

Shanley, "Marriage Contract and Social Contract in Seventeenth-Century English Political Thought" (80-95), both in *The Family in Political Thought*, ed. Jean Bethke Elshtain (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982).

19. See my "Single Mothers and Child Neglect."

14

Why Men Resist

WILLIAM J. GOODE

Although few if any men in the United States remain entirely untouched by the women's movement, to most men what is happening seems to be "out there" and has little direct effect on their own roles. Indeed, since the mass media constantly inform both men and women that the movement toward equality has ended, they are confirmed in that tendency. To most men, the movement often seems to be a dialogue mainly among women, conferences of women about women, a mixture of just or exaggerated complaints and shrill and foolish demands to which men need not even respond, except now and then. When men see that a woman resents a common male act of condemnation, such as making fun of women in sports or management, most males are sometimes still as surprised as corporation heads are when they are told to stop polluting a river.

Men are correct in this perception if one focuses on the short run only. It is not often that social behavior so deeply rooted in tradition alters rapidly. Over the longer run, they are not likely to be correct, and indeed I believe they are vaguely uneasy when they consider their present situation. Unlike numerous popular commentators, I do not think we are now witnessing a return to the old ways, a politically reactionary trend, and I do not think the contemporary attack on male privilege will ultimately fail.

The worldwide demand for equality is voiced not only by women. Many groups have pressed for it, with more persistence, strength, and success over the past generations than in any prior epoch of world history. It has also been pressed by more kinds of people than ever before: ethnic and racial groups; castes; subnational groups such as the Scots, Basques, or Azerbaijani; classes; colonics; and

An earlier version of this essay first appeared in the journal *Dissent* and was reprinted in the first column of *Rethinking the Family*.

political regimes. Even the Russians have recently joined in this great swell. The profoundly moving ideal of equality will ultimately prevail, in some measure, where the structural bases for traditional dominance are weakened. The ancient bases for male dominance are no longer as secure as they once were, and male resistance to these pressures will weaken.

Males will stubbornly resist but reluctantly adjust, because women will continue to want more equality than they now enjoy and will be unhappy if they do not get it; because men on average will prefer that the women they care about be happy; because a majority of either sex will not find an adequate substitute for the other sex; and because neither will be able to build an alternative social system alone. When dominant classes or groups cannot rig the system as much in their favor as they once did, they will work within it just the same; to revise an old adage, if that is the only roulette wheel in town, they will play it even if it is honest and fair.

For many women, the very title of my essay is an exercise in banality, for there is no puzzle. To analyze the peculiar thoughtways of men seems unnecessary, since ultimately their resistance is that of dominant groups throughout history: they enjoy an exploitive position that yields them an unearned profit in money, power, and prestige. Why should they give it up?

That answer contains, of course, some part of the truth, but we shall move more effectively toward equality only if we grasp much more of the truth than that bitter view reveals. If it were completely true, then the great power of men would have made all societies male-vanity cultures, in which women are kept behind blank walls and forced to work at productive tasks only with their sisters, while men laze away their hours in parasitic pleasure. In fact, one can observe that the position of women varies a good deal by class, by society, and over time, and no one has succeeded in proving that those variations are only the result of men's exploitation.

Indeed, there are inherent socioeconomic contradictions in any attempt by males to create a fully exploitative set of material advantages for all males. Moreover, there are inherent emotional contradictions in any effort to achieve full domination in that intimate sphere.

As to the first contradiction, women—and men, too, in the same situation—who are powerless, slavish, and ignorant are most easily

exploitable, and thus there are always some male pressures to place them in that position. Unfortunately, such women (or men) do not yield much surplus product. In fact, they do not produce much at all. Women who are freer and are more in command of productive skills, as in hunting and gathering societies and increasingly in modern industrial ones, produce far more, but they are also more resistant to exploitation or domination. Without understanding that powerful relationship, men have moved throughout history toward one or the other of these great choices, with their built-in disadvantages and advantages.

As to emotional ties, men would like to be lords of their caste and to be loved absolutely—if successful, this is the cheapest exploitative system—but in real life this is less likely to happen unless one loves in return. In that case what happens is what happens in real life: men care about the joys and sorrows of the women to whom they are attached. Mutual caring reduces the degree to which men are willing to exploit their wives, mothers, and sisters. More interesting, their caring also takes the form of wanting to prevent other men from exploiting these women when they are in the outside world. That is, men as individuals know that they are to be trusted, and so should have great power, but other men cannot be trusted, and therefore the laws should restrain such fellows.

These large sets of contrary tensions have some effect on even those contemporary men who do not believe that the present relations between men and women are unjust. Both sets, moreover, support the present trend toward greater equality. In short, men do resist, but these and other tensions prevent them from resisting as fully as they might otherwise, and not so much as a cynical interpretation of their private attitudes would expect. On the other hand, they do resist somewhat more strenuously than we should predict from their public assertion in favor of, for example, equal pay, or slogans like "liberty and justice for all."

Why is that resistance so strenuous? My attempt here to answer that question is necessarily limited. Even to present the latest data on the supposed psychological traits of males would require more space than is available here. I shall try to avoid the temptation of simply describing men's reactions to the women's movement, although I do plan to inform you of men's attitudes toward some aspects of equality. I shall try to avoid defending men, except to the

extent that explaining them may be a defense. And, as is already obvious, I shall not assert that we are on the brink of a profound, sudden change in sex-role allocations in the direction of equality, for we must never underestimate the cunning or the staying power of those in charge. Finally, because we are all observers of men, it is unlikely that I can bring forward many findings that are entirely unknown to you. At best, I can suggest some fruitful, perhaps new, ways of looking at male roles. Within these limitations, I shall focus on the following themes:

1. As against the rather narrow definition of men's roles to be found in the current literature on the topic, I want to remind you of a much wider range of traditionally approved roles in this and other cultures.
2. As against the conspiracy theory of the oppression of women, I shall suggest a modest "sociology of the dominant group" to interpret men's behavior and thinking about male roles and thus offer some robust hypotheses about why they resist.
3. I shall point to two central areas of role behavior, occupations and domestic tasks, where change seems glacial at present and men's resistance strong.
4. As against those who feel that if utopia does not arrive with the next full moon, we should all despair, I shall point to some processes now occurring that are different from any in recorded history and that will continue to press toward more fundamental changes in men's social positions and roles in this as well as other countries of the world.

