



UNCONVENTIONAL WISDOM: News You Can Use, 2nd Annual Edition

A Survey of Recent Family Research and Clinical Findings Prepared for the Council on Contemporary Families

Edited by:

Joshua Coleman
Senior Fellow
Council on Contemporary Families

Stephanie Coontz
Director of Research and Public Education
Council on Contemporary Families

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 UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI
SCHOOL of EDUCATION & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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CCF's annual "Unconventional Wisdom" is a collection of member submissions and recent briefing papers prepared for the Council on Contemporary Families' 12th Anniversary Conference at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, April 17-19, 2009.

The Council on Contemporary Families was formed to increase communication among family researchers and practitioners from many different fields, and to help the press and public get access to accurate information and best-practice findings about how today's families work. Our 12th anniversary conference detailed the latest research and clinical findings about the ways that boys, girls, men, and women have become more similar in recent years--and why they continue to be different. We examined sexuality, work and family, our conceptions of masculinity and femininity, and how recent changes in these domains are represented in the media. To get the conversation going, we asked conference participants to send in their most important--and sometimes surprising--research findings, practical experience, and clinical observations. We encourage members and the press to explore these topics at greater length.

Although Unconventional Wisdom does not include the publications of all those represented here, this document provides the contact information for members for readers to contact them directly.

Unconventional Wisdom: News You Can Use

2nd Annual Edition

Edited by Joshua Coleman, Senior Fellow, Council on Contemporary Families, and Stephanie Coontz, Co-Chair and Director of Research and Public Education, Council on Contemporary Families.

Do Babies Make Marriage Better or Worse? It All Depends

Although marital counselors in the mid-20th century often advised couples that parenthood would increase their marital satisfaction and adjustment, researchers over the past three decades have discovered that, on average, satisfaction with marriage for men and women goes down after the birth of a first child and continues to fall over the next 15 years. Today, conventional wisdom has swung the other way - holding that babies bring trouble to their parents' marriage.

But our research suggests that couples who have more egalitarian relationships can avoid these problems, first when they jointly plan for and welcome the birth of a child, and second, when they minimize the tendency to slip into more traditional gender roles after the child's birth. Our research shows that the average decline in marital satisfaction after childbirth is almost completely accounted for by couples who (1) slid into having a baby without planning; (2) were extremely ambivalent about becoming parents, or (3) disagreed about having a baby but went ahead and conceived without resolving their difference. ALL the couples in which one partner, usually the man, did not want a child but gave in to his partner's pressure were separated or divorced by the time their first child entered kindergarten.

We have also found that when women wind up doing more housework than they did before the birth and more child care than they expected after, this leads to tension, depression, and sometimes anger in both partners, which leaves their relationship vulnerable. We have tested interventions that help couples balance the complex demands of being parents, partners, and workers. These interventions yield more positive relationships between husband and wife and between parents and children. Over time, their children reap benefits too.

Contact Philip A. Cowan, Professor of Psychology, Emeritus, University of California at Berkeley, at 510.643.5608 and pcowan@berkeley.edu.

Contact Carolyn Pape Cowan, Professor of Psychology, Emerita, University of California at Berkeley, at 510.643.5608 and ccowan@berkeley.edu.

Young Women, Including Mothers, Are Now Just as Ambitious About Careers as Young Men; Men Now Feel More Work-Family Conflict Than Women

A just-released report from the Families and Work Institute, *Times Are Changing: Gender and Generation at Work and at Home*, shows significant and surprising changes among men and women at work and at home. For the first time, young women want just as much to advance to jobs with more responsibility as young men. Moreover, being a mother does not significantly change young women's career ambitions.

These changes in attitudes reflect women's evolving roles in the workplace. The share of dual-earner family income contributed by women has risen to 44% and 26% of women now earn 10% or more than their husbands. At the same time, men have increased the amount of time they spend with young children and are now experiencing more work-family conflict than women. To download a copy of our newly released report examining the evolution of work-related gender roles over the past three decades, please visit [http://familiesandwork.org/site/research/reports/Times Are Changing.pdf](http://familiesandwork.org/site/research/reports/Times%20Are%20Changing.pdf). Contact Ellen Galinsky, President, Families and Work Institute, at 212.465.2044 and egalinsky@familiesandwork.org.

Have Boys Been Left Out of the Gender Revolution?

