Man, Woman, and Public Policy

Difference and Dependency in the American Conversation

by

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead and David Blankenhorn

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The world is divided into two very distinct classes of people: men and women. Neither can exist without the other and, practically speaking, significant accomplishment by either alone is impossible. Is it not good sense, therefore, for us to be concerned about how they live together and whether this common life promotes the accomplishment and happiness of each?

--Paul Sayre, founding president of the National Council on Family Relations, 1939.

Introduction

Our topic is sexual identity in the public square -- the meaning and role of gender in America's current policy debate and public discourse. Few topics are more important, for what is ultimately at stake is nothing less than how we raise our children and what kind of people we wish to be.

Yet it is also a dangerous, almost forbidden, topic. Indeed, to say anything interesting about this subject is probably to give offense to much of our nation's policy and opinion elite. For ironically, in a society that purports great interest in all things sexual, our elite discussion of gender policies is almost quaintly repressed and sublimated, governed primarily by taboo, euphemism and silence, and undergirded by a cast-iron orthodoxy that insists on the fundamental social irrelevance of sexual differences between women and men.

In comparison, our private, grass roots discourse is much more pluralistic and, on the whole, much more open and direct about gender differences. In fact, we surmise that elite conversations on this topic in Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles would be much improved if they sounded more like kitchen table conversations in Paducah and Omaha.

To illustrate our argument, we focus primarily on the policy debates and public discourse surrounding marriage and parenthood. Certainly other issues, such as adolescent sexuality or care for the aged, are also relevant. But viewed from the vantage point of public policy, we submit that the two most important things to know about man and woman is that they get married and have children.

Let us state our thesis as plainly as possible. We agree with our opening quotation, written by Paul Sayre in 1939. While we do not uncritically accept the separate-spheres gender philosophy of our parents' and grandparents' generations, we do believe that, on the whole, our own generation's prevailing gender philosophy -- typified by its adamant denial of difference and dependency -- has harmed, rather than helped, the search for a "common life" for man and

woman that promotes "the accomplishment and happiness of each."

Specifically, we believe that current public discourse on gender policies is dominated by twin ideals of androgyny and expressive individualism. The result is a public philosophy that undermines families, neglects children, and makes individual adult happiness more difficult to achieve. The solution is a public philosophy that seeks to improve the social ecology of family life. These are large claims. Let us explain.

Husbands and Wives

Our culture's transvaluation of the marital bond over the past three decades constitutes the most socially consequential change in family life in this century. Indeed, Lawrence Stone, in *Road to Divorce*, describes the recent transformation in the West from "largely non-separating and non-divorcing" societies to "separating and divorcing" ones as "perhaps the most profound and far-reaching social change to have occurred in the last five hundred years."[1]

In the United States in 1960, there were 35 divorced persons for every 1000 married persons. Today there are 142 -- a 406 percent increase in 30 years.[2] During that same period, the proportion of children living with only one parent jumped from 9 percent to 25 percent.[3] Between 1960 and 1985, the percent of all childbirths occurring outside of marriage increased from 5 to 22 percent;[4] the percent of teenage mothers who are unmarried increased from 15 to 58 percent;[5] and the overall proportion of American adult life spent in residence with both a spouse and at least one child dropped from 62 percent, the highest in our nation's history, to 43 percent, the lowest in our history.[6]

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[1] Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce: England, 1530-1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 422.

[2] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Survey* (March 1990), unpublished report. If the divorce rate is measured as the number of divorces per year per 1,000 people, the U.S. rate for both 1989 and 1990 is 4.7, down slightly from its peak of 5.3 in the years 1979 and 1981 -- a drop probably due largely to the aging of the large post-war baby boom cohort. (Source: National Center for Health Statistics, *Monthly Vital Statistics Report*, 39 (No. 10, February 19, 1991) and 38 (No. 13, August 30, 1990). Nevertheless, the rate has "stabilized" at unprecedentedly high levels; the United States has, with the possible exception of Sweden, the highest rate of marital break-up in the world.

[3] U. S. Bureau of the Census, "Household and Family Characteristics: March 1990 and 1989", *Current Population Reports*, P-20 (No. 477, March 1990).

[4] Sar A. Levitan, Richard S. Belous, and Frank Gallo, *What's Happening to the American Family?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1988), pp. 114, 120.

[5] U. S. Bureau of the Census, "Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1988," *Current Population Reports*, P-20 (No. 433, March 1988).

[6] Susan Cotts Watkins, Jane A. Menken, and John Bongaarts, "Demographic Foundations of Family Change," *American*

These numbers reflect the twin processes of deinstitutionalization and dejuridification. The former denotes the erosion of marriage as a social institution embodying widely shared moral values. The latter refers to the shrinking of the legal regulation of marriage, which assists deinstitutionalization by legally transforming marriage from a binding social commitment to an essentially private, freely terminable lifestyle option.[7] In essence, divorce has become a "right" -- less a judicial issue than an administrative procedure.

For some time now, the social consequences of this rapid transformation have prompted popular anxiety and alarm. More recently, even elite discourse, including influential scholarship, has recognized the profound social costs, especially as regards the well-being of children, of the divorce revolution and the redefinition of marriage.[8]

What caused this momentous change? More specifically, what is the relationship of contemporary sexual identity -- the meaning and role of gender in our culture -- to this transvaluation of marriage in our time?

Let us begin by looking at language. Consider the single most important new word to emerge in our public discourse during this phenomenon: "no-fault." Almost all of our grandparents, as well as most of our parents, would be amazed and distressed by any claim that the act of marital dissolution is largely unconnected to issues of fault and morality. Yet in 1969, California became the first state -- indeed, the first jurisdiction in the Western world -- to eliminate all fault-based grounds for divorce. Over the next 15 years, this new type of divorce law -- and this new word -- spread rapidly across the country. By 1987, 40 states plus the Distict of Columbia had revised their divorce laws in ways that, according to Mary Ann Glendon, tilted "decidedly toward easy nonfault divorce."[9]

Sociological Review, 52 (No. 3, 1987), pp. 346-58.

[7] See Mary Ann Glendon, *Abortion and Divorce in Western Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 63-64. In recent decades in most Western societies, Glendon argues, "the legal posture of the state with respect to the family was undergoing its most fundamental shift since family law had begun to be secularized at the time of the Protestant Reformation."

[8] See Irwin Garfinkel and Sara S. McLanahan, *Single Mothers and the Children: A New American Dilemma* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 1986); Lenore J. Weitzman, *The Divorce Revolution: The Unexpected Social and Economic Consequences for Women and Children in America* (New York: Free Press, 1985); Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances: Men, Women and Children a Decade after Divorce* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989).

