A central feature of most societies has traditionally been a division of labor and authority between men and women. Which tasks are assigned to males and which to females has varied widely, but in Western societies sex roles have been primarily distinguished by a division between family and occupational roles.

Recent decades in the United States have witnessed not only important changes in the distribution of occupational roles between men and women but significant change in other aspects of family life. While men have continued to specialize primarily in occupational roles outside the home, married women increasingly have combined paid employment with their traditional homemaker roles. The age at marriage has risen, and so has the divorce rate. The fertility rate has declined sharply, and educational attainment has increased. Meantime, the women's movement has focused attention on the sex-based assignment of tasks, authority, and status with the goal of changing the attitudes of both men and women and providing a wider range of opportunities for women. Since the attitudes and beliefs of men and women about what constitutes an appropriate division of labor and authority between the sexes tend to be consistent with the existing division of family and occupational roles, it is likely that the recent changes in family life and the distribution of occupational roles have been accompanied by shifts in attitudes about appropriate sex roles, with people becoming more tolerant of women occupying roles previously held by men. The increasing levels of education and the rise in the women's movement also should be linked to changes in beliefs and attitudes concerning the role of women.

The questions we ask in this paper are: in what ways and to what extent have sex role attitudes changed in the fifteen years between 1962 and 1977?
Data. The data used for this analysis were collected in five waves of a longitudinal survey of the same women between 1962 and 1977. The sample represented, on a stratified probability basis, white women in the childbearing ages living in the Detroit metropolitan area, who either had just married or had just had a first, second, or fourth birth with approximately equal numbers of first, second, and fourth parity women and a somewhat smaller number of just married women. Within stratum the women were chosen by simple random sampling from the birth and marriage records of the Detroit area.

The first interview, an eighty minute personal interview with 1,304 women (representing a response rate of 92 percent) collected a considerable body of information on the demographic, economic, and social characteristics and attitudes of the respondents.

Follow-up interviews were obtained by telephone in the fall of 1962, and again in 1963, 1966, and 1977. Of the 1,304 original respondents, full interviews were obtained in 1977 with 1,161 or 89 percent. A comparison of the 1977 sample with the original 1962 respondents indicated that the overall characteristics of the continuing 1977 group were only slightly different from the original sample.

Survey Questions. In the original personal interview in 1962 respondents were asked to respond to the following series of statements concerning the appropriate division of labor or authority between men and women:

Now, I would like to get your opinion on some matters concerning family life. I will read you some statements, and I would like you to tell me if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. The first is:

1. Most of the important decisions in the life of the family should be made by the man of the house (DECISIONS).
2. It's perfectly all right for women to be very active in clubs, politics, and other outside activities before the children are grown up (WOMEN ACTIVE).
3. A wife shouldn't expect her husband to help around the house after he's come home from a hard day's work (HOUSEWORK).
4. There is some work that is men's and some that is women's, and they shouldn't be doing each other's (MEN'S/WOMEN'S WORK).

40.
Although the respondents were asked to respond in terms of one of the four agree-disagree categories, the few who insisted that they were undecided, didn't know, or that it depends were coded into a fifth category.

Summary of Findings. The data document the tremendous shift which women have made toward more egalitarian sex role attitudes between 1962 and 1977. As expected, the recent decline in fertility and the increases in education, female employment, and divorce have been accompanied by an increasing rejection of traditional definitions of the appropriate division of labor and authority between men and women. Whereas in 1962 between 32 and 55 percent of the respondents gave egalitarian responses concerning various sex role attitudes, by 1977 these percentages ranged from 60 to 77 percent. This trend towards egalitarian sex role attitudes cannot be explained by the maturation of these women; age was not positively related to egalitarian attitudes at either date. Thus the attitudinal shift over the 15-year period reflects changing conditions between 1962 and 1977 rather than the aging of the panel members.

