

# The End of the Gender Revolution? Gender Role Attitudes from 1977 to 2008<sup>1</sup>

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After becoming consistently more egalitarian for more than two decades, gender role attitudes in the General Social Survey have changed little since the mid-1990s. This plateau mirrors other gender trends, suggesting a fundamental alteration in the momentum toward gender equality. While cohort replacement can explain about half of the increasing egalitarianism between 1974 and 1994, the changes since the mid-1990s are not well accounted for by cohort differences. Nor is the post-1994 stagnation explained by structural or broad ideological changes in American society. The recent lack of change in gender attitudes is more likely the consequence of the rise of a new cultural frame, an “egalitarian essentialism” that blends aspects of feminist equality and traditional motherhood roles.

Since Myra Marx Ferree (1974) noted the increased acceptance of voting for women for president, a steady series of studies have documented rising egalitarianism in gender attitudes and made guarded but optimistic predictions about the future (Mason, Czajka, and Arber 1976; Thornton and Freedman 1979; Cherlin and Walters 1981; Tallichet and Willits 1986). For instance, Karin Brewster and Irene Padavic, using General Social Survey (GSS) data from 1977 to 1996, found that while the pace of change

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toward liberal gender attitudes had recently slowed, they expected that “the liberalization of gender beliefs has not yet run its course” (2000, p. 485). Others have echoed that optimism. Clem Brooks and Catherine Bolzendahl open their extensive review of changes in GSS attitudes with an upbeat overview: “Changes in US attitudes toward gender roles during the past three decades have been large and generally monotonic” (2004, p. 107). Similarly, Peltola, Milkie, and Presser begin their analysis of feminist identities in the National Election Surveys and the GSS with the familiar observation that “Americans’ attitudes about women’s rights and roles have become significantly more liberal during the past half century” (2004, p. 122).

As more recent data became available, researchers became more cautious: “There may have been not only a leveling off of the egalitarian trend in the late 1990s but a small reversal of a long-term pattern” (Thorn-ton and Young-DeMarco 2001, p. 1014). Similarly, Brewster and Padavic (2000, p. 403) expressed reservations about prospects for continued liberalization, “although the strong influence of cohort succession suggests that the trend toward more egalitarian attitudes will continue . . . we are not entirely sanguine about the egalitarian nature of future attitude shifts.” Figure 1 shows these trends for four gender attitudes from the GSS. After an egalitarian peak in 1994, gender attitudes fell until the end of the century. Two of the questions show a moderate resurgence since 2000, one has changed little, and the fourth has continued to decline in this century. Nevertheless, the overall patterns clearly break into two broad eras: a uniform trend toward less traditional gender roles during the 1970s and 1980s, but only small and shifting changes since the mid-1990s.

In this article we ask what structural and cultural changes might account for this unexpected stalling of gender attitudes. We show that the mid-1990s shift can be observed within almost all cohorts, across both men and women of all ethnicities (except Asian Americans) and all levels of education and income. We test and reject a variety of the most readily identifiable social structural causes to the 1990s reversal. While several demographic and structural factors can help explain the rise of liberal attitudes throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the decline after the mid-1990s is robust to all controls. Nor does the change in gender attitudes appear to be part of a broader period shift toward more conservative political and family attitudes.

The lack of a ready structural or broadly ideological explanation of the mid-1990s shift strengthens the case for a specifically antifeminist backlash in the popular culture as the most likely explanation for the attitude shift. At least since the publication of Susan Faludi’s *Backlash* (1991), media and cultural critics have warned that a cultural shift was threatening the

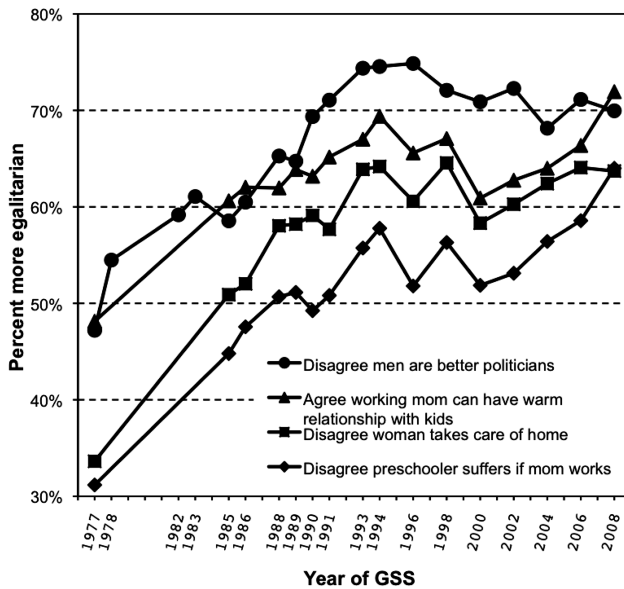


FIG. 1.—Four gender attitudes: 1977–2008. “Strongly agree” (“disagree”) and “agree” (“disagree”) are combined. “Don’t know” responses are coded as not egalitarian. Data are from the General Social Surveys, 1977–2008.

feminist gains of the 1970s. In recent years, the pace of these warnings has picked up. Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels (2004) have argued that the idealization of the “Mommy Myth” has undermined gender equality in the 1990s. The growth of “intensive mothering” (Hays 1996) has put enormous pressures on women to choose between careers and motherhood (Blair-Loy 2003). And the media (Belkin 2003; Story 2005) have been quick, some would say too quick (Pollitt 2003), to document any reversals in feminist commitment. The pattern revealed in the GSS attitudes provides the first quantitative evidence that the cultural attacks on feminist equality have had their impact on public consciousness.

We argue that the result has been not a reversion to the gender traditionalism of the 1950s but the rise of a third cultural frame of “egalitarian essentialism” (Charles and Grusky 2004) combining support for stay-at-home mothering with a continued feminist rhetoric of choice and equality (Stone 2007). We believe this cultural explanation is also consistent with the broader pattern of gender changes that also shifted in the mid-1990s (Cotter, Hermesen, and Vanneman 2004; Goldin 2006). Married mothers’ labor force participation began to decline at about the same time. Women’s entry into previously male occupations slowed in the 1990s. Even women’s

state-level political office holding seems to have peaked in that decade. The gender gap in earnings that had been narrowing since the late 1970s stopped changing in the 1990s. The convergence in husbands' and wives' housework time stopped well short of equality (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie 2006, p. 93). Of all the major indicators of gender inequality, only educational differences (Buchmann and DiPrete 2006) seem to have been unaffected by the mid-1990s shift (see Cotter et al. [2004] for a review).

## BACKGROUND

One place to look for possible causes of the mid-1990s shift is to changes in the factors that helped explain the initial liberalizing trends in the 1970s. Among the factors most commonly cited as causes of the liberalizing gender trends in the 1970s and 1980s are

- cohort replacement of early conservative cohorts by recent liberal cohorts,
- social structural changes such as increasing education and declining fertility,
- the entry of women into the labor force,
- a liberalizing ideological climate of more egalitarian attitudes on many issues, and
- the rise of the second wave of the women's movement.

Each of these can plausibly be amended to explain a downturn in the 1990s. Moreover, empirical tests for several of these are readily available with existing survey data.