[9] Glendon, *Op. cit.*, p. 76. As of 1987, 18 states and the District of Columbia had completely eliminated fault-based divorce and permitted no judicial discretion to deny an individual's "right" to divorce. While the remaining states did retain some fault-based grounds to accompany the new no-fault ones, fully 22 states permitted no-fault divorce over the opposition of one spouse after a separation of only one year or less; eight states required a separation of more than one year for contested unilateral no-fault divorces; and only two states require mutual consent for no-fault divorce. (*Ibid.*, p. 68.) With the exception of Sweden, no other nation has moved so far in the direction of no-fault divorce.

During this time in the United States, Glendon continues,

> the "no-fault" idea blended readily with the psychological jargon that already had such a strong influence on how Americans think about their personal relationships . . . [and] fit neatly into an increasingly popular mode of discourse in which values are treated as matters of taste, feelings of guilt are regarded as unhealthy, and an individual's primary responsibility is assumed to be to himself.[10]

The ideology and practice of no-fault thus transforms marriage both personally and socially. Personally, the no-fault idea tells us that, when a marriage ends, no one is to blame. People change; people grow apart; people must above all pursue their own happiness. These are facts, not to be censured or repressed, but rather to be accepted and even celebrated, since even failed relationships can foster personal growth and self-realization.

Socially, the terminology of no-fault tells us that marital formation and dissolution is a private matter, designed essentially for the fulfillment of the individual spouses. Other prospective stakeholders in the relationship -- such as children or even the society as a whole -- are understood to be at best minority shareholders whose claims should be effectively without standing and therefore unenforceable.

This idea stands in sharp contrast to the common wisdom of our parents' generation, perhaps best summarized in a famous essay by Roscoe Pound, who insisted that family law "must distinguish the individual interests in domestic relations from the social interest in the family and marriage as social institutions." This social interest is twofold: "the maintenance of the family as a social institution" and "the protection of dependent persons, in securing to all individuals a moral and social life and in the rearing and training of sound and well-bred citizens for the future."[11]

Finally, the ascendency of the no-fault idea reflects, in microcosm, a much broader set of newly regnant elite cultural values that substantially redefine our society's understanding of love, mating and adulthood. As Ann Swidler points out, these new values celebrate above all "a new concern with the survival, wholeness and autonomy of the self that makes self-sacrifice seem weakness, and self-realization seem a moral duty."[12]

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[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

[11] Roscoe Pound, "Individual Interests in Domestic Relations," *Michigan Law Review*, 14 (No. 177, 1916), p. 177.

[12] Ann Swidler, "Love and Adulthood in American Culture," in Neil J. Smelzer and Erik H. Erikson, Eds., *Themes of Work and Love in Adulthood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 139.

In the largest sense, Swidler argues, our new cultural story of love and marriage "validates adulthood as a period of continuing crisis, challenge, and change"[13] in which "adulthood provides no resting place from demands on the self."[14] Because it rejects the idea of "the self" as "a stable achievement,"[15] the new story fails to "make the achievement of adult commitment, fidelity, intimacy and care themselves seem heroic, meaningful achievements."[16] Traditional marital norms, therefore, are transmogrified:

> The obligation to sacrifice oneself for another is replaced by the duty to respect the other person's separateness, to recognize the other's need for growth and change, and to give to the other in return for what one receives . . . We no longer believe that an adult's life can be meaningfully defined by the sacrifice he or she makes for spouse or children.[17]

Swidler also explores the ways in which gender differences shape the new values that redefine our society's "love myth." In the United States, she argues,

> the love myth is, at least symbolically, differently shaped for men and women. In women's literature the happy ending is still marriage, and love still allows people to find themselves as they find each other. High culture, on the whole, is dominated by men and by the male version of the myth, in which the man escapes both women and society in his lonely quest for selfhood.[18]

Our currently ascendent story of love and mating, therefore, reflects a sharp cultural tilt, involving women as well as men, toward these traditionally "male" (and adolescent) aspects of the love myth -- the emphasis on individualism and isolated self-mastery, as embodied in cowboy or detective myths, in which dependencies and permanent commitments are seen as obstacles rather than pathways to fulfillment.

These values carry wide-ranging consequences. In our society, divorce is approaching a rough parity with marriage as an expectation, ritual, and experience of adult life. In a remarkable demonstration of what Norval Glenn terms the "decline in the ideal of marital permanence", the proportion of Americans who believe that couples who do not get along should

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[13] *Ibid.*, p. 130.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 134.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 126.

[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 136, 138.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 145.

not stay together for the sake of the children has increased, in just three decades, from a decided minority to an overwhelming majority.[19] A divorced man talks to his former stepson, who is now living with his mother and a second stepfather:

> I assured him that marriage did work, and that just because his parents' marriage hadn't, it was no reason to give up on the institution. He looked at me patiently and said: "Dad, none of my friends parents are still together. Everyone gets divorced sooner or later. Don't worry, I'm all right. I can take care of myself. Love 'em and leave 'em. Right?"[20]

The ubiquity of marital dissolution, though most apparant among elites, has penetrated every aspect of our culture. A new national magazine, *Divorce*, was launched in 1987.[21] The "Style" page of the *New York Times* chronicles divorce parties along with debutante parties. Greeting card companies now include divorce cards ("Think of your marriage as a record album. It was full of music, both happy and sad. But what's important now is YOU: the newly released hot new single!") in their inventories of "occasion" cards. The liquor ad in the magazine, featuring two women in conversation, simply reads: "He's crazy about my kid. And he drinks Johnnie Walker."[22] Numerous religious denominations -- including Lutherans, United Methodists, Episcopalians, Unitarians, and the United Church of Christ -- have incorporated divorce prayers and accompanying rituals into their liturgies.[23] A new line of children's books includes titles such as *The Divorce Workbook: A Guide for Kids and Families*.[24]

What is to be done? The challenge, clearly, is not primarily economic or political. It is cultural. The problem is especially rooted, moreover, within elite culture. As Christopher Jencks has pointed out in his analysis of family dissolution among the poor:

> Single parenthood began its rapid spread during the 1960s, when elite attitudes toward sex, marriage, divorce, and parenthood were undergoing a dramatic change . . . we moved from thinking that society ought to discourage extramarital sex, and especially out-of-wedlock births, to thinking that such efforts were an

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19 Norval D. Glenn, "The Family Values of Americans," unpublished paper for the Institute for American Values (January 1991), p. 13.

20 Steven O'Brien, "One Son, Three Fathers," *New York Times Magazine* (December 28, 1986), p. 36.

21 "A Magazine Called Divorce," *New York Times* (July 7, 1987).

22 *New York Times Magazine* (June 5, 1988), p. 92.

23 "Finding Solace: Prayers Accepting Divorce," *New York Times* (August 31, 1987).