Forty-five years ago, before Title IX and other curriculum reforms favoring women's equity existed, studies showed that the school culture of "proper" masculine and feminine behaviors was suppressing girls' natural talents and aspirations by the time they entered middle school. At age 10 or 11, girls stopped speaking up in class and even started "playing dumb" to attract boys. They often chose not to compete in sports or to develop their bodies for fear of being teased as tomboys. Our new study of middle-school children in the 21st Century shows a remarkable reversal of this pattern.

Although girls face some issues adjusting to our increasingly sexualized culture, they no longer feel that they have to sacrifice their interests and talents to conform to a standard norm of girlhood. Being a top-flight athlete is now considered part of the "ideal" girl package, and girls are very willing to compete with boys in the classroom. They are often the top performers in class and are now more likely to go to college than their male counterparts.

Boys have gained fewer freedoms to explore their individual interests and talents from the gender revolution. Boys are still reluctant to admit to enjoying any activity, from gymnastics to dancing to knitting -- or even reading books -- that smacks of something girls do. And they now seem to be subjected to the same kind of teasing about supposedly "gender inappropriate" activities or interests than girls used to face 45 years ago. Today it is young boys who are afraid of showing off how smart they are and who feel they have to pretend to be interested in certain activities and not others for fear of being taunted as "gay."

Contact Barbara J. Risman, Professor and Head, Department of Sociology, University of Illinois at Chicago, at 312.996.3074 and brisman@uic.edu.

Does the College "Hookup" Scene Mean the End of Commitment?

College students don't go on formal dates much anymore- they "hook up." Students use this term for situations in which two people who usually know each other, and might even have hooked up before run into each other at a party or in the dorm and end up doing something sexual; what prior generations referred to as having a "one night stand." Some commentators worry that hooking up means the end of committed relationships, but research on the new "hookup scene" in college finds some surprises. First, only a minority (under 40%) of hookups involves intercourse (they may go no farther than making out, petting, or oral sex). Second, while they have largely replaced the casual date, they haven't expunged relationships and in some cases, are the pathway to a relationship. Third, while most students don't aspire to marry until their mid-to-late 20s or even early 30s, almost all

plan to marry and be monogamous. Thus, we needn't worry that commitment is on the way out. However, a troubling finding is the extent to which gender inequality persists in the hookup scene. While women have gained some sexual freedoms, they risk harsher judgments than men do if they hook up a lot. As well, there is a striking "orgasm gap" between males and females-it is worse than the sex gap in pay! It appears that men get more than their share of the orgasms while women get more than their share of the bad reputations.

Contact Paula England, Professor of Sociology, Stanford University, at 650.723.4912 and pengland@stanford.edu.

People Who Favor Egalitarian Gender Roles Used to Have Higher Marital Instability Than More Traditional Couples; Today They Have More Stable Marriages

In the 1950s, a woman who wanted a stable marriage was right to pick a man with very strong beliefs in separate gender roles and male breadwinning. Men with less conventional ideas were not very good marriage bets. Today, though, men with rigid ideas about male breadwinning and gender roles are more likely to end up divorced than less conventional men. Today also, men who share breadwinning and household work have happier marriages (both the husbands and the wives) and lower divorce rates than couples where one partner does most of the breadwinning and the other does the big majority of the housework.

For women born during the baby boom and earlier, those who completed higher education were less likely to marry and if they developed a career they were more likely to divorce than women with less education. But for women born after 1960, those with a college degree and/or a well-paid job are MORE likely to be married at age 35 than other women. Their divorce rates are much lower than women with low levels of education or job training.

It used to work to play dumb to catch a man. Today more men than ever before prefer women who are their educational and occupational equals, and fewer feel threatened by a woman with more education or a higher salary. More couples are following the example of Barack and Michelle Obama, who met when she was his mentor at the law firm, earning a much higher salary.

Contact Stephanie Coontz, Professor of History, The Evergreen State College, at coontzs@msn.com and 360.352.8117.

The Persistence of the "Dutiful Daughter-in-Law" Ethos

Most people think they treat their daughters and sons equally. However, when it comes to daughters-in-law, old expectations come to the fore, even among feminists. Whenever I speak about my research on "How to Foster Rewarding Relationships with Your Adult Children," the questions all center on in-laws' expectations of their daughters-in-law, rather than their own son or their sons-in-law. Women are still viewed as the keeper of the family's emotional ties. Parents expect their daughters-in-law, sometimes even more than their own sons, to foster the intimate family ties they desire. They do not seem to have the same expectation for their sons-in-law.

Contact Ruth Nemzoff, Resident Scholar, Brandeis Women's Studies, Brandeis University, at 617.332.7060 and RNEMZOFF@bentley.edu.