### Cohort Replacement

Much of the attitude changes toward greater liberalism observed in the GSS can be attributed to a cohort replacement effect (Davis 1992). Each cohort born before the baby boom was more liberal than the previous cohort. Both Brewster and Padavic (2000) and Brooks and Bolzendahl (2004) found these strong cohort effects on gender attitudes. Brooks and Bolzendahl (2004) estimate that 55% of the 1985–98 changes are a result of the more liberal recent cohorts replacing the earlier more conservative cohorts.

However, cohort differences have been decelerating since the baby boom. There are only small attitude differences separating those born right after World War II from the most recent cohorts. While the popular press sometimes even reports a reversal among generation Y, survey evidence suggests that the recent cohorts are still more liberal than all their

predecessors; what has changed is that the cohort differences are now quite small. With the narrowing of the cohort differences after 1952, the cohort replacement effect has become less dramatic (Brewster and Padavic 2000). This weakening of the cohort replacement effect might explain why gender attitudes plateaued in recent years, but it cannot account for a mid-1990s reversal. Unless there has been a true reversal in the cohort differences, we do not expect the cohort effects to explain much of the 1990s change in the trend.

### Social Structural Changes

Educational, family, and economic changes remade American society in the last half of the 20th century (Fischer and Hout 2006). Several of these changes are responsible for some of the rise of gender liberalism in the 1970s and 1980s (Brewster and Padavic 2000; Brooks and Bozendahl 2004). For example, it is well established that higher education is associated with more liberal gender role attitudes. Thus, the rising level of education in the population should help explain the egalitarian trend in the 1970s and 1980s but seems an unlikely candidate for explaining the reversal in the 1990s because educational levels continued to rise after 1990 even if more slowly (Fischer and Hout 2006). Also, the family composition of the population has changed over time, with an increasing share of persons living in nontraditional family arrangements (Lichter and Qian 2005). This trend also continued through the 1990s and 2000s, and therefore, while it may account for growing liberalism in the 1970s and 1980s, it is unlikely to account for the stalling of gender egalitarianism after the mid-1990s.

More fundamentalist and evangelical religions tend to support a more conservative gender ideology (Peek, Lowe, and Williams 1991; Hoffmann and Miller 1997; Moore and Vanneman 2003; Bolzendahl and Brooks 2005), so the shift away from mainline Protestant denominations toward these more conservative Protestants in the last half of the century should have at least slowed the 1970s and 1980s trend toward more liberal gender attitudes. If this religious shift had accelerated recently, it might account for a 1990s reversal in gender attitudes. However, the evidence shows that these religious shifts may have actually slowed in recent years, not accelerated (Hout, Greeley, and Wilde 2001), so it seems unlikely that religion can explain the 1990s gender turnaround. In addition, the major shift in the late 1990s and early 2000s is the rise of nonaffiliation (Hout and Fischer 2002), a change that should have pushed gender attitudes in a more liberal direction.

### Men's Incomes

However, some structural changes that slowed or even reversed at the end of the century might account for a turnaround in gender attitudes. For instance, the 1990s were one of the first periods in recent times in which men's earnings rose, pushing up median family incomes for the first time since the 1960s (Danziger and Gottschalk 2005). The broader affluence of the 1990s might have reduced the pressure for wives' employment and reemphasized the virtues of mothers remaining at home to care for the family.

### Women's Labor Force Participation

The long rise in women's actual labor force participation rates during the last half of the 20th century seems an obvious source of support for the rise in public approval for women's employment. There is some evidence that women's employment is associated with more egalitarian gender role attitudes (Wilcox and Jelen 1991; Cassidy and Warren 1996). Of course, it is especially difficult to separate cause and effect here, since the attitude changes could just as well have propelled more women into employed work. With the GSS-repeated cross sections, there is little chance of resolving the endogeneity of women's actual labor force participation. But it is still important to test for employment's possible role, suspending for the moment any definitive causal interpretation, in order to see whether even the association of women's work and gender attitudes might account for much of the 1990s attitudinal turnaround.

The women's employment explanation is especially important to evaluate since we know that married mothers' employment, which had been growing steadily, stopped increasing about the same time that the attitude trends also changed (Cotter et al. 2004). Trends in women's employment are still a subject of some controversy (Boushey 2005), but if single mothers are dropped from the analyses (their employment trend is almost opposite to that of married mothers), and if the focus is kept on the gender differences (rather than the motherhood effect among women), the Current Population Survey (CPS) data in figure 2 show quite clearly that there was a fundamental change in the mid-1990s.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The gender inequality is measured here as the gender difference in log odds of employment because that measure remains sensitive as employment rates approach the 100% ceiling or 0% floor; in this case, however, a simple difference in percentages shows the same leveling in the mid-1990s.

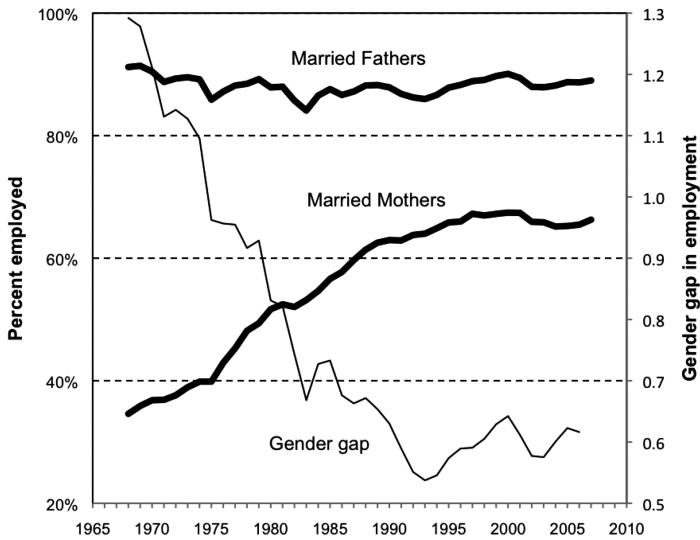


FIG. 2.—Employment rates of married mothers and married fathers: 1968–2007. Samples are married men and women with spouse present and at least one own child in the household. The gender gap in employment is defined as the difference in log odds of being employed:  $\text{Gap} = \ln[m/(1-m)] - \ln[f/(1-f)]$ , where  $m$  = percent of married fathers employed, and  $f$  = percent of married mothers employed. Data are from the Current Population Surveys, 1968–2007.

### Ideological Climate

Brooks and Bolzendahl (2004) find that the cohort and period shifts toward liberal gender attitudes are associated with similar changes in Americans' support of a broader "rights-based ideology" as measured using GSS items on civil liberties, civil rights, and sexual tolerance. Of course, endogeneity is again a problem with this analysis since both gender attitudes and a rights-based ideology could plausibly be results of similar causal forces. But it changes our interpretation of the gender trends to understand that they are part of a larger ideological shift and not a uniquely gender-based transformation. So it is worthwhile testing whether the 1990s turnaround in gender attitudes was also part of a larger transition in Americans' ideology that occurred at the same time. We are unsure why the 1990s would be a turning point in this broader ideology, but it would change our search for causes to know that it was not just gender attitudes but general social liberal ideology that changed at that time.