24 Sally Blakeslee Ives, David Fassler, and Michele Lash, *The Divorce Workbook: A Guide for Kids and Families* (Burlington, VT: Waterfront Books, 1985).

unwarranted infringement on personal liberty.[25]

The central challenge, therefore, is to confront directly the newly ascendent cultural values that are eroding the institutions of marriage and family. In this regard, the most effective tool is also the most controversial: the re-establishment of the social stigma that has traditionally accompanied voluntary family dissolution. Today the word "stigma" is generally used pejoratively, as are such related words as "guilt," "shame," or "blame." But if our principal negative imperative is to banish the language and idea of "no-fault" from our family issues lexicon, surely our key positive imperative is to reclaim our appreciation and use of stigma.

As a rule, stigmatizing any behavior will reduce the frequency of that same behavior. For confirmation of this rule, ask anyone who would, other things being equal, prefer to smoke in crowded restaurants, litter a beach, or use racially derogatory language on television. Conversely, the fact that de-stigmatizing a behavior will increase that behavior is an anthropological commonplace. Without this type of values shift, little effective change will occur, irrespective of what policymakers do.

At the same time, politics also affects culture. Laws and public policies do more than distribute resources and establish rules and incentives. They, too, convey normative messages. They help shape our public conversation -- our cultural stories -- about who we are and who we want to be. Accordingly, the politics of family life remains important, especially as regards marriage. As Bruce Hafen has observed,

> regulation of marital status has always been a fundamental element in helping human society induce the behavior needed for social as well as individual survival.[26]

Reform of our marriage laws, therefore, can contribute, at least indirectly, to a broader cultural renewal of the marital relationship. The first priority is surely to reverse the legal trend toward easy, no-fault, little-responsibility divorce -- especially when the separation is contested by one spouse, and most especially when minor children are involved.

In this regard, it is important to understand that much of the no-fault idea is rooted in the assumptions of androgyny and individualism. No-fault divorce laws tend to assume, for example, that the division of marital property is the principal means for settling the financial aspects of divorce. After the divorce, it is assumed, each spouse can and should be largely self-sufficient. If we look at the real-life facts of gender roles and dependent relationships, however, the flaws in these assumptions become clear:

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[25] Christopher Jencks, "Deadly Neighborhoods," *The New Republic* (June 13, 1988), pp. 28, 30.

[26] Bruce C. Hafen, "The Constitutional Status of Marriage, Kinship, and Sexual Privacy -- Balancing the Individual and Social Interests," *Michigan Law Review*, 81 (No. 3, January 1983), p. 470.

- Roughly three fifths of all divorces involve minor dependent children who, overwhelmingly, end up in the custody of their mothers.[27]

- Most ex-wives, due in part to pre-divorce work and childrearing arrangements, have much less earnings capacity after divorce than do their ex-husbands.

The result of ignoring these gender and dependency realities is that, after divorce, the living standards of women and children tend to drop, often dramatically, while the living standards of men tend to rise.[28] Moreover, child support payments by non-custodial parents, almost always fathers, tend to be quite low -- in part because judicial discretion allows judges, operating on the self-sufficiency assumption, to award low payments and in part because the abscence of meaningful post-divorce supervision means that only a minority of mothers receive full payment of support that has been awarded.[29]

These facts help explain why women, rather than men, have emerged as the most persistent and eloquent critics of our current divorce laws. As Mary Ann Glendon has put it: "American divorce law in practice seems to be saying to parents, especially to mothers, that it is not safe to devote oneself primarily or exclusively to raising children."[30]

Mothers and Fathers

The androgynous imperative within elite discourse is most clearly evident, and especially harmful, when it seeks to suppress or deny the differences between mothers and fathers. This imperative impoverishes our understanding of ourselves in several ways. Most fundamentally, it contests thousands of years of precisely those aspects of our bio-evolutionary history that have favored, above all, the survival of the human infant. By shifting the focus of family life away from the nurture of children and toward adult satisfaction, the new imperative assaults those cultural norms of parental sacrifice and denial that are essential to successful childrearing. Ultimately, therefore, the androgynous imperative challenges the central prerequisite of social life: fostering the competence and character of the next generation.

Again, consider the key words: "mother" and "father." What are their meanings in today's elite discourse? Historically, of course, the definitions of these words goes far beyond "female

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[27] Glendon, *Op. cit.*, p. 93.

[28] Weitzman, *Op. cit.*, p. 323, *passim.*

[29] Glendon, *Op. cit.*, pp. 92-93.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 111. A female Irish leader reportedly commented in 1986: "A woman voting for divorce is like a turkey voting for Christmas."

parent" and "male parent." The Oxford English Dictionary devotes six pages to the word "mother" and its cognates and four pages to "father" and its cognates. Indeed, we can find few, if any, words in our language that are more richly invested with personal, social, cultural, moral, and religious meaning.

Similarly, we can locate no other words more essential to our understanding of gender differences. Certainly anthropologists, sociobiologists, endocrinologists, ethnologists, and obstetricians would all resist, on professional grounds, the obfuscation of these words. (So, for that matter, would most babies.) Yet elite discourse in our public square increasingly, and adamantly, insists that we speak, not of mothers and fathers, but of the androgynous and even non-familial "parent" or "co-parent."

Typical is a 1978 parents' manual written by the Boston Women's Health Collective. In a section entitled "We Are Now Co-Parents," they say:

> In anticipating parenthood, whether natural or adoptive, we both eagerly awaited our child's arrival and worried about ways our life together would change. We are no longer simply "lovers," "friends," "partners," but co-parents in another kind of venture altogether.[31]

This deracination of our vocabulary of sexual differences has its ironic side. In a culture drenched in the imagery and language of adolescent sexuality -- a culture that tolerates, and at times promotes, the onset of sexual activity at ever younger ages -- we detect a curious primness about mature sexual differences. When it comes to mothers and fathers, elite culture shies away from fecund women and virile men and seems much more comfortable with interchangeable androgynes.

Irony aside, however, the substitution of "parent" for "mother" and "father" serves explicit political and cultural objectives. First, it aims at establishing what Alice Rossi terms an egalitarian ethos in child nurture:

> The egalitarian ethos urges several programmatic changes in family organization: a reduction of maternal investment in children to permit greater psychic investment in work outside the family, an increased investment by men in their fathering roles, and the supplementation of parental care by institutional care.[32]

Second, the gender-neutral "parent" also seeks to establish moral equivalency among family types. To achieve this goal, the word "parent" is deployed in order to avoid making any

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[31] The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Ourselves and Our Children: A Book By and For Parents* (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 49.

[32] Alice Rossi, "A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting," *Daedalus*, 106 (1977), p. 1. See also Alice Rossi, "Gender and Parenthood," *American Sociological Review*, 49 (February 1984).

explicit distinctions that might convey implicit value judgements. Thus married mothers and fathers, single mothers and fathers, lesbian and gay custodians of children -- all become equalized as the same thing: "parents." By liberating us from the concreteness of traditional familial statuses and sexual identities, the new "parent" encourages us to embrace as equivalents all possible childrearing forms and to remove any distinctions of gender and family form from our understanding of parenthood.