The shift towards egalitarianism is considerably more pronounced for the two global items of the survey concerned with the general principles of role segregation and division of authority within the home, than for more specific aspects of role specialization, such as the sharing of housework or the legitimacy of nonhome activities for mothers. One possible explanation could be that the general trend toward more egalitarian attitudes about appropriate roles for men and women becomes somewhat tempered when specific activities are concerned—activities with which these women have been involved for a considerable number of years.

The group of women surveyed who were between the ages of 15 and 39 in 1962 had their children during the baby boom; and although most of them have worked some time in their life, only 50 percent have worked two and a half years or more during the past 15 years. Thus, like most American women bearing their children during the baby boom, this group have spent most of their married lives taking care of the home and children while their husbands supported the family. The realities of allocating work and home responsibilities undoubtedly have made them more aware of the problems involved in shifting responsibilities for specific home tasks even though they may in principle support equal prerogatives for men and women as well as more equal sharing of family and occupational roles. Since the survey data showed that these women performed most of the home and child care tasks, their lesser shift on attitudes regarding specific tasks may reflect the actual sex role division within their households.
Why Attitudes Change. In 1962 sex role attitudes bore no appreciable relation to a wide spectrum of individual characteristics, including age, education, religion, number of children, work experience, husband's education, and husband's income. By 1977 many of these basic characteristics were related to sex role attitudes and were shown to be important determinants of changes in attitudes between 1962 and 1977. Younger women, those with more education, those with better educated husbands and those who were working in 1962 were more likely than others to adopt egalitarian sex role attitudes, while mothers of large families and fundamentalist Protestants tended to retain traditional sex role attitudes. The exposure to a wide spectrum of ideas which education and work experience bring apparently made these groups of women more receptive to attitudinal changes than others.

The experiences of the women during the 1962 to 1977 inter-survey period also were associated with a shift in sex role attitudes. Additional education, work for pay, and exposure to divorce were associated with shifts toward egalitarian attitudes, while additional births were associated with remaining traditional.

Thus the data reported in this paper are consistent with the general proposition that the recent changes occurring in the American family have been accompanied by shifts in the attitudes of American women. The recent increases in female education, female employment, divorce, and the decline in fertility have been accompanied by increasing rejection of the traditional definitions of the appropriate division of labor and authority between men and women. In addition, the data indicate that the characteristics and experience of the individual women are related to their attitudinal changes. Those with access to non-traditional ideas and opportunities, both in terms of their 1962 characteristics and their experience between 1962 and 1977, underwent the largest number of changes. Quite clearly the attitudes and behavior of American women are linked together in important ways.
REFERENCES


HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS' PREFERENCES FOR
DIVISION OF LABOR IN THE FAMILY—1977

A. Regula Herzog, J. G. Bachman and L. D. Johnston
Survey Research Center
University of Michigan

How do high school seniors regard their future roles as husbands and wives, and how do they anticipate dividing the major duties between themselves and their partners? The findings presented here are based on questionnaire responses by 2500 or more male and female high school seniors in 1977 and form part of the "Monitoring the Future" national sample, administered each year by the University of Michigan Survey Research Center.

Most of the seniors of both sexes (approximately 75 percent in our study) are planning to get married and think it likely that they would want to have children, with two children the norm. But only a small number of the female seniors (approximately 10 percent) expect to be exclusively homemakers at the age of 30; most of them expect to be involved in some sort of paid work at that point in their lives.

How then do these seniors of both sexes expect to combine the major functions of homemaker and worker in the female role, and to what degree do they anticipate modifying the male role in order to accommodate such changes? Do these young adults reflect in their expectations the clear trend in our society for married women to join the labor force even when they have preschool children at home?

These issues were addressed with a set of questions in which several possible arrangements for division of work between husband and wife were probed and each could be rated as either "desirable," "acceptable," "somewhat acceptable," or "not at all acceptable."

Division of paid work. Rated most often as desirable for couples without children is either a half-time or a full-time working wife in combination with a full-time working husband. The arrangement in which the husband works full-time and the wife half-time (rated by only 4 percent as not at all acceptable) seems to represent a compromise between traditional and egalitarian arrangements which is at least somewhat acceptable to almost everybody. The completely egalitarian arrangement,