### Women's Protest

Ferree's (1974) original argument was that the 1970s shift toward more liberal gender attitudes was particular to gender. Looking at the responses to whether Americans would vote for a well-qualified woman for president, she observed that while similar attitudes about Catholics, Jews, and blacks had been changing slowly for a long time, the acceptance of a female presidential candidate only changed with the onset of the women's movement. Her interpretation anchored the attitude changes in actual protest events in American society and not in the background or ideological characteristics of Americans themselves. Quantitative studies of feminist protest show much less activity after the defeat of the equal rights amendment (ERA) in 1984 (Costain 1992; Minkoff 1997) so Ferree's original explanation of the rise of egalitarian attitudes offers promise for an explanation of the turnaround in the 1990s as well. The decade lapse between the decline in protest activity and the decline in public support for gender equality requires explanation, however.

### The Cultural Explanation

In 1991, *Wall Street Journal* reporter Susan Faludi published *Backlash*, documenting in great detail the many types of counterattacks on feminism that appeared in the popular culture of the 1980s. Casting a wide net across news reports, Hollywood, TV, fashion, popular music, novels, advertisements, and academia, Faludi identified several common themes that had emerged in response to 1970s feminism. The most pervasive theme was the supposed discovery that "you can't have it all"—that women who had bought into the feminist agenda were now discovering its limitations. This realization took many forms—that the 1970s "superwomen" were now suffering burnout from attempting too much, that career women who had postponed marriage now confronted a man shortage while their biological clocks made them desperate, that working mothers were being sidetracked onto a "mommy track" that forced women into a choice between careers and parenting, and that day care options were not only scarce but dangerous. All of these media themes argued in a new way for the older formula that women were best off staying at home rather than trying the impossible: balancing family and work. The language was new, however: "ticking biological clocks," "mommy track," and "postfeminism" were inventions of the backlash, not the same stock arguments of traditional familism.

This antifeminist backlash was later reinforced by a parallel rise in the popular culture of "intensive motherhood" (Hays 1996). The effect was to ratchet up significantly the level of effort expected to raise a "successful"



child. Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels (2004) documented in *The Mommy Myth* how the popular media built up these expectations through a combination of the glorification of celebrity moms, an increase of reports of childhood threats that were not actually increasing (day care abuse, dangerous toys and car seats, child molesters, missing children), indictments of failed mothers (teenage mothers, crack babies), and consumerism's contribution through the growth of "educational" toys, Mozart in the womb, and the popularity of Martha Stewart. For many women, these increased demands of child-rearing coalesced around a "devotion to family schema" (Blair-Loy 2003) that justified women's retreat from careers.

This abundant, if not precisely quantified, evidence of the shift in the popular culture was not matched, at first, by similar evidence in the shift of public opinion. The causal connections between the two are always mixed in any case, but the media analysts argued that the antifeminist backlash and the rise of intensive mothering in the popular culture were bound to shift public attitudes toward more emphasis on family needs and traditional gender roles. That this attitude shift only began in the mid-1990s poses a special problem for an explanation based on changes in the popular culture.

We proceed as follows. First, we measure and describe the trend in the GSS gender items. Then we test to what extent structural changes can explain the attitude changes: How much do demographic, educational, income, and employment changes help explain the attitude changes? Finally, we take a closer look at the cultural changes of the 1980s and 1990s to identify new elements in the 1990s that better coincide with the observed attitude shifts. We argue that the most promising explanation appears to be the rise in the 1990s of this new cultural frame that could claim to be egalitarian while still reinforcing traditional gender roles. This "egalitarian essentialism" (Charles and Grusky 2004) combined elements of the previous conflicting frames of feminism and traditional familism and thus provided support for a return to traditional gender roles while denying any implications of lower status or power for women.

## METHODS

### Data

We use GSS data (Davis and Smith 2007) to analyze changes in gender attitudes, as have many such analyses over the last two decades (e.g., Mason and Lu 1988).<sup>3</sup> The GSS has asked eight repeated questions about

<sup>3</sup> We constructed the data weight using the following steps. First, we multiplied the black oversample weight (OVERSAMP) by the recommended weight (WTSSALL).

gender role attitudes, but only for 11 surveys between 1977 and 1998 were all eight questions asked. For five other surveys between 1974 and 1983, only four of these questions were asked. For the four surveys since 2000, again only four gender questions were asked, but not the same four as between 1974 and 1983. These changes in survey design present problems for an analysis of changes in the late 1990s, since the survey design and the gender attitudes appear to have changed at about the same time.

## Variables

### *Gender Attitude Scale*

Because our main focus is on changes in the last decade, we develop a scale using only the four items (FEPOL, FECHLD, FEPRESCH, FEFAM) that were asked in 1977, 1985–1986, and then continuously from 1988 to 2008.<sup>4</sup> This scale has the same items in every year but is available for only 15 surveys and misses some of the interesting detail during the late 1970s and early 1980s, when gender attitudes were changing rapidly. But this four-item scale has the advantage of a consistent measure over a four-decade period, and frequent measurements over the last 20 years, an important consideration given this was when support for more liberal gender role attitudes waned. The scale is constructed by taking the mean of the standardized scores for each of the four items (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.71$ ).<sup>5</sup>

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Second, to account for variability in sample sizes across years and so as not to give extra weight to years with more cases, we constructed another weight based on sample size. Finally, the weight calculated in the first step was multiplied by the weight in the second step to create the final weight used in the analyses.

<sup>4</sup> The four items in the scale are: "Tell me if you agree or disagree with this statement: Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women" (FEPOL); "A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work" (FECHLD); "A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works" (FEPRESCH); and "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" (FEFAM).

<sup>5</sup> We also developed an alternative strategy that maximizes the number of survey years by computing standardized scores for each item and taking the mean of the available items. Because some items are more available in early (conservative) years and others in later (more liberal) years, the means used for the standardization would be biased by the availability of years. We therefore computed means and standard deviations for each of the eight items only for the 11 surveys (1985–98) for which all eight items are available. We then used these means and standard deviations to standardize each item for all years, including the years when only three or four items were asked. After standardization, the available items in each year were summed to create an overall scale. Using the variables standardized by their means for the 13 surveys with all items (1985–98), we created a scale based on the means of whatever items were available in a survey year. This method provides a scale score for 20 surveys from 1974 to

*Cohort*

To evaluate the role of cohort replacement, we include controls for year of birth. We evaluated two ways of operationalizing cohort: a series of dummy variables in five-year spans and a pair of linear variables for year of birth (Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004). The latter proved a better fit so we report these results below. In addition to a linear year of birth variable, we also include a cohort spline at 1952, which differentiates between pre- and post-baby-boom cohorts, suggested by earlier research to mark a slowing of cohort-related change (Brewster and Padavic 2000; Schnitker, Freese, and Powell 2003; Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004). The cohort spline is coded 0 for birth years up to 1952 and then increases by 1 for each subsequent birth year (e.g., 1952 = 1, 1953 = 2).

*Social Structural Controls*

We include a broad range of social structural, woman's employment, and ideological controls that have been shown in past research to be related to gender attitudes. Our purpose is not so much to analyze the extent of these associations (although several are theoretically interesting) as to see whether changes in any of these help account for the changes over time in gender attitudes, particularly for the turnaround beginning in 1994.