The Range of Sex Roles

Let me begin by reminding you of the standard sociological view about the allocation of sex roles. First, although it is agreed that we can, with only small error, divide the population into males and females, the biological differences between the two that might affect the distribution of sex roles—which sex is supposed to do which social tasks, which should have which rights—are much too small to determine the large differences in sex-role allocation within any given society or to explain the curious doctrines that serve to uphold it. Second, even if some differences would give an advantage to men (or women) in some tasks or achievements, the overlap in talent is so

great that a large minority of women (or men)—perhaps even a majority—could do any task as well as could members of the other sex. Third, the biological differences are too fixed in anatomy and physiology to account for the wide diversity of sex-role allocation we observe when we compare different societies over time and cultures.

Consequently, most of the sex-role allocation must be explained by how we rear children, by the sexual division of labor, by the cultural definitions of what is appropriate to the sexes, and by the social pressures we put on the two sexes to keep each in its place. Since human beings created these role assignments, they can also change them. On the other hand, these roles afford large advantages to men (e.g., opportunity, range of choices, mobility, payoffs for what is accomplished, cultivation of skills, authority, and prestige) in this and every other society we know. Consequently, men are likely to resist large alterations in roles. They will do so even though they understand that in exchange for their privileges, they have to pay high costs in morbidity, mortality, and failure.¹ As a consequence of this fact about men's position, it can be supposed that they will resist unless their ability to rig the system in their favor is somehow reduced. It is my belief that this capacity is in fact being undermined somewhat, though not at a rapid rate.

A first glance at descriptions of the male role, especially as described in the literature on mass media, social stereotypes, family roles, and personality attributes, suggests that the male role is definite, narrow, and agreed upon. Males, we are told, are pressed into a specific mold. For example, "the male role prescribes that men be active, aggressive, competitive, . . . while the female role prescribes that women should be nurturant, warm, altruistic . . . and the like."² The male role requires the suppression of emotion: "the male role, as personally and socially defined, requires men to appear tough, objective, striving, achieving, unsentimental. . . . If he weeps, if he shows weakness, he will likely be viewed as unmanly." Or: "Men are programmed to be strong and 'aggressive.'"³ Those statements were published some time ago, but the flood of books since then has only elaborated that description.

We are so accustomed to reading such descriptions that we almost believe them, unless we stop to ask, first, how many men do we actually know who carry out these social prescriptions (i.e., how many are emotionally anesthetized, aggressive, physically tough and

daring, unwilling or unable to give nurturance to a child)? Second, and this is the test of a social role, do they lose their membership cards in the male fraternity if they fail in these respects? If socialization and social pressures are so all-powerful, where are all the John Wayne types in our society? Or, to ask a more searching question, how seriously should we take such sex-role prescriptions if so few men live up to them? The recent creation of male groups chanting around a campfire, searching for the lost primitive hunter within each bosom, suggests that our generation can not even play the role anymore without a great deal of coaching.

The key fact is not that many men do not live up to such prescriptions; that is obvious. They never did. Rather, many other qualities and performances have always been viewed as acceptable or admirable, and this is true even among boys, who are often thought to be strong supporters of sex stereotypes. The macho boy is admired, but so is the one who edits the school newspaper, who draws cartoons, or who is simply a warm friend. There are at least a handful of ways of being an admired professor. Indeed, a common feminist complaint against the present system is that women are much more narrowly confined in the ways they are permitted to be professors, or members of any occupation.

But we can go further. A much more profound observation is that oppressed groups are *typically* given narrow ranges of social roles, while dominant groups afford their members a far wider set of behavior patterns, each qualitatively different but each still accepted or esteemed in varying degrees. One of the privileges granted, or simply assumed, by ruling groups, is that they can indulge in a variety of eccentricities while still demanding and getting a fair measure of authority or prestige. Consider in this connection, to cite only one spectacular example, the crochets and quirks cultivated by the English upper classes over the centuries.

Moreover, if we enlarge our vision to encompass other times and places, the range becomes even greater. We are not surprised to observe Latin American men embrace one another, Arab or Indian boys walk together hand in hand, or seminary students being gentle. The male role prescriptions that commonly appear in the literature do not describe correctly the male ideal in Jewish culture, which embodies a love of music, learning, and literature; an avoidance of physical violence; an acceptance of tears and sentiment, nurturance, and a sen-

sitivity to others' feelings. In the South that I knew half a century ago, young rural boys were expected to nurture their younger siblings, and male-male relations were ideally expected to be tender, supporting, and expressed occasionally by embraces. Among my own kin, some fathers then kissed their school-age sons; among Greek Americans in New York City, that practice continues many decades later. Or, to consider England once more, let us remember the admired men of Elizabethan England. True enough, one ideal was the violent, daring Sir Francis Drake and the brawling poet Ben Jonson. But men also expressed themselves in kissing and embracing, writing love poems to one another, donning decorative (not to say gaudy and flamboyant) clothing, and studying flowers as well as the fiery heavens.

I assert, then, that men manage to be in charge of things in all societies but that their very control permits them to create a wide range of ideal male roles, with the consequence that large numbers of men, not just a few, can locate rewarding positions in the social structure. Thereby, too, they considerably narrow the options left for feminine sex roles. Feminists especially resent the narrowness of the feminine role in informal interaction, where they feel they are dealt with only as women, however this may be softened by personal warmth or affection.