Is the Recession Good for Dating?

Statistics at the major matching sites show that in the months where the economy is doing the worst, people are dating the most!

Contact Pepper Schwartz, Clarence Shrag Professor of Sociology, University of Washington, at pepperschwartz@hotmail.com and 206.910.7586.

Couples Without Role Models

Today's couples have work and family options that their grandparents could have scarcely imagined such as stay-at-home fathers, dual earner couples, gay and lesbian parents, or single mothers by choice. Having a variety of ways to organize work and family has created greater opportunities for happier individuals and better functioning families. However, today's couples have fewer role models for their particular family form and this sometimes creates more marital conflict.

Many of the couples in my practice have to reckon with the subtle or unconscious memories of traditional family life. For example, a woman who earns more than her husband may feel proud about her success, yet resentful if she prefers to stay at home as did her mother. A husband who stays at home may find meaning and happiness in his ability to be a full-time Dad, yet shamed by a culture where career and breadwinning are still central to a male's identity. Both genders may find themselves reverting to more traditional roles once children arrive, despite agreements to have a more egalitarian marriage.

In addition, being a stay-at-home parent is quite a different entity from prior generations when children spent long hours playing outside without adult supervision or interference. Especially in the middle class, children have moved front and center in most homes and that sometimes creates more conflict for their parents. The most successful couples appear to be those who recognize that children are not the only members in a family who need quality time.

Contact Joshua Coleman, Psychologist, at 510.547.6500 and drjoshuacoleman@comcast.net, or visit him online: www.drjoshuacoleman.com.

An STD Diagnosis Can Improve a Woman's Sexual Health Attitudes and Behaviors

Picture a woman who has just been diagnosed with a genital herpes or HPV infection -- do you imagine her in shock, possibly devastated and losing hope of having a happy and healthy sex life? Contrary to this widespread impression, more than 80% of the women I interviewed for my recent book ultimately viewed their STD diagnosis as a positive turning-point moment with regard to their attitudes and behaviors about sexual health. They were more likely to communicate openly with potential partners about their sexual desires and concerns, educate themselves about the range of STDs (including HIV), receive thorough annual exams, and practice safer sex.

Contact Adina Nack, Associate Professor of Sociology, California Lutheran University, at nack@callutheran.edu and 805.493.3438.

Do Biracial Adoptees Do Better in White Families than Black Adoptees?

Early transracial adoption research reported that adoptive parents sometimes requested biracial babies, believing that black-white children would have an easier time than black children adjusting to a white family and community. A recent study of biracial adoptees

found that being biracial was not easier, and in some cases, was harder. Like any other transracial adoptee, they too had to cope with racism both in their predominantly white communities and sometimes, within their own adoptive family systems. They too, often had limited-to-no opportunities to connect to black peers or a black community and found that the books and dolls their parents provided sometimes felt like empty connections to that part of their heritages.

In addition, they also experienced discrimination and stigma because of their multiracial heritage. Being both multiracial and raised by white parents often challenged their acceptance as "black" with African American peers. This study suggests transracially adopted biracial children are at high-risk for experiencing parenting approaches that downplay the role of their black heritage and culture. So-called "colorblind parenting" left this group of children on their own to explore their racial heritages as adults. Findings from this study suggest that adopting biracial children requires special insight and deliberate parenting approaches to create ongoing and daily opportunities for children to make connections not only within a black community, but with other children and adults who are multiracial.

Contact Gina Miranda Samuels, Assistant Professor, University of Chicago, at gmsamuels@uchicago.edu and 773.834.2163.

How Do Couples Create Equal Relationships?

Most couples say they want equality, yet many couples have difficulty because hidden male power gets in the way. Their therapists may not pick up on male privilege either because most have not had training in how to identify or resolve covert gendered power issues. Yet couples can move toward greater equality through a process, either with a clinician or on their own, that includes (1) education about underlying gender issues, (2) active negotiation of equal status, accommodation and well-being, (3) the development of new competences on the part of both partners, and (4) mutual attention to relationships, work needs, and family tasks. This process can be helpful for a variety of couples, including those in collectivist as well as individualistic societies, couples in different life stages, and in diverse religious, immigrant, and ethnic groups.

Contact Carmen Knudson-Martin, Professor and Director of the Ph.D. program in Marital and Family Therapy, Loma Linda University, at cknudsonmartin@mft.llu.edu.

Contact Anne Rankin Mahoney, Professor Emerita of Sociology, The University of Denver, at amahoney@du.edu.