Education is defined as the highest year of school completed and is computed for the respondents, their spouses, mothers, and fathers. A set of dummy variables are included to measure religious affiliation (Steensland et al. 2000), with the reference group being mainline Protestants. Religious participation is an ordinal scale measuring frequency of religious attendance. Marital and parental statuses are categorized into four mutually exclusive dummy variables defined by married or unmarried, and having children under age 18 at home or not; currently married with children is the reference category. Also included are counts of the number of children at preschool, preteen, and teenage years. Family income is operationalized using logged constant dollar midpoints from the grouped categories provided in the data. Occupational status is coded for a man in the house—for the respondent if he is male, the respondent's husband if the respondent is a woman. Both occupational prestige and a dummy variable for managerial or professional position are included. In addition, the number of hours the man works is included.

Several of these variables are structurally missing in some households (e.g., spouse's education for unmarried respondents; husband's occupation for unmarried women). Family income is not reported for some respon-

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2008. The results using this scale are substantively similar to those we report here and are available in the online appendix table A5.

dents. Mother's and father's education are often not reported also because of either an absent parent or lack of response. Respondents with missing data for these measures were included by identifying the missing cases with a dummy variable and substituting the mean for the missing values.<sup>6</sup>

### *Women's Labor Force Participation*

To evaluate the association of women's employment with gender attitudes, we include a measure of labor force participation, which is scored 1 if the respondent is a woman and in the labor force, or if the respondent is a married man and his spouse is in the labor force; all other women and men are coded 0. We also include measures of her hours of work, her occupational prestige, and a dummy variable for professional-managerial status. Because her hours of work may have a discontinuous relationship with gender attitudes, we also include a dummy variable for whether she is working full-time or not, as defined by the respondent.

### *Ideology*

Brooks and Bolzendahl (2004) find that the growing liberalism of gender attitudes is correlated with a broad trend of more acceptance of a liberal rights ideology, as indexed by a scale based on attitudes about civil liberties, civil rights, and sexual tolerance. We construct a similar index to test whether the leveling off of the 1990s is also correlated with a broader change in ideology. We standardize the same items used by Brooks and Bolzendahl (2004) and take the average of the standardized scores (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.91$ ). A high value indicates greater support for civil liberties and sexual tolerance.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, the analysis also includes the self-report measure of political conservatism and liberalism, a seven-point scale where high values indicate greater conservatism. Seven dummy variables are included to measure the respondent's political party identification; independents are the reference category.

<sup>6</sup> The coefficients for spouse's education, family income, and the other variables are interpreted as the strength of the relationship for cases without missing data, and the dummy variable indicates the difference in gender attitudes between the missing cases and a respondent with the mean value.

<sup>7</sup> Because some of the rights index items were asked of only a split subsample in some years, the sample size for the model with the rights index is reduced ( $N = 11,446$ ) from the other analyses. We also had to exclude the one item indexing racial attitudes, since the GSS has not included that question since 2000.

## RESULTS

Figure 3 reports the gender attitude scale means for each survey year in which the four gender role attitudes were asked. Following Hout and Fischer (2002), the figure also fits the observed means with the best-fitting spline function that has “knots” at 1994 and 2000.<sup>8</sup> After 1994, not only does the trend cease rising, it turns downward until 2000, when it begins to rise again, although more slowly than in the 1980s.

## Group Differences

How general are these gender attitude trends, especially the 1990s turnaround? On the one hand, if the disillusionment with the feminist agenda was the result of the discovery that work-family conflicts for working mothers exacted unacceptable costs, then we would expect the turnaround to be especially sharp among those who faced such conflicts: for instance, families with working mothers, especially perhaps among the professional middle class, where “opting out” has received so much attention (Blair-Loy 2003; Stone 2007). On the other hand, if the reaction against the liberal feminism of the 1970s and 1980s was a more general cultural shift, then the particular micro-level characteristics of the individual’s family and work situations may be less important, and we should expect to see the attitudes changing broadly across the entire population.

To begin to answer these questions, we computed the gender-scale trends separately for various subgroups and tested the group differences using interaction effects computed between the group characteristics and the survey year (and the spline functions). We did this sequentially in a series of models separately for each group characteristic, rather than trying to add all of the highly intercorrelated interactions in a single model. The results of seven of these models are summarized in table 1.

The first row shows the coefficients for the total sample—the parameters of the fitted line in figure 3. The 1994 hinge coefficient ( $-0.065$ ) is negative and larger than the positive value for the main annual trend ( $+0.040$ ). The results indicate, therefore, that the trend from 1994 to 2000 is negative ( $-0.025$ ), that is, more conservative. The second hinge is again positive ( $+0.042$ ), indicating a rebound toward more egalitarian attitudes although resulting in a smaller slope ( $+0.017$ ) than the original 1977–94 trend ( $+0.040$ ).

In general, most groups show the same basic changes over time: more

<sup>8</sup> In results not reported here, we tested for a second knot in the early 1980s, as suggested by Brewster and Padavic; but once the knot at 1994 is included, there are no significant knots earlier in the series. The spline is coded 0 for 1977–94, and then increases by 1 for each subsequent calendar year (e.g., 1996 = 2, 1998 = 4).

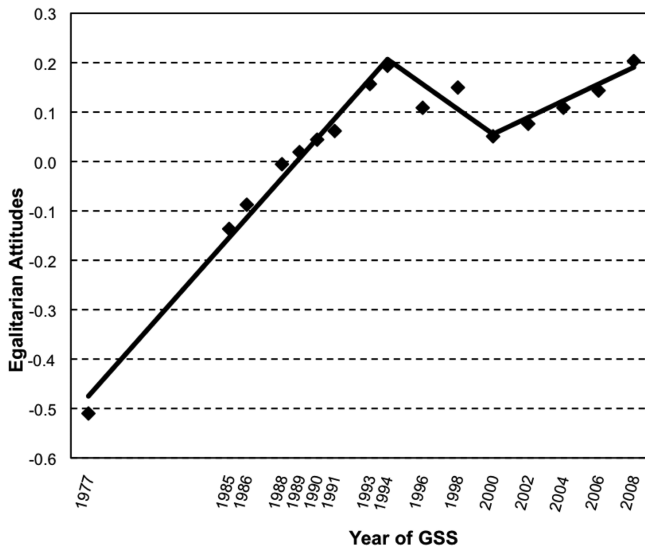


FIG. 3.—Gender role scale: 1977–2008. The gender role scale is the mean of the four items listed in figure 1, each standardized by its 1987–98 mean and standard deviation. Data are from the General Social Surveys, 1977–2008.

liberal attitudes in the 1970s and 1980s, a downturn at 1994, and some rebound after 2000. Nevertheless, the strength of these trends varies across some important groups, especially for the 1994 turnaround. There are almost no major differences by gender, race/ethnicity, or cohort. For instance, the trends for women and men are remarkably alike (although data before 1977, not analyzed here, indicate that the liberalizing trend was stronger for women in the early 1970s). The variations in time slopes across cohorts are no greater than what might be expected by chance—in contrast to important cohort variations in self-described feminism (Schnittker et al. 2003). Among racial-ethnic groups, only Asian Americans show a distinct pattern, although given the small GSS sample sizes for Asian Americans, these results should be interpreted cautiously.