Moreover, "parent" can be isolated not only from gender and family status, but also from kinship itself. Thus a 1991 conference publication from the Child Welfare League proposes a "many parents" model of childrearing that approvingly establishes equivalency among the "many parents" -- "biological parents, kinship care parents, family foster parents, group care or house parents, and adoptive parents" -- of our nation's children.[33]

Consider another word that is essential to a vocabulary of difference: pregnancy. Pregnancy is the physiological condition of carrying a child. It is a state unique to female mammals and a primary expression of biological difference between the sexes. Moreover, the word "pregnancy," like the words "mother" and "father," is historically redolent with positive cultural meaning: it is a "blessed event," the state of "expecting" and of "being with child." These definitions helped convey the story of pregnancy in our culture -- a story that aimed at sacralizing a physiological event and valorizing the pregnant woman.

"And why shouldn't most women love being pregnant?" asks *The Expectant Father*, published in 1964. It continues:

> Despite the temporary distortion of their figures, they usually bloom physically and emotionally in every way. They are in good spirits most of the time. Their complexions become transparent and rosy; their eyes shine brightly, they carry themselves as well as a protruding abdomen allows, with a majesty they never had before and will seldom have again.[34]

Today, we increasingly tell ourselves a quite different story. Consider a typical version of the new story, written in 1977 in *A Guide to Pregnancy and Parenthood for Women on Their Own*: "... pregnancy is a momentous event in any woman's life, married or single, and it helps to understand your initial feelings, which may include any of the following, or even several mixed up at the same time." The list of feelings includes: pleasure, doubts and fears, embarrassment,

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[33] Child Welfare League of America, "Children in Crisis: A Response for the '90s", a pamphlet announcing the 1991 Mid-Atlantic Regional Training Conference of June 16-19, 1991, of the Child Welfare League of America (Washington, D.C.). In a growing number of child custody disputes involving lesbian couples, lawyers are arguing that parental status is conferred by exposure and experience as well as by biology and adoption. Thus, the estranged partner of the biological mother is described as a "*de facto*" or "equitable" parent. See "Lesbian Child-Custody Cases Test Frontiers of Family Law," *New York Times* (July 4, 1990), pp. 1, 10.

[34] George M. Schaefer, M.D., and Milton L. Zisowitz, *The Expectant Father* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), p. 48.

apathy, activity, running away, and suicide.[35]

Perhaps these two examples represent the extremes. But the extremes reveal much about our cultural narrative. Today, pregnancy is increasingly portrayed in our discourse as problematic and difficult -- a source of anxiety, fear, and unwelcome dependency. A number of specific trends undergird this story, including the changing age of primiparous women; the pressures on, and desires of, mothers to participate in the paid labor force; the growing number of single mothers; and our general cultural devaluation of children and parenthood.[36] The overall result is a new cultural definition: pregnancy as a disability.

Certainly both popular wisdom and medical opinion dispute this understanding of pregnancy as a disability. Yet neither of these sources of authority guided the legislative establishment of pregnancy leave in the United States. Passed as an amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act was part of a larger effort to secure equal rights for women in the workforce and to provide statutory protections for all workers without regard to gender.

Cast as an issue of civil rights and argued in the familiar American idiom of individualism and formal equality, pregnancy can simply no longer be viewed as a healthy condition unique to women. Instead, it must be construed as a temporary disability, like a broken leg, no different from any other temporary disability that might handicap any other worker.

This redefinition of pregnancy -- from blessed event to disability -- reflects a broader change: the cultural shift from a family-based ethic to an employment-based ethic. Historically, pregnancy has been exclusively a family event, *extra-commercium*. It is now increasingly a workplace event, mediated by the money world.

Consider the meaning of this shift. The family perspective understands pregnancy and childbirth as the central event of family life, to be welcomed with ceremony, thankfulness, and celebration. The labor force perspective understands pregnancy as a workplace disruption that weakens employees' attachments to their jobs, increases absenteeism, and reduces productivity.

The old story of pregnancy and childbirth accentuated the differences between men and women -- physical, emotional and social -- and reinforced the cultural ideal of separate and complementary spheres. A classic rendering of that story is found in *Anna Karenina*. As Tolstoy describes it, the scene is one of radical separation, with a clear division of physical and emotional labor. Levin waits in an anteroom as his beloved Kitty goes into labor with their first child. Kitty submits to the physical pains of childbirth while Levin experiences emotional anguish as devastating as her physical pain.

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[35] Patricia Ashdown-Sharp, *A Guide to Pregnancy and Parenthood for Women on Their Own* (New York: Random House, 1975; Vintage Original, 1977), pp. 19-21.

[36] Norval D. Glenn, *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

> Leaning his head against the doorpost in the next room, he stood there listening to someone shriek and moan in a way he had never heard before, and he knew these sounds were coming from what had once been Kitty. He no longer had any desire for a child. Now he hated that child. He did not even want her to live any more; all he wanted was an end to this horrible suffering.[37]

Levin's emotional vulnerability, his fear and ignorance, contrast sharply with Kitty's emotional strength, physical courage and womanly knowledge. These are the familiar elements of the old story. With a winking apology to Tolstoy, one might even compare Levin to Ricky Ricardo in the famous January 1953 television episode of *I Love Lucy* -- an episode that captured the largest audience share in American television history. Rotund and serene in her impending maternity, Lucy arrives at the hospital carrying her own suitcase, while Ricky is pushed alongside in a wheelchair, emotionally unhinged and temporarily disabled. He is loving but weak. She is strong.

The old story, moreover, extends these differences into the post-partum period. Popular advice literature warns a husband that his wife will experience new emotions; she may, in fact, lavish more affection on the new baby than on him. Family life will change, the old story warns. A new baby exacts new and different sacrifices from mother and father -- sacrifices that result, however, in life's highest rewards. As Dr. Spock puts it in his classic *Baby and Child Care*:

> Taking care of their children, seeing them grow and develop into fine people, gives most parents -- despite the hard work -- their greatest satisfaction in life. This is creation. This is our visible immortality. Pride in other worldly accomplishments is usually weak in comparison.[38]

The new story explains these same physical, psychological, and social components of pregnancy and childbirth, but through a radically different narrative. Underlying the new story is the cultural ideal of androgyny. It minimizes, rather than celebrates, the differences between mothers and fathers. It focuses not on family and biological indentity, but on individual rights and options. In short, it recasts the experience of pregnancy and childbirth into the familiar terms of the marketplace and of what Robert Bellah terms the therapeutic model.[39] Accordingly,

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[37] Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina* (New York: Bantam Books, 1960), p. 761.