We can recognize that general relationship in a widespread male view, echoed over the centuries, that males are people, individuals, while women are lumped together as an aggregate. Or, in more modern language: women have specific roles, a delimited number of parts to play, but men cannot be described so simply.

Nor is that peculiar male view contradicted by the complaint, again found in all major civilizations, that women are mysterious, unpredictable, moved by forces outside men's understanding, and not controllable. Even that master of psychodynamics Sigmund Freud expressed his bewilderment by asking, "What do women want?" Men have found their women difficult to understand for a simple reason: they have continued to try to think of them as a set of roles (above all else, mothers and wives), but in fact women do not fit these roles, neither now nor in the past. Some women were great fighting machines, not compliant; some were competitive and aggressive, not nurturant; many were incompetent or reluctant mothers. They have been queens and astronomers, moralists and nurturers, leaders of religious orders as well as corporations, and so on.

At any point, men could observe that women were ignoring or breaking out of their social molds, and men experienced that discrepancy as puzzling. However, it is only recently that many have faced the blunt fact that there is no feminine riddle at all: women are as complex as men are, and will always escape the confinements of any narrow set of roles.

The Sociology of Superordinates

That set of relationships is only part of the complex male view, and I want to continue with my sketch of the main elements in what may be called the "sociology of superordinates." That is, I believe there are some general principles or regularities to be found in the relationships between superordinates—here, the sex-class called males—and subordinates, in this instance women. Those regularities do not justify, but they do explain in some degree, the modern resistance of men to their social situation.⁴ Here are some of them:

1. The observations made by either men or women about members of the other sex are limited and somewhat biased by what they are most interested in and by their lack of opportunity to observe behind the scenes of each others' lives.⁵ However, far less of what men do is determined by women; what men do affects women much more. As a consequence, men are often simply less motivated to observe carefully many aspects of women's behavior and activity because women's behavior does not affect as much what men propose to do. By contrast, almost everything men do will affect what women *have* to do, and thus women are motivated to observe men's behavior as keenly as they can.

2. Since any given cohort of men know they did not create the system that gives them their advantages, they reject any charges that they conspired to dominate women.

3. Since men, like other dominants or superordinates, take for granted the system that gives them their status, they are not aware of how much the social structure, from attitude patterns to laws, pervasively yields small, cumulative, and eventually large advantages in most competitions. As a consequence, they assume that their greater accomplishments are actually the result of inborn superiority. Dominants are never satisfied with their rule unless they can also justify it.

4. As a corollary to this male view, when men weigh their situation, they are more aware of the burdens and responsibilities they bear than of their unearned advantages.

5. Superiors, and thus men, do not easily notice the talents or accomplishments of subordinates, and men have not in the past seen much wisdom in giving women more opportunities for growth, for women, in their view, are not capable of much anyway, especially in the areas of men's special skills. As is obvious, this is a self-validating process. Thus, few women have embarrassed men in the past by becoming superior in those areas. When they did, their superiority was seen, and is often still seen, as an odd exception. As a consequence, men see their superior position as a just one.

6. Men view even small losses of deference, advantages, or opportunities as large threats and losses. Their own gains, or their maintenance of old advantages, are not noticed as much.⁶

Although the male view is similar to that of superordinates generally, as the foregoing principles suggest, one cannot simply equate the two. The structural position of males is different from that of superordinate groups, classes, ethnic populations, or castes. Males are, first, not a group, but a social segment or a statistical aggregate within the society. They share much of a common destiny, but they share few if any group or collective goals (within small groups they may be buddies, but not with all males). Second, males share with certain women whatever gain or loss they experience as members of high or low castes, ethnic groups, or classes. For example, women in a ruling stratum share with their men a high social rank, deference from the lower orders, and so on; men in a lowly Indian caste share that rank with their women, too. In modern societies, men and women in the same family are on a more or less equal basis with respect to "inheritance, educational opportunity (at least undergraduate), personal consumption of goods, most rights before the law, and the love and responsibility of their children."⁷ They are not fully equal, to be sure, but much more equal than are members of very different castes or social classes.

Moreover, from the male view, women also enjoy certain exemptions: "freedom from military conscription, whole or partial exemption from certain kinds of heavy work, preferential courtesies of various kinds." Indeed, men have generally believed, on the whole, that their own lot is the more difficult one.⁸

It is possible, however, that feminist cries of indignation have touched their hearts, and those of women too, in recent years. Without giving a breakdown by gender, Gallup announced "a remarkable shift of opinion" in 1989: almost half those polled asserted that men

"have a better life" than women, compared with only 3.2 percent in 1975. Almost certainly many women have been convinced, since nearly two-thirds of younger women felt that way.⁹ Fifty-nine percent of a 1990 *Times Mirror* sample of women aged eighteen to twenty-four agreed, but so did 65 percent of the men.

As the student of polls will recognize, however, that shift has many sources. The judgment, of course, is about all men, whether single, married, or divorced, and includes all aspects of life. In a society in which people seem to be moving toward less personal long-term investments in the collectivity of the family, men are better able to reap the benefits of abandoning costly family obligations—and thus may be seen as "having a better life." I continue to be certain, however, that most men with families still believe that their lot is harder than that of most women.

Most important as a structural fact that prevents men from cunningly exploiting their superordinate status is that they do not live in communities, neighborhoods, or families set apart from women. Of course, some other social categories are not sequestered either, such as alcoholics, former mental patients, or the physically handicapped; but these are, as Goffman points out, "scattered somewhat haphazardly through the social structure." That is not so for men; like their women, they are allocated to households in a nonrandom way, for "law and custom allow only one to a household, but strongly encourage the presence of that one."¹⁰

A consequence of this important structural arrangement is that men and women are separated from their own sex by having a stake in the organization that gives each a set of different roles, or a different emphasis to similar roles. Women especially come to have a vested interest in the social unit that at the same time imposes inequalities on them. This coalition between the two individuals makes it difficult for members of one sex to join with large numbers of their own sex for purposes of defense against exploitation. This applies equally to men and women.