Are Young Adults Becoming More Traditional?

In contrast to popular images of twenty- and thirty-somethings returning to tradition, my study of "the children of the gender revolution" finds that most young people want to balance work and caretaking in the context of an egalitarian relationship. When it comes to their aspirations, most young women and men are more alike than different, with both hoping to blend the traditional value of lifelong commitment with the modern value of flexible, egalitarian sharing. Yet young people are also developing strategies to prepare for "second best" options. Fearful that they will not find the right partner to share family caretaking, most women see work as essential to their survival. Worried about time-greedy workplaces, most men believe they must put career first. These divergent fallback positions may be putting "self-reliant" women and "neo-traditional" men on a collision course, but

they do not reflect this generation's highest aspirations for relationship equality and personal work-family balance.

Contact Kathleen Gerson, Professor of Sociology, New York University, at kathleen.gerson@nyu.edu and 212.998.8376.

Singlism: The Unnoticed Prejudice

Today, sexism, racism, and ageism are widely recognized and discussed, but the stereotyping, stigmatizing, and discrimination against single people remains largely hidden. New research reveals that unmarried men and women are discriminated against in the housing market and in access to affordable health care. They are also paid less than married men who do the same job. A growing body of research shows that, contrary to stereotypes about depressed single women and self-centered single males, most singles live happy and healthy lives. They are in some ways more connected to friends and communities than are married people, and more likely to maintain intergenerational ties. Contact Bella DePaulo, Visiting Professor of Psychology, UC Santa Barbara, at depaulo@psych.ucsb.edu and 805.565.9582, or visit her online: www.BellaDePaulo.com.

Gender Inequality is Sneaky

As reported last year in *Gender & Society*, men and women are subject to different standards of evaluation at work, and this may help explain the persistence of inequality in pay and promotions.

Other research on women in the labor market, however, suggests that labor unions, which increasingly are populated by women, are helping to reduce the gender gap. Women workers who belong to unions earn, on average, 11% more than women workers without unions, even when controlling for education and a variety of other things. Read more about women in unions at <http://girlwpen.com/?p=1376>; read more about double standards at work at <http://girlwpen.com/?p=1357>.

Contact Virginia Rutter, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Framingham State College, at 206.375.4139 and vrutter@gmail.com.

New Intervention Improves Re-Entry For the Incarcerated

Numerous studies have established that maintaining family relationships while incarcerated is associated with improved reentry outcomes. What is less understood is how corrections staff and case managers can identify individuals' family ties and the connections people have to broader social networks. Building on the studies of social networks and strength-based work, Family Justice has developed and tested the Relational Inquiry Tool for corrections staff and case managers.

The pretest results revealed that fewer than half of the incarcerated respondents had ever been asked about their family by institution staff. More than 80% of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people who participated in testing Family Justice's Relational Inquiry Tool stated that the tool would be useful in planning for reentry from prison. Nearly 75% of staff reported that the tool increased their understanding of the incarcerated men and women. The tool was tested in four states with the support of the National Institute of Corrections, and is currently being used by corrections and community-based organization staff in Oklahoma, Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois.

Contact Carol Shapiro, Founder and President, Family Justice, at cshapiro@familyjustice.org.

Gender Bending, Gender Crossing: A Growing Issue for the Contemporary Family

Increasing numbers of children are telling their parents that they are not the gender stated on their birth certificate or are not able or willing to play within the culturally defined binary boxes of "girl," "boy." They might be transgender; they might be gender fluid; they might be a "Prius"--a hybrid half boy-half girl; or they might be a "gender smoothie"--a synthesized blend of male/female.

Traditional thinking in psychology has been that parents make their children that way and mental health professionals have to jump in to "fix" it and make their children "all boy" or "all girl." But my clinical work with gender-nonconforming children and their families challenges this traditional thinking. Rather than the parent shaping the child, the gender-nonconforming child, with a strong constitutional disposition toward gender crossing or bending, is shaping the parent, and whether that child emerges from the family with a true rather than false gender identity and with good mental health will depend on the family's ability to meet the child where he or she is, listen carefully to what the child is communicating about his or her gender self, get social and psychological supports for family members' unease about gender bending and gender crossing, affirm the child's gender identity as it evolves, and become an advocate for the gender-nonconforming child in the larger community.