[38] Benjamin Spock, M.D., and Michael B. Rothenberg, M.D., *Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care* (New York: Pocket Books, 1985), p. 23. It is fascinating to compare a 1946 Pocket Books edition of this classic with the one cited above. The 1946 edition begins with "A Letter to the Mother and Father" on page 1 and then moves on to "Things You'll Need" on page 3. The 1985 edition devotes the first 60 pages to parenthood, including sections on "The Family Is Changing," "Who Will Care for the Children?" and "The Father as Parent." Despite these changes, Spock is consistent in his philosophy: children come first; caring for children requires hard work and sacrifice; and childrearing involves moral as well as physical nurture.

[39] Robert N. Bellah, Richard Masden, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).

pregnancy and childbirth become yet one more path to greater individual freedom and self-expression.

In the old story, pregnancy separates women from men. In the new story, pregnancy brings the sexes together. Men, in fact, join women in the state of pregnancy, so that couples versed in the latest linguistic fashions tell their friends that "we are pregnant." Men should join women in the delivery room, since mothers and fathers should share as equally as possible the pain and pleasure of childbirth.

At the same time, the woman in the new story must be free to pursue her autonomy and her rights -- this story is firmly anchored in a very particular conception of female freedom and independence. In *Your Baby, Your Way*, Sheila Kitzinger urges the expectant mother to draw up a birth plan designed to achieve an autonomous birth. This task aims, not simply at achieving an obstetrically trouble-free birth, but at liberating the pregnant woman from medical, social, and legal constraints. Childbirth is a political act:

> Through striving to achieve autonomy in childbirth -- the biological act that epitomizes a woman's role as mother, nurturer, homemaker -- conformists become nonconformists, assimilators become dissidents, charming, polite, compliant women become political activists.[40]

Yet paradoxically, the emphasis on rights and options only makes pregnancy more problematic. According to Kitzinger,

> a woman's experience of pregnancy and birth is likely to be fraught with a sense of inadequacy and powerlessness. At the point when she is bringing new life into the world and a tremendous power is released in her body, she feels most helpless. She is trapped in a situation outside her control.[41]

We are now looking at exact opposites. In the old story, pregnancy empowers. In the new story, it disempowers.

The current demand for autonomy in pregnancy, intended to overcome female powerlessness, is clearly evident in the affirmation of single motherhood through artificial means -- one of many "options" promoted in contemporary guidebooks. In *Having A Baby Without a Man*, thirty-eight-year-old Elaine tells her story:

> I started looking around me and felt that family life could be different from what I had grown up with. I read in the newspaper that one out of five children were

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[40] Sheila Kitzinger, *Your Baby, Your Way: Making Pregnancy Decisions and Birth Plans* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), pp. 313-14.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

> being raised by single mothers and realized that I could and should be able to do it on my own too. . . When I realized that I could be assured of having the father be anonymous yet also mentally and physically healthy, my mind became made up. Here was the optimal way to be a mother in my situation.[42]

Where do these new definitions come from? What underlying trends have produced this new story of mothers and fathers? We recognize, of course, the important demographic, technological and economic trends of the late 20th century: the internationalization of the economy; the stagnation of real wages; new contraceptive technologies; rising levels of higher education; the societal ripple effects created by the huge baby boom generation as it moves through the life cycle; the impact of the broadcast media; and many others. But as we seek to identify the shaping influences of the new story of mothers and fathers, we do not, in the final analysis, look to economics, demographics, politics, or technology.

Again, we look to culture. We do not, therefore, interpret cultural values as a "superstructure" that can be understood as a reflection of a materialistic "base." Accordingly, we do not interpret changes in our cultural story of parenthood -- or for that matter, family change in general -- as essentially adaptive and situationally induced, caused primarily by institutions and material conditions outside the family itself. We believe that the heart of the matter -- not merely a reflection, but rather the basic source of the new story -- is a shift in cultural values.[43] Specifically, we look to the growing influence of the twin cultural values of androgyny and expressive individualism. Consider three principle tensions in our public discourse which reflect the shift toward these values.

1. Man and woman versus the universal male

One strain of feminist thought has been particularly influential in the drift toward androgyny. Most powerfully articulated by Simone de Beauvoir, this view sees freedom and independence as the natural state of only one sex: the male sex. As Michael Walzer points out in his essay on de Beauvoir,

> there is only one universal life, and it is men -- beings of transcendence and ambition -- who have lived it. The fact is that culture, civilization, and universal values have all been created by men, because men represent universality.[44]

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[42] Susan Robinson, M.D., and H. F. Pizer, PA-C, *Having a Baby Without A Man: The Woman's Guide to Alternative Insemination* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), p. 21.

[43] Glenn, *Op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

[44] Michael Walzer, *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), pp. 161-62.

Many contemporary feminist philosophers share this belief. In their utopia, as Christina Sommers has pointed out,

> gender in the choice of lover or spouse would be of no more significance than eye color. There the family would consist of adults but not necessarily of different sexes and not necessarily in pairs. There we find equality ensured by a kind of affirmative action which compensates for disability. If women are somewhat weaker than men, or if they are subject to lunar disabilities, then this must be compensated for.[45]

Consequently, although the ideal is androgyny, the new public story also embraces the idea of the universal male. As Alice Rossi puts it with admirable precision,

> the authors and dramatists of both the mating and parenting scripts in the new perspectives on the family are just as heavily male as the older schools of thought about the modern family, if not in the generic sense, then in the sense that parenting is viewed from a distance, as an appendage to, or consequence of mating rather than the focus of family systems and individual lives.[46]

2. Parental altruism versus expressive individualism

In *Reclaimed Powers*, a cross-cultural study of gender patterns in aging, David Gutmann describes a pivotal event in human development: the "parental emergency." Young parents respond to the emergency in two ways. First, they assume the gender-specific roles learned during early socialization -- roles they may have modified, experimented with, or even ignored before they became parents. Second, they abandon narcissistic strivings toward omnipotentiality. They voluntarily limit their potential freedoms in order to secure the physical and psychological well-being of the dependent child.[47] As Gutmann puts it,

> There is general agreement that parents will, as part of their general servitude, accept deep restrictions on their own needs and deep revisions of their own psychological make-up in order to meet their children's essential needs.[48]

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[45] Christina Sommers, "Philosophers Against the Family," in George Graham and Hugh LaFollette, Eds., *Person to Person* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), p. 734.

[46] Rossi, "A Biosocial Perspective," *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

[47] David Gutmann, *Reclaimed Powers: Toward a New Psychology of Men and Women in Later Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), pp. 195-96.

[48] *Ibid*, p. 190.

In short, parenthood demands that children come first. Its essential requirement is sacrifice and denial. Its result is "the routine, unexamined heroism of parenting ..."[49] In Gutmann's cross-cultural studies, parental altruism approaches the status of a universal norm, since it is essential to the survival of the species.