One neat consequence may be seen in the hundreds of family law provisions created over the centuries that seem to run at cross-purposes. Some gave more freedom to women in order to protect them from predatory or exploitative males (i.e., in a man's view, other men), and some took freedom away from women and put it in the hands of supposedly good and kindly men (i.e., himself). Or, in

more recent times, the growing efforts of some fathers to press their daughters toward career competence so they will not be helpless when abandoned by their future husbands, against those same fathers' efforts to keep their daughters docile and dutiful toward their protecting fathers.

You will note that male views are not contradictory in such instances, even though their actions may be. In coalition with their women, they oppose the exploitative efforts of outside men; within the family unit, however, they see little need for such protections against themselves, for they are sure of their own goodheartedness and wisdom.

That men see themselves as bound in a coalition with their families and thus with their daughters and wives is the cause of much common male resistance to the women's movement, even while the same men feel anger at the unfair treatment their wives and daughters have experienced from other men. The failure of many women to understand that complex male view has led to much misunderstanding.

Responses of Superordinates to Rebellion

Because of similarities in their position and views, superordinates are likely to respond to rebellion in many common ways.¹¹ One of these is surprise. To be sure, contemporary men are not as startled as the men of the 1960s and 1970s, for then they were confronted by a sudden, large social movement. Even now, however, most men are startled at times when a woman friend is annoyed by a "trivial" denial of respect for her as a person. Most men simply do not remain steadily aware of the depth of resentment that many women have harbored, though sometimes, of course, it comes as a surprise to many women, too.

Second, men are also hurt, for they feel vaguely betrayed. They discover, or begin to suspect, that the previously contented or pleasant facade their women presented to them was false, that perhaps they were even manipulated to believe in that presentation of self. Because males view themselves as giving protection against anyone exploiting or hurting their women, they respond with anger to the hostility they encounter, to the discovery that they were deceived, and to the charge they have selfishly used the dominant position they feel they have rightfully earned.

A deeper, more complex source of male anger requires a few additional comments, for it relates to a central male role, that of job holder and breadwinner. Most men, but especially most men outside the privileged stratum of professionals and managers, see their job as not yielding much intrinsic satisfaction, not being fun in itself, but they pride themselves on the hard work and personal sacrifice they make as breadwinners. In the male view, men make a gift of all this to their wives and children.¹²

Now they are told that it was not a gift, and they have not earned any special deference for it. In fact, their wives earned what they received, and indeed nothing is owing. If the work was a sacrifice, they are told, so were all the services, comforts, and self-deprivations women provided. Whatever the justice of either claim, clearly if people think they are giving or sacrificing much to make gifts to someone over a period of time, and then they learn he or she feels the gifts were completely deserved, since the counter-gifts are asserted to have been as great and no gratitude or special debt was incurred, they are likely to be hurt or angry.¹³

I am reasonably certain about the processes I have just described. Let me go a step further and speculate that the male resentment is the greater because many fathers had already come to suspect that their children, especially in adolescence, were indifferent to those sacrifices, as well as to the values that justified them.¹⁴ Sennett and Cobb made that observation in the 1970s, and I believe that paternal feeling of injustice is even stronger today. Thus, when women too begin to assert that men's gifts are not worth as much as men thought, the worth of the male is further denied.

Some Areas of Change and Nonchange

Although I have not heard specific complaints about it, I believe that the most important change in men's position, as they experience it, is a loss of centrality, a decline in the extent to which they are the center of attention. In our time, other superordinates have also suffered this loss: colonial rulers, monarchs and nobles, and U.S. whites both northern and southern, to name a few.

Boys and grown men have always taken for granted that what they were doing was more important than what the other sex was doing;

the action was where they were. Their women accepted that definition (though I am equally sure that older women in traditional societies everywhere have laughed, railed, and shaken their heads at the childishness of men, too). Men occupied center stage, and women's attention was focused on them. Although that position is at times perilous, open to failure, it is also desirable, even at times heady.

Men are still there, of course, and will be there throughout our lifetime. Nevertheless, some changes are perceptible. The center of attention shifts to women more now than in the past. I believe that this shift troubles men far more, and creates more of their resistance, than the women's demand for equal opportunity and pay in employment.

The change is especially observable in informal relations, and men who were involved with women in the liberation movement experienced it more often than other men did. Women find each other more interesting than in the past, and focus more on what each other is doing, for they are in fact doing more interesting things. Even when they are not, their work occupies more of their attention, whether they are professionals or factory workers. Being without a man for a while does not seem to be so bereft a state as it once was. I also believe that this change affects men more now than at the time of the suffragist movement, not only because more women now participate in it but also because men were then more solitary and could rely on more all-male organizations and clubs. Now they are more dependent on women for solace and intimacy, for typically they have fewer close friends than women do.

As a side issue, let me note that the loss of centrality has its counterpart among feminist women too, and its subtlety should be noted. Such women now reject a certain type of traditional centrality they used to experience, because its costs are too great. Most women know the experience of being the center of attention: when they enter a male group, even now, conversation changes in tone and subject. They are likely to be the focus of comments, many of them pleasurable: affectionate teasing, compliments, warmth. However, these comments put women into a special mold, the stereotyped female. Their serious comments are less welcomed or applauded, or their ideas are more likely to be treated as amusing. Their sexuality is emphasized. Now, after all these years of education about gender, women are more likely to experience that kind of centrality as less

pleasant—in fact, it seems condescending—and they avoid it when they can. In turn, many men feel awkward in this new situation, for sometimes their repertory of social graces is now called boorish.