There is some evidence for a steeper increase in the 1970s and 1980s for the less educated, and a more dramatic rebound after 2000 for the more educated. The downturn in the mid-1990s, however, can be observed at all educational levels. Similarly, the post-2000 rebound was sharper among high-income households, and there is marginal evidence that the mid-1990s downturn was stronger among these high-income households as well.

The differences across work and family groups are especially interesting. The gender attitude turnaround in the 1990s was sharpest for re-

spondents with children. While all groups have negative coefficients for the 1994 spline—and implied negative slopes for the 1994–2000 period (not shown)—the spline coefficients are significantly smaller for the childless, whether single or married. Similarly, households both with and without working women show negative trends in the 1994–2000 period, but the turnaround is steeper for the households with working women. These results argue that the changes of the mid-1990s reflected a general cultural change in gender attitudes, but that change was felt most strongly by high-income households with working mothers for whom work-family stresses were most relevant.

### Explanations of the Trends

Next, we use a series of structural and ideological variables to explain the observed curve—the rise in the 1970s through the 1980s, another smaller rise since 2000, and especially the downturn in the late 1990s. The logic here is that if a change in U.S. society accounted for the turnaround, then controlling for such a change should reduce the size of the “hinge” in the spline functions. For instance, if the cohort replacement effect has slowed down, then cohort controls should explain not only the 1970s and 1980s liberal rise but also should eliminate or reduce the downward turn in 1994.

Table 2 reports tests for these factors. The first column repeats the spline function coefficients from the first line of table 1 that were illustrated in figure 2. Our goal in explaining the reversal of the 1990s is to reduce the hinge coefficient to zero (i.e., nonsignificance). The second hinge at 2000 is positive and also significant, indicating that some of the decline in the 1990s was reversed in the next decade. Nevertheless, the second spline coefficient is smaller than the first, so not all the forward progress was regained. The estimated slope after 2000 (+0.018) is positive, but less than half as rapid as in the 1970s and 1980s (+0.040).

### *Cohort Controls*

The cohort effect is itself not linear, as has been noticed before (Davis 1992). The differences among the cohorts before the baby boom are quite large; from the baby boom onward, the differences become much more modest, although there is no indication that the most recent cohorts are actually more conservative than the generation that pioneered the second wave of feminism. The trend continues for each new cohort to be slightly more liberal than the previous cohort, but the differences after 1952 are

TABLE 1  
SLOPES OF YEAR AND YEAR SPLINES FOR SELECTED GROUPS

	Unweighted <i>N</i>	Year	Year Spline (Knot = 1994)	Year Spline (Knot = 2000)
Total sample .....	22,770	.040 <sup>***</sup>	-.065 <sup>***</sup>	.042 <sup>***</sup>
By gender:				
Women .....	12,797	.042	-.068	.047
Men .....	9,973	.038	-.062	.038
By race/ethnicity:				
White (reference) .....	17,913	.041	-.070	.053 <sup>***</sup>
Black .....	2,886	.036	-.056	.045
Hispanic .....	1,146	.044	-.069	.002 <sup>*</sup>
Asian .....	449	.004 <sup>**</sup>	.015 <sup>**</sup>	-.002
By cohort:				
1925-34 (reference) .....	2,297	.027	-.053	.030
1935-44 .....	2,973	.028	-.079	.076 <sup>+</sup>
1945-54 .....	4,479	.023	-.062	.042
1955-64 .....	5,024	.029	-.078	.079 <sup>*</sup>
1965-74 .....	3,343	.041 <sup>+</sup>	-.068	.023
By education:				
12 years .....	22,770	.034	-.057	.036
16 years .....		.029 <sup>**</sup>	-.062	.056 <sup>*</sup>



By family income (log const. \$)				
\$10,000 .....	20,283	.040	-.054	.023
\$200,000 .....		.041	-.083*	.069*
By marital and parental status:				
Married with children (ref.) .....	6,105	.043	-.087	.065
Married no children .....	5,506	.043	-.065*	.045
Single with children .....	8,255	.040	-.073	.032
Single no children .....	2,754	.035*	-.048***	.032*
By woman/wife in labor force:				
Not in labor force .....	7,679	.038	-.058	.042
In labor force .....	10,688	.036	-.071	.055

NOTE.—Slopes by groups are calculated from seven separate regressions of the gender scale on survey year and year interactions with each group. Significance tests represent differences from the reference group (the first line in each group). Education and income are entered in regressions as continuous variables. Slopes are calculated at representative low and high points from the education and income distributions. Data are from General Social Surveys, 1977–2008.

+  $P < .10$ .

\*  $P < .05$ .

\*\*  $P < .01$ .

\*\*\*  $P < .001$ .

TABLE 2  
REGRESSIONS OF GENDER ATTITUDE SCALE: SELECTED COEFFICIENTS

	Model 1 + Base	Model 2 + Cohort	Model 3 + Social Structure	Model 4 + Women's Employment
Regression coefficients:				
Intercept .....	−80.216 <sup>a</sup>	−90.995 <sup>a</sup>	−76.589 <sup>a</sup>	−70.747 <sup>a</sup>
Survey year .....	.040 <sup>a</sup>	.025 <sup>a</sup>	.022 <sup>a</sup>	.023 <sup>a</sup>
Survey year spline (knot = 1994) .....	−.068 <sup>a</sup>	−.062 <sup>a</sup>	−.061 <sup>a</sup>	−.061 <sup>a</sup>
Survey year spline (knot = 2000) .....	.045 <sup>a</sup>	.047 <sup>a</sup>	.053 <sup>a</sup>	.054 <sup>a</sup>
Cohort: year of birth .....		.021 <sup>a</sup>	.016 <sup>a</sup>	.013 <sup>a</sup>
Cohort: year of birth spline (1952) .....		−.018 <sup>a</sup>	−.014 <sup>a</sup>	−.010 <sup>a</sup>
Social structural controls .....	No	No	Yes	Yes
Women's employment .....	No	No	No	Yes
Calculated period slopes:				
1977–94 .....	.040	.025	.022	.023
1994–2000 .....	−.027	−.037	−.039	−.039
2000–2008 .....	.018	.010	.014	.015
Calculated cohort slopes:				
Pre-1952 .....		.021	.016	.013
Post-1952 .....		.003	.003	.003
R <sup>2</sup> .....	.037	.130	.230	.245
N .....	21,925	21,925	21,925	21,925

NOTE.—Data are from General Social Surveys, 1977–2008. Full results for the social structural and employment coefficients are available in the appendix in the online version of this journal.

<sup>a</sup>  $P < .001$ .

just much smaller. This curvilinearity can be summarized in its own spline function with a hinge at births in 1952.<sup>9</sup>

Column 2 of table 2 shows the effects of controls for birth cohort and the cohort spline. As other analyses have shown, cohort composition accounts for a substantial part of the positive linear trend in gender attitudes in the 1970s and 1980s. After cohort controls, the year coefficient (+0.025) is only 63% of its size before controls. Much of the change in the 1970s and 1980s is explained by the cohort controls.<sup>10</sup>

However, only a small part (8%) of the reversal of the 1990s is explained by cohort controls. The first spline coefficient is reduced slightly, reflecting the slowing down of the cohort replacement effect in the 1990s, but this effect on the period reversal is not great. The turning point in 1994 is almost as dramatic after the cohort controls as before. The implied negative slope since 1994 (−0.037) is now even more negative than before cohort controls (−0.027). Except for the continued although milder liberalizing effect of cohort replacement, the conservative trend since 1994 would have been even more dramatic. That is, within cohorts, individuals became considerably more conservative between 1994 and 2000.