Yet to what degree is this norm reflected in our public discourse and policy debate about gender roles and childrearing? The answer is unsettling. Clearly, the dominant discourse seeks to extend, rather than suppress, the narcissistic tendencies of young adulthood. For parents, no less than non-parents, the self -- not the other or the neighbor or the child or the family -- constitutes the governing moral idea of contemporary culture.

Even a casual reading of advice literature for new parents reveals this tendency. Compared to the old story, far greater emphasis is attached to recognizing and affirming adult "needs" as against baby's demands. In the old story, the arrival of a new baby ushered in a period of mutual sacrifice. In the new story, a baby tests the parents' own sense of independence with its assertion of neediness. Parents must "balance" the baby's needs against other social and personal "needs." The very title of one parenting manual, *Ourselves and Our Children*, succinctly states the new set of priorities: parents come first.

> We want to develop a strong bond with our child and at the same time maintain our partnership, our adult friendships, as well as our involvements with the outside world. What we discover even before we have a baby is that our lives are thrown off balance once we become parents and we need time to establish a new equilibrium...[50]

In the new story, the fascination is not with the developing child; it is with the constantly evolving adult.

3. Family culture versus jobs culture

In his essay on "The Invasion of the Money World," Robert Bellah argues that the values and language of the marketplace are invading the family realm and, more broadly, the realms of church, neighborhood, and community. Activities once assigned to families -- childcare, meals, even outdoor play -- are increasingly monetized: converted to services that are bought and sold in the marketplace. As part (but only part) of this trend, mothers, who have traditionally dominated the realms of family and community life, now pursue, or at least are strongly expected to pursue, regular paid employment outside the home.[51]

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[49] *Ibid*, p. 198.

[50] Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

[51] Robert N. Bellah, "The Invasion of the Money World," in David Blankenhorn, Steven Bayme, and Jean Bethke

As a result, the separate sphere of family and community life is both shrinking and losing its distinctive character. Increasingly, this sphere simply fails to constitute an independent moral realm containing relationships and values different from those of the commercial realm. This trend helps explain why women are no longer considered -- nor, at least in the dominant discourse, would they want to be considered -- more virtuous or innocent than men. More importantly, this trend tells us why home and family are no longer expected to serve as the essential base of women's power and self-esteem.

Precision in criticism requires precision in praise. Certain revisions in traditional gender roles, we believe, have been beneficial for both men and women. Women today have far greater opportunities for a public life, with its considerable recognition and rewards, than did our mothers' generation. This is good. Moreover, as the life span increases and as the proportion of life devoted to childrearing concomitantly decreases, women clearly have more time, over the course of the life cycle, to devote to work in the marketplace. We see benefits for men as well. Men no longer must bear sole responsibility for breadwinning. With a mutual, if not equivalent, commitment to both the worlds of paid work and of family, husbands and wives who stay together may achieve a greater harmony of interests and perhaps even greater emotional closeness.

At the same time, separate spheres philosophy -- properly, we believe -- located life's most enduring virtues and satisfactions not in the marketplace or even in the public square, but in the home. Indeed, nineteenth-century feminism hoped to reform the world according to the model of home and family. Domesticating the marketplace, not commercializing the domestic realm, was the central focus of much early feminist thought.[52]

Thus, the current identification of home and family as the source not of woman's strength, but of her weakness, stands as a sharp departure from earlier feminist traditions. And when contemporary feminists attack traditional family life as oppressive, they frequently fail to recognize that men, as well as women, have historically embraced the sacrifices and restrictions of family life as their best chance for happiness and individual fulfillment. In an important respect, the gender script of our parents' generation was intended to be less blatantly sexist than aggressively familistic.

As much as our culture in the 1950s worshipped Mom in the kitchen, it celebrated Dad in the den. Father's Day became an important national holiday during this period, as Hallmark cards iconized the "at-home" dad, with his pipe and newspaper. Television viewers seldom saw the father of "Father Knows Best" at work. We never knew what Ozzie Nelson or Ward Cleaver

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Elshtain, Eds., *Rebuilding the Nest: A New Commitment to the American Family* (Milwaukee: Family Service America, 1990), pp. 230-31.

[52] See, Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Avon, 1977; Doubleday, 1988); Catherine Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School* (1846).

did for a living. For these television dads, the pathway to the good life ran, not through the office, but straight to the backyard with the kids. As one contemporary magazine article -- entitled "Are You a Dud as a Dad?" -- put it:

> Here is one area of your life which doesn't depend on "breaks" or ability or education or money. A man can be a success as a father, a real "dad," if he cares enough to try...

As Elaine Tyler May notes in her analysis of this article, "nowhere was it easier for a man to be his own boss than in fatherhood."[53]

In contrast, the contemporary vision of individual happiness and social progress, as reflected in elite discourse, is increasingly less identified with building a family. The new vision focuses on achievement in the marketplace. It is rooted, above all, in the assumption of a fully mobilized workforce.

In this story, both women and men find fulfillment and contribute to the good of society through their participation in the workforce and in their behavior as paid workers and consumers. Of course, the economy of the 1950s mobilized consumers as well, but the primary unit of consumption was the family, not the individual. Today it is affluent individuals, including children -- with appetites for imported cars and designer toys -- who are most eagerly courted by advertisers. Mom, Dad, and kids, though still desirable, are considered slightly down-scale, with tastes running more to K-Mart than to Cuisinart.

Our public policy debate on child care is clearly dominated by this economic perspective. To a remarkable degree, the debate centers less on what is best for the parent-child relationship than it does on what is best for the labor force. To the degree, for example, that the mother-child relationship conflicts with the mother-job relationship, the mother-job relationship is almost always treated as primary.

This overwhelmingly economic focus in our child care debate reflects, in large part, the remarkable success of the "work-family" movement of the 1980s -- a broad coalition of corporate consultants, policy think tanks, business leaders, legislative lobbyists and others who seek, in the words of one prominent organization, "new approaches for balancing the changing needs of America's families with the continuing need for workplace productivity."[54] A national work-family conference in 1988, entitled "Child Care: The Bottom Line," elaborates this perspective:

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[53] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 149, but also pp. 146-49, *passim*.

[54] From a description of the Families and Work Institute, excerpted from a brochure entitled "Mainstreaming a Work-Family Agenda," published jointly by The Conference Board and the Families and Work Institute, New York (February 1991).