Although I have noted men's feelings of hurt and anger, I want to emphasize that I believe no backlash of any consequence has been occurring, and no trend toward more reactionary male attitudes exists. Briefly, there is a continuing attitude change on the part of both men and women, in favor of more equality. The frequent expressions of male objection, sometimes loosely called "backlash" in the popular press, can be attributed to two main sources: (1) the discovery, by some men (and women) who once paid lip service to the principle of equality, that they do not approve of its concrete application; and (2) active resistance by men and women who simply never approved of equality anyway and who have now begun to oppose it openly because it can no longer be seen as a trivial threat.

If the term is used to refer simply to any adverse reaction to the forward movement of women toward equality, then surely that is nothing new, and it would not be easy to claim the present adverse reaction is *more* intense than in the days when feminists were derided publicly as mere "bra-burners." This is not, of course, a denial of the setbacks and slowdowns of the 1980s.¹⁵ I am merely asserting that little of it should be dignified by the term "backlash."

Some analysts would argue that the contemporary backlash has generated much political support for Reagan and Bush in their efforts to turn the clock back. However, in that context the notion should be recognized as having a concealed political goal: It asserts that "women have gone too far"—beyond equality, on into preference or privilege—and therefore people have been sensibly trying to reverse those excesses. Both presidents have been successful in making "red-neckism" or anti-intellectualism respectable, and they have smiled on policies that aimed at putting women back in "their place." In turn, their policies have been given a patina of apparent scholarship through reports emanating from well-endowed conservative and right-wing think tanks. Nevertheless, general public opinion has not moved backward to join those groups.

It is not possible to summarize here all the various changes in public opinion about sex roles over the past generation, simply because pollsters have often failed to chart them, especially in the earlier years. Sometimes they did not capture certain social trends because

they did not consistently ask the same questions in successive decades. One unfortunate result is that one of the most fiercely debated events of that period, the resurgence of the women's liberation movement that began in the 1960s, is not salient in the polls until rather late in the 1970s.¹⁶

The single finding that seems solid is that the data show no backward or regressive trend in men's attitudes about women's progress toward equality. The most often repeated question is not a profound one: whether a respondent would vote for a qualified woman for president. Favorable answers rose from about one-fourth of the men in 1937 to two-thirds in 1971, and to 89 percent among men and women combined in 1990. Another repeated question is whether a married woman should work if she has a husband able to support her, and here the answers of men and women combined rose from 18 percent in 1936 to 62 percent in 1975, and to 82 percent in 1990. In contrast to these large changes, a sizeable majority favored equal pay, in principle at least, as early as 1942, and later data report no decrease.

In 1953, 21 percent of men said it made no difference whether they worked for a man or woman, and that figure rose slightly to 32 percent in 1975.¹⁷ By 1989, it had risen a bit more, to 41 percent. Indeed, by that time, women were more inclined to prefer a man as boss (54 percent) than men were (43 percent). Even by 1978 polls showed that a large majority of the nation, both men and women, was in favor of the enforcement of laws forbidding job discrimination against women or discrimination in education; and most agreed that more women should be elected to public office.¹⁸ A plurality of only about 40 percent had held such favorable opinions in 1970. On such issues, men and women do not differ by much, while men's attitudes in many polls have been somewhat more favorable toward equality. Divisions of opinion are sharper along other lines: the young are in favor more than the old, the more educated more favorable than the less educated, city dwellers more than rural people, Blacks more than whites.

Whatever the differences, clearly no substantial amount of male backlash has appeared. A *Times Mirror* poll of 1990 reported that nearly three-fourths of the men agreed or strongly agreed "with the goals of the women's movement."¹⁹ Through men's eyes, at least the principle of equality seems more acceptable than in the past. Their

resistance is not set against that abstract idea—modest progress, to be sure, but progress nonetheless.

Domestic Duties and Jobs

So far, the opinion data give some small cause for optimism. Nevertheless, all announcements of the imminent arrival of utopias are premature. Although men's approval of more equality for women has risen, the record in two major areas of men's roles—the spheres of home and occupation—gives some reason for optimism, but little for rejoicing. Here we can be brief, for though voluminous and complex data exist, the main conclusions can easily be summarized.²⁰ Changes have occurred, but they are not great if we consider the society as a whole and focus on changes in behavior. In short, men have gained great credit (in conformity with their higher ranking) for a few modest steps toward equality.

Let us consider first the domestic role of men. The many complex studies done during the past decade have at least shown how difficult it is to pin down the causes of the present division of labor in the home. Thus, a simple summary is not adequate, but I note some salient findings here.

Women who work full-time have reduced the hours they spend on household tasks—in some studies, by almost half, while the reduction is substantial even if only routine tasks are included.²¹ Husbands do not do much more housework if their wives are employed full time; nevertheless, over time men have increased their contribution (especially in child care), although the increase must be measured by a few minutes per day. White men and men with high incomes are least likely to increase their contribution. About half of both husbands and wives believe they ought to share equally; four-fifths think this of child care.²² This represents a substantial change among wives, since until the end of the 1970s only about one-fourth of wives stated that they thought their husbands should work more, while the vanguard of opinion was led by the young, the educated, and African Americans.²³

I have sometimes suggested that men generally decide that if they must contribute more equally to housework, then they begin to feel the seduction of doing it in a quicker, more slovenly fashion. One study of a highly educated sample suggests this relationship: both

spouses at least express more satisfaction when the division is equal, but the two want different things. The man wants to spend only a few hours in household work, while the woman wants the traditional chores (laundry, shopping, cooking) to be shared.²⁴ In the United States, as in other countries, men are quicker to express support for equality in that sphere than actually to practice it. They may be wise in doing so, for that is surely less costly, at least for the present.

Of course, there are some differences. If a child two years or younger is in the house, the father does more, especially in child care. Better-educated husbands do a bit more, and so do younger husbands. But the indisputable fact is that men's domestic contribution does not change much whether or not they work, and whether or not their wives work.