The cohort controls also have little effect on the hinge after 2000. The within-cohort conservative trend in the late 1990s ends after 2000 so that the estimated slope is again positive, although weak (+0.010). A main reason for the mild liberalizing trend in the post-2000 surveys in figure 2 is that a much reduced cohort replacement effect continues to push up the national average despite little change within recent cohorts. In sum, only the 1977–94 period shows any strong evidence that individual Americans' gender attitudes became more egalitarian.

An interesting result of this formulation is that the main cohort effect during the 1970s and 1980s (+0.021) is almost as large as the main period effect (+0.025). During this era of rapid changes, one year of difference in birth dates has almost the same liberalizing impact on gender attitudes as does one year of time. After 1994, time actually makes most people more conservative (−0.037), although the more recent cohorts are still marginally more liberal than their predecessors (+0.003). Of course, we will have to wait to see if those generations born in the 1990s maintain even this same slight liberalizing cohort difference. Nevertheless, since cohorts explain little of the downturn of the late 1990s, we must look elsewhere for an explanation of the 1990s reversal.

<sup>9</sup> Results available in the online appendix table A6, control for detailed, five-year cohorts and reach the same conclusions.

<sup>10</sup> In results reported in the online appendix table A5, using a modified gender attitude scale that can be constructed for the full range of years, 1972–2008, the year coefficient is only 51% of its original size after cohort controls.

*Social Structural Controls*

How much of the period (and cohort) changes can be explained by changes in the composition of the American public? For example, each new cohort had achieved more education than its predecessor, and more education has been consistently linked with more liberal social attitudes in general, and with progressive gender role attitudes in particular. Divorce rates had skyrocketed in the 1960s and 1970s, so women seemed to need the protection of a job even if married. By the mid-1970s, fertility rates had reached their nadir following the baby boom of the 1950s, so family pressure on raising children may have abated. Some of these trends have ebbed in the last decade and so might account for the 1990s reversal in gender attitudes; the steady fertility rates since the mid-1970s mean that the number of children in American households is no longer declining as it had done previously.

We test for the effects of these structural changes on the 1990s reversal in two steps. First, in column 3 of table 2, we add controls for education, religion, ethnicity, family income, and family structure and then, in a second step, because of its special problems of endogeneity, add the control for whether there is a working woman in the family. All of these factors have their expected and now well-documented impacts on gender attitudes (details provided in appendix table A3, which can be accessed in the online version of this journal), but none of these controls changes the period coefficients very much. The slope for 1977–94 in model 3 is +0.022, down only 12% from the +0.025 shown in model 2 without any structural controls. The hinge marking the downturn at 1994 changes negligibly (–0.062 to –0.061), so the downturn cannot be explained by any of these measurable characteristics of the GSS individuals. The second spline coefficient is actually larger after the controls suggesting that the rebound after 2000 might have been stronger except for changes in American society.

The story is quite different for the cohort effects, which are more easily explained by the changes in American society included in model 3. The slope of the annual increase in the pre-1952 cohorts reduces by 23%, from +0.021 to +0.016, after the social structural controls. Increasing education is important in explaining the rising liberalism among these early cohorts. Perhaps more interesting, the weakening of the cohort effect in the post-1952 cohorts is in part a result of the weakening of many of these structural changes in the post-1952 cohort. Education levels in particular stopped rising so rapidly in the post-1952 cohorts, so the smaller changes in gender attitudes after the 1952 cohort should not be unexpected.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Some of the structural explanations of cohort differences are probably overstated

Although women's labor force participation is strongly associated with gender role attitudes, it explains almost none of the period effects. (Results are reported in tables A1–A8, available in the online version of *AJS*.) The survey-year coefficients in column 4 of table 2 are only marginally different from those in column 3; the cohort coefficients, however, decline by another 20%–30% from those without controls for women's work. Thus, the structural changes in American society, including especially higher education and more women working at higher status positions, helped give more recent cohorts more liberal gender attitudes. But little of the period effects, and almost none of the reversal of the 1990s, can be related to these structural changes.

### *Ideological Changes*

Our last possibility of explaining the attitude reversal of the 1990s is to look to the broader ideological climate, which may have become more conservative in the 1990s. A more conservative ideological climate would not so much "explain" the reversal in gender attitudes as change the nature of our search for explanations. If the 1990s experienced a general reversal of liberal ideology, of which the change in gender attitudes was just a part, then we need to look to sources of this general pattern rather than to some specifically gender-based changes.

The results of the controls for the rights ideology scale, political conservatism, and party identification are reported in table 3. Because the sample size is much reduced from the models in table 2, the period and cohort coefficients in models 1 and 2 are slightly different from the equivalent models in table 2, but the substantive interpretations remain much the same. Both ideology variables and Democratic Party identification are strongly associated with gender attitudes, even after the controls for background factors. (Results are reported in tables A1–A8, available in the online version of *AJS*.)

Like the social structural changes, the ideological changes help explain the cohort differences but have little ability to explain the period effects. The negative coefficient for the 1994 period spline hardly changes after adding the political and rights ideology variables. In contrast, the rights ideology is closely associated with the cohort differences in gender attitudes and, so, "explains" a good deal of the increases in liberal gender attitudes of the post-1952 cohorts and especially the deceleration in those cohort changes after 1952.

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since the changing gender attitudes of recent generations undoubtedly affected their behavior as well: certainly some of the increase in women's labor force participation and perhaps even the changes in marriage and family formation are consequences, not causes, of the attitude differences.

TABLE 3  
REGRESSIONS OF GENDER ATTITUDE SCALE WITH POLITICAL IDEOLOGY,  
SELECTED COEFFICIENTS

	Model 1	Model 4	Model 5
Regression coefficients:			
Intercept .....	-79.947*	-70.330*	-64.863*
Survey year .....	.040*	.023*	.024*
Survey year spline (knot = 1994) .....	-.066*	-.058*	-.058*
Survey year spline (knot = 2000) .....	.044*	.053*	.051*
Cohort: year of birth .....		.013*	.009*
Cohort: year of birth spline (1952) .....		-.010*	-.005*
Social structural controls .....	No	Yes	Yes
Women's employment controls .....	No	Yes	Yes
Ideology and political controls .....	No	No	Yes
Calculated period slopes:			
1977-94 .....	.040	.023	.024
1994-2000 .....	-.025	-.035	-.034
2000-2008 .....	.018	.018	.017
Calculated cohort slopes:			
Pre-1952 .....		.013	.009
Post-1952 .....		.003	.004
R <sup>2</sup> .....	.055	.253	.308
N .....	11,446	11,446	11,446

NOTE.—Data are from General Social Surveys, 1977–2008. Full results for all coefficients in models 4 and 5 are available in the appendix in the online version of this journal.

\*  $P < .001$ .

