

March 9, 2004

The Effects of Changing Gender Roles on the Family

Read:

Jackson: Destined for Equality

Hays: The Mommy Wars: Ambivalence, Ideological Work, and the Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood

Gerson: Children of the Gender Revolution: Some Theoretical Questions and Findings from the Field

di Leonardo: The Female World of Cards and Holidays: Women, Families, and the Work of Kinship

La Rossa, et al., The Changing Culture of Fatherhood in Comic-Strip Families: A Six-Decade Analysis

1. What, according to Jackson, is the driving force behind what he sees to be a worldwide decline of gender inequality? Do you think he's right?
2. Jackson speaks of a trend toward households without economic activity. What would such a household look like?
3. Hayes, discussing US motherhood ideology, says that "all mothers ultimately share a recognition of the ideology of intensive mothering." What does she mean, do you think? Do you agree? What readings have we had that suggest that "intensive mothering" was not always the ideal?
4. What are the contradictions in our current conception of "the good mother," according to Hayes?
5. Hayes says that voluntarily childless career women will be accused by some of being cold, heartless and unfulfilled as a woman. Do you agree? If so, how strong are these opinions in present-day society?
6. What is "ideological work" as described by Hayes? What example does she give? Can you think of ways we engage in ideological work in another domain besides mothering?
7. In these readings women express a lot of negative opinions about stay-at-home mothers. Do you think the problems that are seen to arise if a couple decides the mother will not work have been true of most mothers throughout the centuries? Why or why not?
8. Hayes' interviewees indicated that they felt motherhood isn't highly valued in our society. Do you agree? What evidence can you provide that supports your position?
9. Why, according to Hayes, is the portrait of the "mommy wars" overdrawn?

10. To what degree do you agree with the “family decline” group of social scientists discussed in Gerson? Describe their position.
11. How would you characterize the other side of the dispute over “family decline?” Describe their argument.
12. Gerson suggests that looking at family structure is not the place to look when trying to explain the observable differences in children’s welfare in families with both biological parents present and single-parent families. Where does she suggest we look?
13. What conclusions does Gerson come to?
14. Describe the card-and-holiday division of work in your family. Do you agree with di Leonardo’s analysis?
15. What is “kin work”? What consequences does this gendered division of labor have in divorce, do you think?
16. di Leonardo says that despite two major waves of feminist activism in this century, the gendering of certain categories of unpaid labor is still largely unaltered. Jackson doesn’t discuss this kind of “work.” What would be his response to di Leonardo’s analysis?
17. On p. 276 La Rossa et al. talk about “the culture of fatherhood.” What do they mean?
18. During some decades fathers were significantly more likely than mothers to be depicted as incompetent. Why was this funny?
19. What is your opinion about studying what comics mean to readers, given that we can’t get inside their heads and observe their reactions?