With reference to the second large area of men's roles, holding jobs, we observe two further general principles of the relations between superordinates and those at lesser ranks. One is that men do not, in general, feel threatened by competition from women if they believe that the competition is fair and that women do not have an inside track. (To be sure, against overwhelming evidence, many do believe women enjoy that preference, while many whites believe that Blacks also have the inside track.) Men still feel that they are superior and will do better if given the chance. Since no society has actually tried the radical notion of genuinely fair competition, they have little reason to fear as yet. Except in a few occupations, they have lost very little ground. Women's position (by some measures) did improve during the 1970s, but changed very little in the 1980s.²⁵

The second general principle of superordination noted here is that those who hold advantaged positions in the social structure (men, in this case) can perceive or observe that they are being flooded by people they consider their inferiors—women, Blacks, or the lower classes—while the massive statistical fact is that only a few such people are rising by much. There are several causes of this seeming paradox.

First, the new arrivals are more visible, by being different from those who have held the jobs up to this time. The second cause is our perception of relative numbers. Since there are far fewer positions at higher job levels, only a few new arrivals constitute a fair-size minority of the total at that level. Third, the mass media emphasize the hiring of women in jobs that seem not to be traditional for them, for that

is considered news. Men's structural position, then, causes them to perceive radical change here even when little has taken place, and they resist it.

Nevertheless, the general conclusion does not change much. There is progress, but it is not at all clear-cut. After all, as long as the entrance of a few women into good jobs is news, the reality is less rosy than one might hope. Here are a few details:

—The number of businesses owned by women increased by 63 percent between 1982 and 1987.²⁶

—The percentage of physicians who were women rose to 20 percent by 1988, an increase of two-thirds from 1980.

—Women made almost no inroads into the skilled crafts.

—Women made up almost one-half of all bakers, but nearly all simply put the dough through the final process in retail stores.

—As buyers and as administrators or managers in education, auditing, personnel, and training, women occupied about one-half of the jobs by 1988. However, they made up only about 3 percent of the top executives in large U.S. companies by 1991, almost no change from 1980. In general, their earnings in this group of managerial jobs were about two-thirds of male salaries.²⁷

—As bus drivers and bartenders, women had almost half of the jobs.

—Over the decade, women's salaries rose; instead of making two-thirds of men's wages, they were making 72 percent.

The strongest variable that determines the lower wages of women is occupational segregation by sex, and that changed very little in the 1980s.²⁸ The blunt fact is that women have been able to enter a given occupation easily only if men no longer defend that territory. Or, more dramatically, the common pattern of "feminization" in most occupations is simple: They are rising on an elevator in a crumbling building. The job itself is being downgraded. They get better wages than other women, perhaps, but lower wages than men once made in those occupations.

Although the mass figures are correct, we need not discount all our daily observation either. We do see women entering formerly masculine jobs, from garbage collecting to corporate management. That helps undermine sex stereotypes and thereby becomes a force against inequality. Although occupational segregation continues to be strong, it did decline in most professions (e.g., engineering, dentistry,

science, law, medicine). That is, the percentage of women in those professions did rise. Generally they doubled or tripled in the period 1970–88.²⁹ Of course, the absolute percentages of women in such professions remain modest (4–22 percent), because in occupations where almost everyone was once male, it is not possible to recruit, train, and hire enough women to achieve equality within even a generation. Still, the trend seems clear.

A secondary effect of these increasing numbers should be noted. Percentages are important, but so are absolute numbers. When women lawyers increase from about seven thousand to more than a hundred thousand, they become a much larger social force, even though they still form no more than about 22 percent of the total occupation. When women medical students, while remaining a minority in their classes, increase in number so that they can form committees, petition administrators, or give solidarity to one another against any traditional masculine badgering and disesteem, they greatly increase their influence on discriminatory attitudes and behavior. That is, as their rise in numbers permits the formation of real groups in any occupation, their power mounts faster (except at the very start) than the numbers or the percentages. Thus, changes occur even when the percentage of the occupation made up of women is not really large.

Bases of Present Changes

Most large-scale, objective measures of men's roles show little change over the past decade, but men do feel now and then that their position is in question, and their security somewhat fragile. I believe they are right, for they sense a set of forces that lie deeper and are more powerful than the day-to-day negotiation and renegotiation of advantage among individual husbands and wives, fathers and children, or bosses and those who work for them. Men are troubled by this new situation.

The conditions we live in are different from those of any earlier civilization, and they give less support to men's claims of superiority than perhaps any other historical era. When these conditions weaken that support, men can rely only on previous tradition, on power, or on their attempts to socialize their children to shore up their faltering advantages. Such rhetoric is not likely to be successful against the

new objective conditions and the claims of aggrieved women. Thus, men are correct when they feel they are losing some of their privileges, even if many continue to smile at the rhetoric of the women's liberation movement.

The new conditions can be listed concretely, but I shall also give you a theoretical formulation of the process. Concretely, because of the increased use of various mechanical gadgets and devices, fewer tasks require much strength. As to those that still require strength, most men cannot do them either. Women can now do more household tasks that men once felt only they could do, and still more tasks are done by repair specialists called in to do them. With the development of modern warfare, there are few if any important combat activities that only men can do. Even now, their "auxiliary" tasks take them in and around battle zones as a matter of course. Women are much better educated than before.

With each passing year, psychological and sociological research reduces the areas in which men are reported to excel over women and discloses far more overlap in talents, so that even when males still seem to have an advantage, it is but slight. It is also becoming more widely understood that the top posts in government and business are not best filled by the stereotypical aggressive male but by the people, male or female, who are sensitive to others' needs, adept at obtaining cooperation, and skilled in social relations. Indeed, had male management in a number of U.S. industries followed that truth over the past decade, their failure to meet Japanese competition would surely have been less. Finally, in one sphere after another, the number of women who try to achieve rises, and so does the number who succeed.