The post-1952 birth cohorts that favor more egalitarian gender roles are the same cohorts that favor a more tolerant acceptance of social and political minorities. This can be seen most clearly in table 4, which reports regressions of the rights ideology and political identifications on the same variables as model 4 of table 3. The first column, analyzing the rights ideology, shows substantial cohort effects, even after controls for the other structural variables. The pattern of these cohort associations with the rights ideology is quite similar to the pattern of the cohort associations with the gender attitudes in table 3: there is a rapid rise in rights ideology up to the 1952 cohort, after which the trend flattens out entirely or even declines. Gender attitudes changed across cohorts along with these other changes in political ideology, so cohort differences in gender attitudes need to be interpreted as part of this broader shift in individual rights ideology.

In contrast, there are no significant period effects on rights ideology. Thus, the time trends in rights ideology are almost entirely a cohort replacement effect. Period changes in gender attitudes are quite different. Neither the general period rise in gender egalitarianism in the 1970s and 1980s nor its turnaround after 1994 is associated with any period trends in liberal ideology.

TABLE 4  
REGRESSIONS OF RIGHTS IDEOLOGY AND POLITICAL VARIABLES ON YEAR, COHORT,  
AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

	Rights Ideology	Conservative Identification	Republican Party Identification
Regression coefficients:			
Survey year .....	.001	.015***	.022***
Survey year spline (knot = 1994) .....	-.005	.000	-.031**
Survey year spline (knot = 2000) .....	.009+	-.006	-.013
Cohort: year of birth .....	.010***	-.005***	.003*
Cohort: year of birth spline (1952) .....	-.011***	.003	.011***
Social structural controls .....	Yes	Yes	Yes
Women's employment controls .....	Yes	Yes	Yes
Calculated period slopes:			
1977–94 .....	.001	.015	.022
1994–2000 .....	-.003	.015	-.009
2000–2008 .....	.006	.009	-.022
Calculated cohort slopes:			
Pre-1952 .....	.010	-.005	.003
Post-1952 .....	-.001	-.002	.014
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> .....	.335	.090	.144
<i>N</i> .....	11,958	21,017	21,584

NOTE.—Data are from General Social Surveys, 1977–2008. Full results for all coefficients are available in the appendix in the online version of this journal. Rights ideology is an index of 18 items measuring civil liberties, civil rights, and sexual tolerance. Conservative identification: “We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I’m going to show you a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal—point 1—to extremely conservative—point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale?” Republican Party identification: “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?”

+ *P* < .10.

\* *P* < .05.

\*\* *P* < .01.

\*\*\* *P* < .001.

The results for conservative and Republican self-identifications do show statistically significant period effects, but they are the opposite of what would explain the gender ideology trends. The 1972–94 period effects reveal increasing conservative and Republican identifications (a consequence of the Reagan era) in contrast to the gender attitude trends, which became more liberal in this period. Moreover, the post-1994 period showed no such Republican trend even though gender attitudes had ceased becoming more liberal then. While the period trend toward more conservative identifications continued after 1994, the pace of change was identical to the pre-1994 period, when gender attitudes were becoming more liberal. Thus, there is nothing in the general political trends after 1994 to prompt an end to the rise in liberal gender attitudes.

DISCUSSION

Changes in gender attitudes in the last three decades break into two distinct phases: a steady liberalization that halted in the mid-1990s and then changed little in the years since. There is a slight and interesting rebound since 2000 but nowhere near the rate of change of the 1970s and 1980s. About half of the increase up until the mid-1990s was a cohort replacement effect with more recent, liberal cohorts replacing earlier, more conservative cohorts. The attitude differences among cohorts became much smaller for people born after 1952, so recently the cohort replacement effect has lost most of its strength: the new cohorts are no longer that much more liberal than the cohorts being replaced. This weaker cohort effect accounts for a small part of the mid-1990s turnaround, but most of the post-1990s leveling is unexplained.

The cohort differences are more easily explained than the period effects. More recent cohorts are better educated, and this difference alone accounts for many of the differences in gender attitudes. More recent cohorts are generally more liberal on civil rights and social attitudes, although as is true for gender attitudes, the post-1952 cohorts differ far less than the pre-baby-boom cohorts did. Thus, cohort differences in gender attitudes are best understood as part of this same pattern of growing but decelerating social liberalism among recent generations.

The period effects, however, are not well linked to changes in American social structure nor to broader changes in social ideology. Neither the period increases between the 1970s and the 1990s nor the reversal after the mid-1990s are associated closely with any other changes we can measure in the GSS samples. These period changes are specific to gender attitudes and do not reflect any underlying changes in American ideology. For this reason, we suspect that the period changes in gender attitudes better reflect the popular agitations and trends in popular culture surrounding gender issues. This was Ferree's (1974) conclusion at the beginning of this period, and it seems that the passage of time has only confirmed her emphasis on feminist protest.

What is still most difficult to understand is the timing of the reversal in gender attitudes in the mid-1990s rather than in the mid-1980s, when a cultural backlash was already well established and feminist mobilization had subsided. The (second) women's movement rose in a great crescendo of cultural and structural changes during the 1970s. Feminism held the public stage almost alone during that decade. There was opposition, of course, but it was less organized and less vocal—more of a conservative inertia that only occasionally spoke publicly and then often in a reactionary and discredited voice. So, the period attitude changes in the 1970s fit the events of the times.



But the 1970s were only a moment in the history of gender relations. By the 1980s, organized opposition to feminism was better established, and the defeat of the ERA in 1983 signaled that feminism was no longer an unchallengeable wave of the future. Cultural backlash was evident throughout the 1980s, as Susan Faludi (1991) thoroughly documented. This backlash in gender culture fit broadly with the conservative “Reagan Revolution” of the 1980s.

Nevertheless, neither public attitudes nor most structural changes in gender inequalities showed any sign of reversal or even slowing down in the 1980s. Women, especially married mothers with young children, continued to enter the labor force in ever growing numbers. They integrated previously male occupations, especially middle-class occupations, and narrowed the earnings gap with men more in the 1980s than in any other decade we have been able to measure. The most pressing question in understanding gender attitude change is why it took over a decade of reaction before we could observe any real consequences of the 1980s backlash that Faludi described in her 1991 book and had been mobilized by the anti-ERA forces.

Change did finally come in the mid-1990s. Perhaps rapid periods of change such as the gender revolution of the 1970s can only sustain themselves for short periods—a kind of punctuated equilibrium theory of change in which stasis or slow generational change is the normal condition of social life. But we still need to identify what forces arose to hold back the wave of changes that seemed so dominant for two decades. Even if reaction is inevitable, it cannot be invisible.