> Never before in the history of the United States has the issue of child care been so inextricably linked with the state of the nation's economy. Not only does the availability of affordable, high-quality child care affect the well-being of the majority of American families, it affects the bottom line of every business in the nation and ... inevitably ... affects the United States' ability to compete successfully in a global economy.[55]

As one national leader of the work-family movement recently put it: "Child care is really an economic development issue" that is "as essential for getting people to work as public transportation."[56] This approach became truly bipartisan during the 1980s, defining the discourse of Republicans as well as Democrats. The most influential child care report of the Reagan Administration, for example, organized by the Department of Labor, was entitled "Child Care: A Workforce Issue."[57]

Such an approach sends a clear message to both policymakers and families. The message to policymakers is that child care is a matter of economic policy, designed almost exclusively for mothers who work full time in the paid labor force. Thus, for U.S. Representative Patricia Schroeder, probably the nation's most influential advocate of the work-family agenda, to argue that child care policies should recognize the role of non-employed parents is "like saying the highway program must recognize people who don't drive."[58]

For policymakers, the flaw in this approach is not merely philosophical -- it leads to specific and dubious policy consequences. Most of the child care debate in the 1980s, for example, assumed that the goal is to allow more parents, especially mothers, to achieve a new "balance" that, in practice, would mean less time with children and more time at work.

Yet considerable evidence suggests that many mothers want precisely the opposite: to spend less time in the workplace in order to spend more time with family.[59] The chief policy recommendation of the economistic assumption is more day care centers. In contrast, the chief recommendation of the familistic assumption is more part-time work and other options to reduce, rather than increase, hours of paid employment.

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[55] Barbara Riesman, Amy J. Moore, and Karen Fitzgerald, *Child Care: The Bottom Line*, (New York: Child Care Action Campaign, 1988), p. 9.

[56] Barbara Riesman, quoted in "U.S. Plan on Child Care is Reported to be Stalled," *New York Times*, January 27, 1991.

[57] U. S. Department of Labor, *Child Care: A Workforce Issue* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988).

[58] Patricia Schroeder (with Andrea Camp and Robyn Lipner), *Champion of the Great American Family: A Personal and Political Book* (New York: Random House, 1989), p. 84.

[59] The Roper Organization, Inc., *The 1990 Virginia Slims Opinion Poll* (1990), pp. 10, 68, 75. Cf. The Roper Organization, Inc., *The 1985 Virginia Slims Opinion Poll* (1985).

For families -- or again more specifically, for mothers -- the message of today's child care debate is not to feel "guilty" or overly constrained by the responsibilities of childbearing and childrearing. The new imperative is not to permit the demands of children to stand in the way of work responsibilities.

In sum, we identify three major tendencies in our current public discourse and policy debates on parenthood: the universalization of the "competitive male model,"[60] the denial of parental altruism, and the invasion of the family culture by the jobs culture. These tendencies contribute to a regnant cultural ethos, especially strong among elites, based on the twin ideals of androgyny and expressive individualism. We believe that this ethos is harmful to the quality of our public discourse and to the well-being of families, particularly children. Let us state more explicitly our basic reasons for this assertion.

First, today's individualistic and androgynous "parenting script" is antithetical to childrearing on both biological and cultural grounds. In essence, the egalitarian perspective seeks to deny biological difference, claiming that motherhood and fatherhood are determined by externally imposed and outmoded socialization processes. Therefore, public discourse as well as public policy should seek to reform the socialization process in ways that make men and women equally competent in the care and nurture of the newborn.

We offer only one cheer for this idea. Babies can certainly benefit from a father's attention. (So can fatigued mothers.) We believe that "real men" can change diapers. Yet as Alice Rossi convincingly argues, bio-evolutionary theory, as well as endocrinological evidence, clearly suggests that

> there may be a biologically based potential for heightened maternal investment in the child, at least through the first months of life, that exceeds the potential for investment by men in fatherhood . . . Mating and parenting are activities linked more closely for females than males.[61]

From a cultural perspective, David Gutmann similarly demonstrates that, across time and cultures, mothering and fathering appear as sharply differentiated (and complementary) activities. Fathers protect the vulnerable infant from physical harm by defending the perimeters of the domestic realm. Mothers provide emotional nurture to the child and sustain the domestic realm as the center of nurturance. This role differentiation does not derive primarily from either social convention or individual choice, as current elite discourse would have it. Instead, it is the result of a bioevolutionary process that selects for capacities that will favor the survival of the vulnerable human infant and ultimately the species itself.[62]

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[60] Sylvia Ann Hewlett, *A Less Life: The Myth of Women's Liberation in America* (New York: William Morrow, 1986), p. 33.

[61] Rossi, "A Biosocial Perspective," *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

[62] Gutmann, *Op. cit.*, pp. 190-191.

Historical and sociological evidence leads to similar conclusions. As David Popenoe puts it,

> Universally, women have cared for very young children, and men have typically played the child-care roles of provider, protector and back-up assistant ... [Men] have different sexual drives, different propensities toward children, different perspectives on relationships, and perhaps different conceptions of morality. They also have different reasons for marrying."[63]

Second, as Christina Sommers suggests, elite discourse on family life is frequently at odds with the experiences, norms and moral values of ordinary men and women. She writes:

> politically and morally, lack of respect for common sense fosters illiberalism and elitism. Here we have a radical temper that often advocates actions and policies wildly at odds with common opinion -- from infanticide to male lactation, from no-fault divorce on demand for children to the "roomate test" for marital relationships.[64]

In the realm of everyday life and practical morality, most Americans, if asked, say that they seek happiness through family life, not through their careers.[65] Most women want to be mothers and prefer staying home while their children are very young. Most women want and expect financial and emotional support from husbands and fathers. Many, we suspect most, divorced mothers view divorce as harmful to children. Yet our dominant elite discourse about love, marriage, and parenthood would have it quite the other way on each of these issues.

Finally, the ideals of androgyny and expressive individualism fail to deliver on their basic promise: they do not make for greater individual happiness. Individual happiness and family obligation are not, as the elite story would have it, antithetical. Survey research shows quite compellingly that happiness with marriage and family life remains by far the strongest predictor of personal happiness and overall life satisfaction.[66]

Gender Identity in Public Policies

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[63] David Popenoe, "The Declining American Family: Taking a Reasoned Moral Stand," unpublished paper presented at the "Consultation on Religion, Family and Culture" conference sponsored by the University of Chicago Divinity School and The Johnson Foundation, held at the Wingspread Center of the Johnson Foundation in Racine, Wisconsin, November 9-11, 1990, pp. 21 & 24.

[64] Sommers, *Op. cit.*, p. 747.

[65] Glenn, *Op. cit.*, pp. 4-8.

[66] *Ibid.*, pp. 8-11.

We conclude an essentially cultural analysis of marriage and parenthood with a political question: Should public policies strive explicitly to counteract the prevailing tilt toward androgyny and expressive individualism? To what degree can, and ought, politics seek to influence culture in the area of gender differences and dependencies?