Although the pressure of new laws has its direct effect on these conditions, the laws themselves arise from an awareness of the foregoing forces. Phrased in more theoretical terms, the underlying shift is toward the decreasing marginal utility of males, and this I suspect is the main source of men's resistance to women's liberation. That is, fewer people believe that what the male does is indispensable, is non-substitutable, or adds such a special value to any endeavor that it justifies his extra "price" or reward. In past wars, for example, males enjoyed a very high value not only because it was felt that they could do the job better than women but also because they might well make the key or marginal difference between being conquered and remain-

ing free. In many societies, their marginal utility came from their contribution of animal protein through hunting. As revolutionary heroes, explorers, hunters, warriors, and daring capitalist entrepreneurs, men felt, and doubtless their women did too, that their contribution was beyond anything women could do. Without question, this would not be true of all men, but it would have been true of men as a distinct group. Men thereby earned extra privileges of rank, authority, and creature services.

It is not then as individuals, as persons, that males will be deemed less worthy in the future or their contributions less needed. Rather, they will be seen as having no claims to extra rewards solely because they are members of the male sex-class. This is part of a still broader trend of our generation, which will also increasingly deny that being white or upper-class produces a marginally superior result and thus justifies extra privileges.

The relations of individuals are subject to continuous renegotiation as people try to gain or keep advantages or cast off burdens. They fail or succeed in part because one or the other person has special resources or deficits that are unique to that individual. Over the long run, however, the outcome of those negotiations depends on the deeper social forces I have been describing, which ultimately determine which qualities or performances are more or less valued.

Men now perceive that they may be losing some of their advantages and that more aspects of their social roles are subject to public challenge and renegotiation than in the past. They resist these changes, and we can suppose they will continue to do so. In all such changes, there are gains and losses. Commonly, when people at lower social ranks gain freedom, those at higher ranks lose some power or centrality. When those at the lower ranks also lose some protection, some support, those at the higher ranks lose some of the burden of responsibility. It is also true that the care or help given by any dominant group in the past was never as much as their members believed, and their loss in political power or economic rule was never as great as they feared.

On the other hand, I know of no instance when a group or social stratum gained its freedom or moved toward more respect and then its members decided that they did not want it. Therefore, although men will not joyfully give up their rank, in spite of its burdens,

neither will women decide that they would like to get back the older feminine privileges, accompanied by the lack of respect and material rewards that went with those courtesies.

I believe that men perceive their roles as being under threat in a world that is different from any in the past. No society has yet come even close to equality between the sexes, but the modern social forces described here did not exist before, either. At the most cautious, we must concede that the conditions favoring a trend toward more equality are more favorable than at any previous time in history. If we have little reason to conclude that equality is at hand, let us at least rejoice that we are still marching in the right direction.

Notes

1. Herbert Goldberg, *The Hazards of Being Male* (New York: Nash, 1976), and Patricia C. Sexton, *The Feminized Male: Classrooms, White Collars, and the Decline of Masculinity* (New York: Random House, 1969). On the recognition of disadvantages, see J. S. Chatterz, *Masculine/Feminine or Human?* (Ithaca, Ill.: Peacock, 1974), 56 ff.
2. Joseph H. Pleck, "The Psychology of Sex Roles: Traditional and New Views," in *Women and Men: Changing Roles, Relationships, and Perceptions*, ed. Libby A. Carter and Anne F. Scott (New York: Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, 1976), 182. Pleck has carried out the most extensive research on male roles, and I am indebted to him for special help in this inquiry.
3. Sidney M. Jourard, "Some Lethal Aspects of the Male Role," in *Men and Masculinity*, ed. Joseph H. Pleck and Jack Sawyer (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 22, and Irving London, "Frigidity, Sensitivity and Sexual Roles," in *Men and Masculinity*, ed. Pleck and Sawyer, 42. See also the summary of such traits in I. K. Braverman et al., "Sex-Role Stereotypes: A Current Appraisal," in *Women and Achievement*, ed. Martha T. S. Mednick, S. S. Tangri, and Lois W. Hoffman (New York: Wiley, 1974), 32-47.
4. Robert Bierstedt's "The Sociology of the Majority," in his *Power and Progress* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 199-220, does not state these principles, but I was led to them by thinking about his analysis.
5. Robert K. Merton, in "The Perspectives of Insiders and Outsiders," in his *The Sociology of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 99-136, has analyzed this view in some detail.
6. This general pattern is noted at various points in my monograph *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979).
7. Erving Goffman, "The Arrangement between the Sexes," *Theory and Society* 4 (1977): 307.
8. Hazel Erskine, "The Polls: Women's Roles," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 35 (Summer 1971):
9. Linda DeStefano and Diane Colasanto, Gallup Organization press release, 5 February 1989. For the *Times Mirror* sample, see *Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press*, press release, September 1990, 5.
10. Goffman, "Arrangement between the Sexes," 308.
11. A simple analysis of these responses is presented in William J. Goode, *Principles of Sociology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977), 359 ff.
12. See Joseph H. Pleck, "The Power of Men," in *Women and Men: The Consequences of Power*, ed. Dana V. Hillier and R. Sheets (Cincinnati: Office of Women's Studies, University of Cincinnati, 1977), 20. See also Colin Bell and Howard Newby, "Husbands and Wives: The Dynamic of the Deterrent Dialectic," in *Dependence and Exploitation in Work and Marriage*, ed. Diana L. Barker and Sheila Allen (London: Longman, 1976), 162-63, as well as Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 125. On the satisfaction of work, see Daniel Yankelevich, "The Meaning of Work," in *The Worker and the Job*, ed. Jerome Rosow (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 19-49. Men now recognize that they cannot easily use this rhetoric in family arguments, but I suspect they still believe it.
13. Whatever other sacrifices women want from men, until recently a large majority did not believe men should do more housework. On this matter, see Joseph H. Pleck, *Working Wives, Working Husbands* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1985). In the mid-1970s only about one-fourth of wives agreed with such a proposal.
14. Sennett and Cobb, *Hidden Injuries of Class*, 125.
15. Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York: Crown, 1991), also documents in some detail many of the different efforts made during the 1980s to put women "back in their place," but little of what Faludi describes is truly "backlash." Leaving aside the innocents whom she attacks, most of these efforts were carried out by people who never thought women should have left "their" place to begin with.
16. To date, the most complete published summary for that period is that by Erskine ("The Polls," 275-91). From the late 1970s onward, however, the documentation is much fuller.
17. Stephanie Greene, "Attitudes toward Working Women Have 'a Long Way to Go,'" Gallup Opinion Poll, March 1976, 33. A wide variety of related questions are to be found in *Public Opinion Quarterly* 53 (1989): 265-76.
18. Harris Survey, 16 February 1978; see also Harris Survey, 11 December 1975.
19. *Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press*, press release, September 1990, 10.
20. By now, the research data on household tasks are voluminous, their conclusions complex, and by the time they are published they may be somewhat dated. For comparisons with other countries, see Jonathan Gershuny and John P. Robinson, "Historical Changes in the Household Division of Labor," *Demography* 25 (1988): 537-52. See also Linda Thompson and Alexis J. Walker, "Gender in Families: Women and Men in Marriage, Work, and Parenthood," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 51 (1989): 845-71; Mary H. Benin and Joan Agostinelli, "Husbands' and Wives' Satisfaction with the Division of Labor," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 50 (1988): 349-61; and Beth A. Shelton, "The Distribution of Household Tasks," *Journal of Family Issues* 11 (1990): 115-35. Joseph Pleck was a leader in these studies during the 1970s and 1980s.
21. Shelton, "Distribution of Household Tasks," table 2, p. 124; Gershuny and Robinson, "Historical Changes," 550.