Recent analyses of the antifeminist backlash have identified new themes in popular culture that might explain a reversal in the 1990s rather than in the 1980s. The reaction of the 1990s featured several new themes, a different “package” of ideas (Gamson and Modigliani 1989), that together created a new cultural frame to mobilize antifeminist forces. This new frame may have been more effective than the earlier, more traditionalist resistance because it combined elements of both traditional familism and feminist egalitarianism. During the 1970s and for much of the 1980s, the struggle over gender relations had been framed in a progressive equality rhetoric versus an older family hierarchy tradition. In the 1990s, a third cultural frame emerged that proclaimed itself egalitarian and woman-centered but nevertheless opposed some of the structural changes that had moved American society toward a more feminist future. In this alternative frame, equality meant the right of women to choose—so choosing a stay-at-home mother role could represent as much of a feminist choice as pursuing an independent career (Williams 2000). Stone (2007) shows that career women who “opted out” for full-time motherhood always used this rhetoric of choice in describing their changed lives—even if those

changes were prompted mainly by unsupportive work environments or increased job demands. If traditional stay-at-home motherhood roles could be defended while still professing an egalitarian worldview, people could support traditional gender attitudes without identifying themselves with an outdated and unfair sexism.

Paul Burstein and his colleagues (Burstein, Bricher, and Einwohner 1995; Burstein and Bricher 1997; Burstein and Wierzbicki 2000) have also proposed a similar classification of gender frames to analyze congressional legislation, noting that the rise of a "work-family accommodation" frame came to replace the "traditional spheres" frame but nevertheless was distinct from an "equal opportunity" frame that had dominated much of the 1970s and 1980s.

Charles and Grusky (2004) have also posited a multidimensional gender map in which a separate-but-equal ideology provides the cultural basis for sex segregation between manual and nonmanual occupations—a "horizontal" distinction in contrast to the "vertical" distinction between high- and low-status occupations within each sector. The historical decline in this vertical status dimension of segregation can be traced to a declining male primacy ideology. But Charles and Grusky argue that a culture can reject male primacy but still endorse a separate spheres essentialist ideology ("boys are better at math, and girls at literature" or "women are better at social relations, men at manipulating things").

Parallel multidimensional arguments have been made to understand the public shift toward opposition to the Vietnam War in the 1970s: a debate that had been deadlocked between pacifist doves and hawkish war proponents was broken by the rising popularity of a third frame, "win or get out," that combined elements of both the hawkish and dovish frames (Modigliani 1972; Schuman 1972).

Other themes entered the popular culture in the 1990s that reinforced this "egalitarian but traditional" gender frame. The expansion of intensive mothering (Hays 1996) created pressure to find a way to support traditional gender roles without appearing sexist. Children now faced such a competitive future that only a stay-at-home parent could prepare them adequately. The growth of expensive infertility treatments also provided a monetary expression to the rise of the precious child. Parenting in the 1990s required, in part, a selfless sacrifice on behalf of your children, but raising children also became a challenge with its own intrinsic rewards at least as important as professional fulfillment. According to Blair-Loy's (2003) devotion to family schema, "involved motherhood is vital and creative." Intensive mothering was reinforced by the transformation of the toy industry into "educational support" and by the media's serious treatment of such far-fetched ideas as the benefits to the fetus of listening to Mozart (Douglas and Michaels 2004). The consequence, however, was to

endow the traditional female gender roles that Betty Friedan (1963) had once characterized as the problem that had no name with a new social and intellectual purpose providing a similar challenge as a career: traditional but now equal.

At the same time, a wave of media stories on the stress resulting from women's efforts to "have it all" also raised questions about a feminist agenda. Just as parenting demands were increasing, so were time demands at work, at least among the professional middle class (Jacobs and Gerson 2004). Instead of work organizations adapting to the needs of parents, women were supposed to blame themselves for the inevitable work and family conflicts. Nor did child care institutions respond sufficiently to the new needs. Instead, real and imagined child molestation cases painted institutional child care as a danger better avoided by stay-at-home mothers. And, as if it were a deliberate divide-and-conquer strategy, supposed "mommy wars" (Peskowitz 2005) developed between stay-at-home and career mothers that effectively replaced the gender wars for a more feminist future.

These 1990s popular culture themes of intensive mothering and women's career stress supported some traditional gender roles by justifying women's decisions to forgo careers and stay home to raise their children. But the traditional stay-at-home role was justified not for the sake of their husbands' careers but for their children's advancement and for their own mental health. Thus, the new gender frame could still be technically egalitarian between husband and wife and even emphasize the importance of women's autonomous choices but nevertheless support what still looks like a traditional gender division of labor. Agreement with the traditional alternatives of the GSS gender items could therefore be reinterpreted in the 1990s not as an endorsement of hierarchical gender relations of submissive wives and decision-making husbands but as a sensible choice for women to maximize their own and their children's best interests. This new frame would be most persuasive for those households facing the strains of work-family conflicts, that is, for parents and for households with working women—precisely those households that the GSS shows had the strongest turnaround in attitudes during the 1990s.

Nevertheless, not all the GSS results fit so neatly with an explanation emphasizing a new gender frame based on intensive mothering and career stress. The obsessive concern with child-rearing is largely a middle-class phenomenon (Lareau 2003). Similarly, increased work demands are also limited to the middle class, while working-class employees actually have seen their work hours decline (Jacobs and Gerson 2004). The GSS analyses, however, do not show significant differences between college and high school graduates in the 1990s turnaround, although there is some evidence that the turnaround was sharper for families with high incomes.

Thus, a cultural explanation of the 1990s attitude changes should be grounded in a shift in the national culture in response to a rise of intensive parenting, but one that families with working mothers were especially responsive to because of their work-family conflicts. That is, the cultural explanation has to be a macro-level cause: it is not just the particular families who experienced this time bind that changed their attitudes; everybody's attitudes were affected by the popularity of this new cultural frame. The origins of the new frame might be found in conditions that affected the dual-earner middle-class family most strongly, but its consequences were universal.

If the turnaround of the 1990s derived from this new "egalitarian but traditional" frame for understanding gender relations, we will need a broader array of attitude questions to tap the public's multidimensional understanding of gender roles. The GSS gender questions inquire about only a limited range of issues—appropriate for a strategy of tracking changes over time but insufficient for distinguishing between male primacy and separate spheres ideologies. Three of the four GSS items explicitly tap work-and-family conflicts, while the fourth (FEPOL) could also be interpreted by some respondents as reflecting a kind of nonevaluative essentialism ("Men are better at politics; women are better at non-competitive friendships"). Thus, the 1990s turnaround in the GSS may reflect a growth of an egalitarian essentialism that combines feminist and traditional attitudes rather than being strictly a return to the traditionalism of midcentury.

It is also true that the first decade of the 21st century has trended differently from the decline observed for the last decade of the 20th. Anybody speculating about trends still in progress needs to proceed with a humility required by the unpredictability of the future. Since we first began working on the 1990s turnaround (Cotter et al. 2004), each subsequent GSS survey has shown a small but consistent increase in gender egalitarian attitudes. The pace of change in this century is nothing like the rate of change in the 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, the rebound in the first decade of this century needs explanation as much as the downturn in the last decade of the 20th. Where future changes will go is not well predicted by the recent past. The question mark in our title is still well deserved.

Whatever the direction for the future, we will still be faced with the question of explaining the 1990s reversal, which our analyses have shown had little basis in any structural or broader ideological changes in American society. Instead, we need to explain period changes with changes in period events: the rise and decline of feminist and antifeminist movements; the shifts in popular culture, especially the rise of a new cultural frame that incorporates traditional gender roles without implying hierarchical

power relations; and the independent emergence of new cultural concerns, such as intensive parenting and career stress, whose consequences, intended or not, helped reverse past trends in norms of gender equality.

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