

2010

FP-10-04 Thirty Years of Change in Family Roles and Parenthood Attitudes, 1976-2008

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Bogle, R. and Wu, Hsueh-Sheng, "FP-10-04 Thirty Years of Change in Family Roles and Parenthood Attitudes, 1976-2008" (2010). *National Center for Family and Marriage Research Family Profiles*. 140.
https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/ncfmr_family_profiles/140

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Changes in Family Behavior

- The past 30 years have witnessed dramatic change in families ranging from growth in divorce, cohabitation, single motherhood, and delays in marriage (FP-09-02; FP-09-03; FP-10-02; Cherlin, 2009). To better understand future family changes, it is important to consider the views of adolescents, as their attitudes may guide their future family formation behaviors. Drawing on 30 years of nationally representative data from *Monitoring the Future* (MTF), this profile presents attitudes of high school seniors regarding traditional family roles, fatherhood, and motherhood. For more information on the MTF sample and study design, access the NCFMR's The Data Source by [clicking here](#).

Traditional Family Roles

- High school seniors were asked to *agree or disagree* with the following statement, "It is usually better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside of the home and the woman takes care of the home and family." Responses were used to measure changes in adolescents' views of traditional family roles.
 - » Agreement with traditional family roles has decreased by 50% since the late 1970s, falling from just under 60% in 1976 to 30% in 2008.
 - » Disagreement with traditional family roles has doubled since the late 1970s, peaking at 60% in 1993; however, disagreement with traditional family roles had fallen to about 45% by 2008 (Figure 1).
- Disagreement with traditional family roles has exceeded agreement since the early 1980s; however, the gap in percentages that agree and disagree has narrowed, and more seniors have no opinion "or neither agree nor disagree."
 - » More young men than women agreed with traditional family roles in 2008 than 15 years ago.
 - » Over the thirty-year period, young women were consistently twice as likely to disagree with traditional family roles relative to young men.
 - ◇ Young women's disagreement with traditional family roles peaked in 1994 at 75%, reflecting an 88% increase since 1976. This was followed by a moderate decline to a 60% disagreement in 2008 (Figure 2).
 - ◇ In 1982, the percentage of young women who disagreed with traditional family roles exceeded those who agreed. Disagreement about traditional family roles did not outpace agreement among young men until a decade later in 1992.

Figure 1: Traditional Family Roles

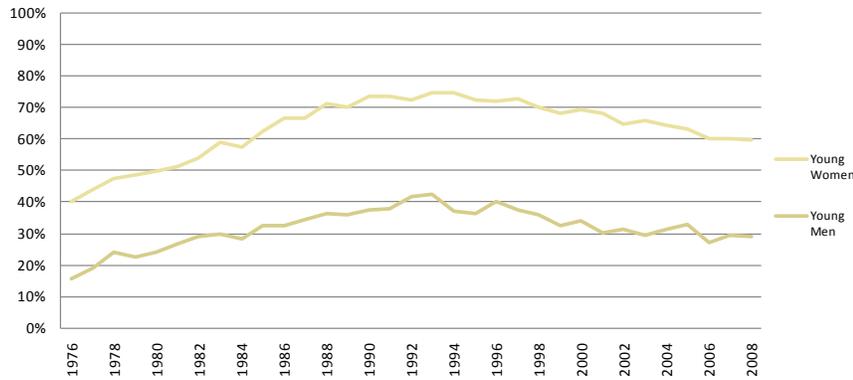


Source: Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth (12th -Grade Survey), 1976-2008.

Family Profiles examine topics related to NCFMR's core research themes. Data are presented at both the national and state levels using new data sources. Written for both researchers and broad communities, these profiles summarize the latest statistics on U.S. families.

» Young men's disagreement with traditional family roles increased from 16% in 1976 to 43% in 1993, a 169% increase. This was followed by a moderate decline to a 30% disagreement in 2008 (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Disagreement with Traditional Family Roles by Gender*



The Value of Parenthood

• High school seniors were asked to *agree or disagree* with the following statement, "Being a father/mother and raising children is one of the most fulfilling experiences a man/woman can have." Responses were used to measure changes in adolescents' views of the value of parenthood.

- » Highly valuing parenthood has remained stable over the past 30 years. Since 1976, about 70% have agreed that fatherhood is one of the most fulfilling experiences for a man, and about 60% have agreed that motherhood is one the most fulfilling experiences for a woman (Figure 3).
- » A greater percentage of young women (70%) agreed that motherhood is one of the most fulfilling experiences for a woman relative to young men (48%) (Figure 4).
- » An almost equal percentage of young men and women agreed that fatherhood is one of the most fulfilling experiences for a man (70%).

Figure 3: Agreement with the Value of Parenthood*

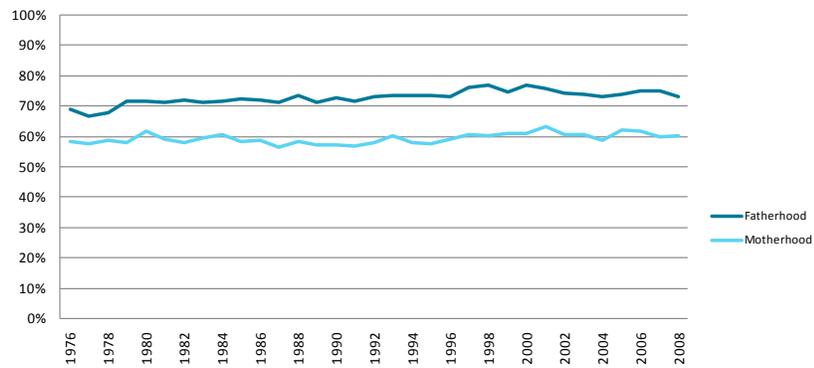
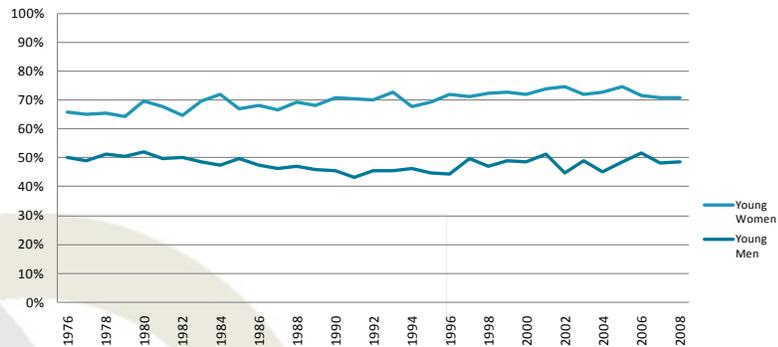


Figure 4: Agreement with the Value of Motherhood by Gender*



*Source: Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth (12th-Grade Survey), 1976-2008.

Suggested Citation:
Bogle, R., & Wu, H.-S. (2010). Thirty Years of Change in Family Roles and Parenthood Attitudes, 1976-2008 (FP-10-04). National Center for Family & Marriage Research. Retrieved from http://ncfmr.bgsu.edu/pdf/family_profiles/file83690.pdf

This project was supported with a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, grant number 5 UOI AEO00001-03. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the author(s) and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of any agency of the Federal government.