology. In this majority, domestic gender equality is unlikely to occur unless the men come to regard child rearing as a shared responsibility.

The final variable in Table 3 is year itself, which has a strong and significant relationship to the attitude scale, as it does to the individual items that compose the scale. This persistence of a strong relationship after statistical controls are introduced means that even after one takes into account differences between 1977 and 1985 in the sociodemographic composition of the population, the change in gender-role attitudes is large. A substantial portion of gender-role attitude change in this period involved a changed outlook among individuals of all ages and sociodemographic statuses, rather than the replacement of more traditional older individuals by more feminist younger people.

In the statistics examined thus far, the question of whether different subgroups of the population changed their attitudes equally between 1977 and 1985 has been ignored. In order to study this question, we added to the regression shown in Table 3 a series of multiplicative interaction terms involving year and the other predictor variables. (In principle, these terms, when significant, indicate that some population subgroups have changed their attitudes more quickly than have others.) We also included interactions between gender and the other predictors in order to assess similarities between women and men in attitude change and in the impact of other social and economic characteristics on attitudes. Our exploration of several possible interaction models suggested that the best-fitting and most parsimonious model was one that included additive terms for the variables shown in Table 3, plus all the possible interactions involving gender, year, and education, including the third-order (three-way) interaction. This model explained significantly more variance in the attitude scale than did the additive model. Adding to it all the possible interactions between gender or year and the other predictors in the equation did not significantly improve the model's fit, however. Table 4 shows means on the attitude scale predicted by the terms from this model involving gender, year, and education.

The heart of the interaction in Table 4 involves a relative absence of attitude change among college-graduate women (see Cherlin and Walters 1981). Unlike all other gender and education groups, college-graduate women barely increased their support for equal gender roles between 1977 and 1985. Analysis of the individual attitude items suggests this stasis was especially prominent for the two items focusing on the maternal role. In other words, while all other groups of women and all groups of men significantly increased their support for the idea that maternal employment is compatible with children's well-being, college-graduate women did not do so. Does this mean that well-educated women experienced a backlash against the feminist ideal of women with children maintaining an occupational career?

Although this is possible, we think it unlikely. As Table 4 makes clear, support for an egalitarian model of women's familial roles among college-graduate women was already extremely high in 1977 and remained extremely high in 1985; it simply did not grow at the rate experienced in other groups. To regard college-graduate women as experiencing a backlash thus seems misleading, given the overwhelming support for equality in this group at both points in time. Indeed, although the mean scale value among college graduate women in

TABLE 4
Means on the Gender-Role Attitude Scale by Sex, Year, and Education, Predicted by a Nonadditive Regression Equation^a

Education	Women		Men	
	1977	1985	1977	1985
16 or more years	11.0	11.3	9.8	10.6
13-15 years	9.5	11.2	9.7	10.2
12 years	9.3	10.7	8.7	10.0
Less than 12 years	9.0	10.1	8.5	9.5

SOURCE: Combined National Opinion Research Center General Social Surveys for 1977 and 1985.

a. The regression equation from which the predicted values shown in the table were computed contained all of the predictors shown in Table 3, plus all possible multiplicative interaction terms involving gender, year, and education. The third-order interaction of gender, year, and education was significant at the .05 level.

1985 was by no means at the maximum, it was higher than in any other group except women with one to three years of college. Because of speculation that a disillusion with feminist ideals occurred primarily among *younger* college-educated women, we also investigated attitude change among different age groups of college and noncollege women. There was no evidence of age differences in attitude change among college women, suggesting that in 1985, even younger college-graduate women continued to support the ideal of equal marital and parental roles for women and men.

The relative absence of change among college-graduate women also seems unlikely to represent a backlash against feminism because it revolves around a difficult set of issues with which feminists as well as traditionalists have increasingly had to grapple during the past decade. This problem is how to provide adequate care for children—and a reasonably nonstressful life for women—in a society in which government, employers, *and* husbands provide little support for mothers who work outside the home. College women's failure to endorse the idea that working is fully compatible with the maternal role in ever-increasing numbers may reflect the recognition that in the United States, carrying a double work load is hardly a form of liberation, or good for children or mothers (Friedan 1982). In any case, in 1985 the vast majority of college-graduate women continued to endorse the compatibility of employment with motherhood, which hardly suggests disillusionment with feminism or a backlash against the feminist movement.

The interaction shown in Table 4 was the only significant interaction involving gender or year, and the other predictors in the regression equation. Therefore, the impact of most personal characteristics on gender-role attitudes was approximately the same for women and men, and all subgroups of the adult population (except college-graduate women) experienced a similar change in attitudes between 1977 and 1985. For example, political conservatives increased their support for gender-role equality just as much, on average, as did political liberals and moderates, even though their support for equality remained below that of more liberal groups. In general, even though not all groups in the United States support gender equality equally, all *increased* their support equally during this period of recent history.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this analysis can be summarized briefly. Change in gender-role attitudes in a feminist direction occurred among both women and men in the United States during the late 1970s and early to mid-1980s. In this period, support for the traditional role for wives decreased, and, especially among women, endorsement of the belief that maternal employment harms children or the mother-child relationship declined. There remained considerable dissension within the population about ideal domestic roles for women in 1985; men were especially likely to express a concern that maternal employment is harmful to children or to the mother-child relationship. Nevertheless, contrary to common speculation in the mass media, there was no evidence of a backlash against feminist conceptions of family roles in these data.

That women and men in the United States continued to increase their support for egalitarian gender roles during the late 1970s and early 1980s is consistent with the exchange model of gender-role attitudes. Although gender-role attitudes are formed or reinforced through participation in social groups that endorse or reject the traditional gender-based division of labor, individual viewpoints toward that division of labor also reflect its personal benefits (or, in the case of men, its benefits to mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters). During the late 1970s and early 1980s, U.S. family structure was increasingly inconsistent with the traditional exchange of domestic labor for economic support because of high divorce rates, low fertility rates, and rising rates of married women's labor force participation.

Thus to find an increasing proportion of the U.S. population endorsing an egalitarian view of domestic gender roles is not surprising.

This analysis has also shown a remarkable consistency of attitude change across a variety of subgroups of the U.S. population. Indeed, the only major exception to the trend toward greater support for gender equality in the family between 1977 and 1985 was among college-graduate women, a group whose support for such equality was extremely high in 1977. That a profeminist change in attitudes occurred between 1977 and 1985 in virtually all groups suggests just how widespread the process of redefining gender-role norms currently is in American society. Even the widespread agreement among men that the well-being of young children should be a woman's, rather than a man's, responsibility saw a significant reduction during this period. Although it is difficult to conclude that the gender revolution is anywhere near complete, the data reviewed in this article suggest that it continues.

NOTES

1. The GSS is based on a national probability sample of the noninstitutionalized population aged 18 and older in the continental United States. In most years, including those analyzed here, each GSS sample is drawn independently of earlier samples.

2. The four items correlate with each other between .3 and .6. A principal components analysis suggested that there was only one principal component underlying them. Because separate analysis of the four items was complex and often difficult to understand, and in most instances produced similar results (exceptions are noted in the text), presentation of the summary scale seemed justified. The results of the analysis of the four separate items is presented in Mason and Lu (1986).

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