22. Thompson and Walker, "Gender in Families," 857.
23. Arland Thornton and Deborah S. Freedman, "Changes in the Sex Role Attitudes of Women, 1962-1977," *American Sociological Review* 44 (1979): 833.
24. Benin and Agostinelli, "Husbands' and Wives' Satisfaction," 360.
25. For an excellent analysis of the many complex processes involved in these changes, see Barbara F. Reskin and Patricia A. Roos, *Job Queues, Gender Queues* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).
26. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1991* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1992).
27. These and other related data were published in *U.S. News and World Report*, 17 June 1991, from a study of the "glass ceiling" conducted for the Department of Labor but not officially issued.
28. Reskin and Roos, *Job Queues, Gender Queues*, tables 1.7, 1.8. See especially the case studies of changes in occupational segregation in *ibid.*, part 2. In the usual case of "de-segregation," women move into men's jobs (bartending, in-store baking, bus driving, banking) when those jobs are downgraded, usually technologically, so that the wages no longer attract men. Most of the expansion of women's jobs has occurred in "female" jobs, service jobs at lower levels.
29. *Ibid.*, 19. On the earlier period, see also Victor R. Fuchs, "A Note on Sex Segregation in Professional Occupations," *Explorations in Economic Research* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1975): 103-111.

Index

- abortion, 141, 142, 144, 150; opponents' views of, 152
- accordion households, 103
- adoption, informal, 220, 222
- African-American women, controlling im-ages of, 16
- Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), 77, 78
- "All in the Family," 105
- Altman, Dennis, 122
- Amiker, Annie, 236
- Amory, Cleveland, 65
- Arcaea, Judith, 193, 194, 195, 210
- Ariès, Philippe, 43
- autonomy, 55, 278
- Baby M, 156-57
- Baker, Ella, 220, 221
- Baltzell, E. Digby, 65
- Bane, Mary Jo, 76
- Barrett, Michèle, 129
- Basement: *Meditations on a Human Sacrifice: The* (Millert), 199
- Beard, Mary, 265
- Bell, Alan, 129
- Benedek, Therese, 205
- Benjamin, Jessica, 214n.40
- Berger, Bennett, 53
- Billingsley, Andrew, 73
- biological sex, as cause of women's oppression, 197
- birth control, 141, 147, 148-49; feminist attitudes toward, 11; historical summary of, 142-44; modernization theory and, 141; socialist feminists and, 148; technology and, 141, 150
- birthgiving, 182, 187; and emotional bonding, 183; as emotional labor, 183; labor theory of, 182-83, 184
- Black Feminist Thought* (Collins), 16
- Black motherhood, 218-19, 234-35, 237-39; daughters and, 223-30; the superstrong Black mother as image of, 216-17; use of family language, 231
- bloodmothers, 16, 219
- Bluestone, Barry, 79
- bodily life, 187-88
- Bort, Elizabeth, 44, 253
- Bowers v. Hardwick*, 132
- Brave New Families* (Stacey), 25
- Braverman, Harry, 53
- Bridenthal, Renate, 23
- Bridges, Amy, 57
- Brooks, Gwendolyn, 239
- Brooks, Sara, 220, 225, 235, 238
- Brown, Elsa Barkley, 224
- Brown Girl, Brownstones* (Marshall), 22
- Bumpass, Larry, 114n.33
- Bunker, Archie, 105
- Burke, Kenneth, 123
- Campbell, Bebe Moore, 219, 226
- Caplowitz, David, 59
- caring work. *See* kin work
- Cherlin, Andrew, 107
- Chesler, Phyllis, 157, 158, 173
- child: abuse of as a gendered phenomenon, 268; as all-powerful, 198; rearing, 269-73, 274, 275-76; rearing, Chodorow, Nancy, 15, 16, 27n.14, 211-12n.13
- chosen families, 17, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 126, 130-31, 134-35
- Christian, Barbara, 216
- class: concept of, 52; structures of, 5
- Cobb, Jonathan, 298
- Coleman, Willis, 225
- Collins, Jane, 6, 11, 24, 256, 257
- Collins, Patricia Hill, 8, 13, 16, 17, 19, 85