The recent publicized findings by Caitlin Ryan and her colleagues at the Family Acceptance Project in San Francisco that family rejection is significantly correlated with poor mental health outcomes for gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual young adults only highlights the urgency of the need for better family practices for all children who go against the gender grain of society, whether it be in their gender or their sexual identities or expressions. To that end, my presentation at the conference will discuss three different types of families--the transcendent, the transphobic, and the transporting--that I have discovered in my clinical work with families who have a gender-bending or gender-crossing child, each emblematic of the challenges confronting parents when their gender nonconforming child "just shows up."

Contact Diane Ehrensaft, Ph.D., at dehrensaft@earthlink.net and 510.547.4147.

Whens Moms and Dads Switch Roles -- By Choice or Necessity

Why have reverse-traditional families emerged during the past forty years, and what happens when moms and dads switch their traditional roles? In my presentation for the conference, I profile fathers who have embraced caregiving roles, explore the circumstances and ideals that inform their choices, and analyze the economic and social developments that have made their choices possible. Especially timely are the stories of fathers who find themselves thrown into a new role at home when they are laid off. I explore the circumstances in which these dads and their families can survive intact, and even thrive.

Contact Jeremy Adam Smith, Senior Editor of *Greater Good Magazine*, at jeremyadamsmith@mac.com and 415.845.3673.

Changing the Second Shift

Based on interviews with managers, hundreds of men and women in two-career couples and a survey of 1100 working mothers, Joanna Strober and I have found that mindset makes all the difference. When women know that their employment is a positive for their children and marriage, they are better able to problem solve for what they need. When men see how valuable they are to their kids (and the career flexibility a wife's income provides a husband), they are more willing to do their part at home - particularly when given the freedom to do it their own way. And when women and men see themselves as equally valuable parents, they change the workplace by working with employers to re-engineer the workday and focus on metrics of success other than hours. My presentation at the conference, "Getting to 50/50," shows the practical steps that couples take to negotiate better deals in marriage and in the workplace.

Contact Sharon Meers, coauthor of *Getting to 50/50: How Working Couples Can Have It All by Sharing It All*, at Sharon@sharonmeers.com and 650.321.0909.

The Lifelong Ties of Separated Parents

Some people do make lemonade. As a family therapist I have interviewed parents separated 10, 20 and sometimes 40 years. Joint custody was not possible in 1970. Today it is commonplace. Yet even then, difficult untangling in 1980 often resolved itself into cordial grandparenting in the 21st century, as ordinary parents discovered how to continue caring for their children and grandchildren after formal separations and divorces. These parents were pioneers in continuing to co-parent after separation. Parents separating today are hungry for models of new kinship circles and these can be found not in the divorce statistics but the real stories of untangling and rearranging

Contact Judy Osborne, Director, Stepfamily Associates, at judyosborne16@gmail.com and 617.731.5767.

Men's Changing Roles in Housework and Childcare: When Do They Step Up to the Plate?

International studies show a tremendous increase in men's share of housework and child care over the past 30 years. But these changes have been slow, and they vary from place to place. My presentation at the conference discusses how gender division of labor is affected by changing labor market conditions, changing gender ideologies, and changing childhood socialization.

Contact Oriel Sullivan, Oxford University, at sullivan@bgu.ac.il.

How Does Equally Shared Parenting Work?

As co-founders of www.equallysharedparenting.com, an online resource dedicated to egalitarian parenting from the perspective of both genders, we report on the personal side of creating an egalitarian marriage with children. One of our main findings may seem paradoxical: The closer couples get to equally shared parenting, the less they focus on the division of chores.

Contact Marc and Amy Vachon at amy@equallysharedparenting.com and marc@equallysharedparenting.com.

About the Editors

Josh Coleman

Psychologist, San Francisco Bay Area
Senior Fellow, Council on Contemporary Families
Phone 510.547.6500
Email: drjoshuacoleman@comcast.net
Website: www.drjoshuacoleman.com

Stephanie Coontz

Professor of History and Family Studies
The Evergreen State College
Director of Research and Public Education
Council on Contemporary Families
Phone: 360-352-8117
Email: coontzs@msn.com

About CCF

The Council on Contemporary Families is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to providing the press and public with the latest research and best-practice findings about American families. Our members include demographers, economists, family therapists, historians, political scientists, psychologists, social workers, sociologists, as well as other family social scientists and practitioners.

Founded in 1996 and now based in the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Miami, the Council's mission is to enhance the national understanding of how and why contemporary families are changing, what needs and challenges they face, and how these needs can best be met. To fulfill that mission, the Council holds annual conferences, open to the public, and issues periodic briefing papers and fact sheets.

Access our publications and learn more about CCF membership at www.contemporaryfamilies.org