Certainly a case can be made for public policies that affirm gender differences. For example, the family policies of the U.S. armed services are rigorously gender-blind. They accord no special status to nursing mothers, single mothers, or married parents simultaneously called into active service. In this instance, gender-blindness leads to the traumatic separation of mothers and children during wartime. It also risks turning children into orphans. These military policies typify a work-family perspective that puts work over family. Although such policies are hospitable to the employment needs of working parents, they are almost self-evidently hostile to the needs of children.

Similarly, consider policies that protect a woman's right to a job that is potentially harmful to her reproductive system. Such policies certainly contribute to greater opportunities and equality for women in the labor force. But they do not, to speak with moderation, promote the well-being of the developing child.

Finally, our society's new divorce laws, firmly rooted in the assumptions of androgyny and individualism, simply fail to acknowledge, to a remarkable degree, the roles of most mothers within most marriages. Our no-fault divorce laws, in fact, constitute a clear embodiment of the universal male model -- a model which rewards autonomous achievement in the marketplace while largely ignoring our social and individual interests in the family and in caring for dependent children. In this case, current policy goes beyond simply the formulation of gender-neutral legal categories. These new laws are indifferent, even hostile, to important social interests.

Yet despite these caveats, we believe that, as a general rule, public policies should seek to be gender-neutral -- they should generally refrain from directly defining gender identities or assigning gender roles within the family, or in the workplace or in public life.

In the area of divorce, for example, we believe that our laws must offer more protection for women and children. Yet this imperative does not require the law to establish gender-specific legal categories. It requires only that the law acknowledge the divisions of labor within marriage and the social importance of childrearing. In the area of custody, for example, we do not have to say: "Custody shall go to the mother." We only have to say: "Custody shall go to the person who is already providing the most day to day care for this child." Sometimes, that person will be the father. Most times, not.

In the workplace, as well, policies should steer this middle ground. They should be family-friendly. They should not simply embody the norms of the competetive male model. But neither should they seek explicitly to define the gender identities and roles of workers. Thus we

favor generous "parental" leave, not "maternity" leave, even as we know that most workers who use it will be mothers. The same principle should govern wage and hour policies, employee benefits, and others workplace policies. Such policies would, in practice, affirm and promote formal equality of opportunity for women in the workplace and in public life, while at the same time respecting the importance of family commitment and obligation.

This conclusion rests on the principle of "subsidarity," drawn largely from Catholic social thought. In this instance, the idea of subsidarity suggests that cultural problems require primarily cultural, not political, solutions. Controversies over gender differences are, as a rule, simply too complex -- and too important -- to be settled through legislation or political campaigns. Instead, we must turn to the institutions of civil society -- the family itself, the church, the local community -- to direct us in the important task of naming gender differences, affirming familial dependencies, and reasserting the permanent and binding character of relationships within the family.

Moreover, we detect some signs -- some reasons for hope -- that the United States in the 1990s will substantially revise its currently dominant elite stories of man and woman. We sense a culture that is now acknowledging the limits and costs of expressive individualism as a reigning norm. We sense, even within elite discourse, the beginning of a renewed appreciation of differences and mutual dependencies between men and women. We anticipate, in short, a new cultural tilt toward improving the ecology of family life in the 1990s.

For example, David Gutmann's recent scholarship on the evolution of gender roles during the life cycle finds a popular echo today -- both in the declining popularity of the "superwoman" model and, concomitantly, in the growing popularity among women of "sequencing" job and family responsibilities.

For Gutmann, the end of the "parental emergency" permits both men and women to resume, albeit in different ways, their quest for omnipotentiality. Indeed, according to Guttman, something of a sex-role convergence occurs within many couples. Wives, no longer responsible for the daily care of children, become more independent, self-centered, and publicly ambitious. Men, as they age, become more dependent, other-centered, affiliative, and private. Gutmann writes:

> senior men and women can reclaim, for themselves, those aspects of self that were once disowned inwardly, though lived out externally, vicariously, through the spouse.[67]

Sylvia Ann Hewlett aptly summarizes this theory when she declares:

> When I was younger I wanted to insist on a 50/50 division of love and work every single day. But now I see my 50/50 shot occurring over the course of a

[67] Gutmann, *Op. cit.*, p. 203.

lifetime.[68]

Looking at contemporary U.S. culture, David Popenoe finds a new realism about family matters:

> The gender-role debate is turning more in the direction of frankly discussing gender differences. In view of the new work roles of women, many men are becoming more actively involved in childrearing. A growing number of women have begun to rethink their lives and their careers along lines different from men, with a new interest in sequencing work and family pursuits that enables them to spend more time with very young children.[69]

Several recent surveys support Popenoe's observation. According to separate surveys conducted in Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles, a majority of working mothers would prefer, if finances permitted, to stay home with young children.[70] In 1985, the Virginia Slims Opinion Poll survey reported that 21 percent of women surveyed believed that "nothing gets slighted when mothers work." In the 1990 survey, that figure had declined to 14 percent.[71]

The 1990 Yankelovich Monitor, the annual survey of social values and consumer attitudes, finds a similar tilt toward family and children. In 1987, 21 percent of women said "putting more energy into homemaking" was a good reason to stop working. In 1990, the figure rose to 28 percent. "Having a baby" also became an increasingly popular reason to give up paid employment, increasing from 18 percent in 1987 to 24 percent in 1990. Overall, the survey points to a "major shift away from work and more toward home," according to Peter Stisser, a Yankelovich vice president and Monitor analyst.[72]

Moreover, the currently large number of childbirths in our society -- over four million this past year, more than any year in American history -- suggests that a large proportion of the baby boom generation will be experiencing the "parental emergency" at roughly the same time over the coming decade. This demographic event, with its myriad social and cultural ripple effects, may well lead to an upturn in parental altruism within the society and to a renewed commitment to family well-being.

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[68] Comments made during the "Consultation on Religion and Family Ethics" Conference, *Op. cit.*

[69] David Popenoe, "The Declining American Family", *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

[70] *The Washington Post Poll* (June 11-July 7, 1990); Mark Baldassare & Associates (Irvine, CA), *The Los Angeles Times Poll* (July 19-23, 1990).

[71] The Roper Organization, Inc., *Op. cit.*

[72] "Focus shifts from goods to feelings," *Dallas Times Herald* (February 25, 1991), D-1.

We are essentially pessimistic about the state's ability to define and enforce gender roles and identities. At the same time, we are optimistic about our cultural capacity in the years ahead to renew the language of difference and dependency in our public discourse about man and woman -- to leave behind a story that is impoverished and anemic and to refashion for our time a story of "a common life" for man and woman that "promotes the accomplishment and happiness of each."[73]

[73] Paul Sayre quoted in Ruth H. Jewson and James Walters, *The National Council on Family Relations: A Fifty-Year History, 1938-1987* (St. Paul, MN: National Council on Family Relations, 1988), p. 1.