

THE CHANGING PERCEPTION OF WOMAN'S

ROLE IN SOCIETY: A STUDY

(1974-1978)

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There can be no doubt that, in our society today, women have been working hard to advance and better their situation in the home, in the schools, and in the workplace. As early as 1647, Margaret Brent went before the Maryland Assembly to demand that women be given a "place and voyce" in their meetings.¹ In 1848, in Seneca Falls, New York, the first covention on women's rights took place. In 1920, women were given the right to vote. Throughout the 1960's and 1970's legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. This particular act prohibited job discrimination based on sex.² There has been a great push for women's rights in our country that has brought about an obvious change in the public's attitude towards the woman and her role in the society. It was only a few years ago that we, as a nation, came only three states short of passing the Equal Rights Amendment giving full and equal rights to women. Only sixty-five years ago women could not even vote! There can be no doubt that attitudes are changing on this important issue.

With this in mind, I have resolved to undertake a brief study of the public's changing attitude on the role of women in our society. I have gotten some information from

the National Elections Study from the University of Michigan that is very helpful in showing the general change in attitude of the American public towards a woman's role in society.

National Elections Study
University of Michigan
Interconsortium for Political Research

woman's place is in:	<u>1974</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>%</u>
The Workplace.....1	809	(34.6)	875	(40.6)
2	233	(10.0)	238	(11.1)
3	206	(8.8)	179	(8.3)
4	445	(19.1)	373	(17.3)
5	179	(7.7)	153	(7.1)
6	125	(5.4)	113	(5.2)
The Home.....7	<u>338</u>	<u>(14.4)</u>	<u>224</u>	<u>(10.4)</u>
TOTALS	<u>2335</u>	<u>(100.0)</u>	<u>2155</u>	<u>(100.0)</u>

An initial look at these numbers and percentages might indicate that there is a change in the public's attitude towards the woman's role in society from 1974 to 1978, but in order to be sure we must go one step further by testing if a change has actually occurred. In order to do this, a Chi Squared (X^2) test and a Difference of Means test will be used. The results of the X^2 test appear on the next page.

The X^2 Test

Null Hypothesis: There is no change in public attitude towards woman's role in society from 1974 to 1978.

Alternative: There is a change in public attitude towards woman's role in society from 1974 to 1978.

Test Statistic: $X_c^2=22.457$ (significance level=.001, degrees of freedom= 6.)

X^2 Value: $X^2=29.467$

Conclusion of X^2 Test: $29.467 > 12.592$, so we reject the Null Hypothesis and accept the Alternative. In other words, there is a change in public attitude towards woman's role in society from 1974 to 1978.

Therefore, this test demonstrates that there is a change in public attitude from 1974 to 1978. Upon examining the percentages from the National Elections Study one can see that the change occurs with a shift towards the woman's place being in the work area as opposed to it being in the home. Another test that may be utilized in order to demonstrate the shift in the public's attitude is the Difference of Means Test. The results of this test are as follows.

Difference of Means Test

Null Hypothesis: There is no change in public attitude towards woman's role in society from 1974 to 1978.

Alternative: There is a change in public attitude towards woman's role in society from 1974 to 1978.

Test Statistic: $z_c = 3.09$ (significance level = .002, two-tailed test)

z Value: $z = 4.31$

Conclusion of Difference of Means Test: $4.31 > 3.09$, so we reject the Null Hypothesis and accept the Alternative. In other words, there is a change in public attitude towards woman's role in society from 1974 to 1978.

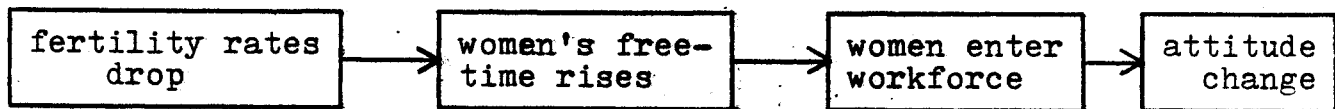
Again, it has been demonstrated that indeed there is a change in the public attitude from 1974 to 1978. And, as was stated earlier, this change appears to be occurring with a general shift towards the idea that a woman's place is in the work area and not simply the home.

The question must arise--Why is there a change in the public's attitude towards woman's role in the society? What specific issues or occurrences have taken place from 1974 to 1978 to cause this change in the public's attitude? I would like to advance two main hypotheses that I will investigate which I believe have led to this change in attitude.

Hypothesis Number One

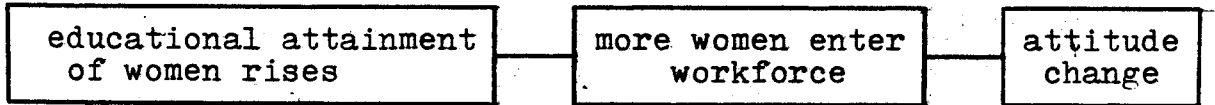
Fertility rates during this period ('74-'78) dropped dramatically (which I will show). This drop has caused more free-time for many women, which has led them into the work-

force. With this influx of women into the workforce, people's opinions have begun to adjust. Additionally, the "baby boom" generation has, in 1974 through 1978, most likely began to leave the house where they were raised (most have become 18-23 years old by this period of time). This has, again, caused a large amount of free-time for many women who, in turn, enter the workforce. Therefore, it is the dramatic drop in the fertility rates and the subsequent rise in women's labor force participation that has caused this attitudinal shift in how our society views the role of the woman.



Hypothesis Number Two

Educational attainment of women is rising from 1974 to 1978 while it is falling for men. In a society where the woman is more and more coming to compete on the same level as men, attitudes will change. The woman is proving herself in the schools as an equal to the man. And, once the woman graduates with her degree, she will most likely enter the workforce. Again, as in Hypothesis One, as more and more women flood the job market, people will adjust their attitudes on where the woman belongs in society. Therefore, my contention in this hypothesis is that it is the woman's rising educational attainment that is causing the attitude shift that was demonstrated at the start of this paper.



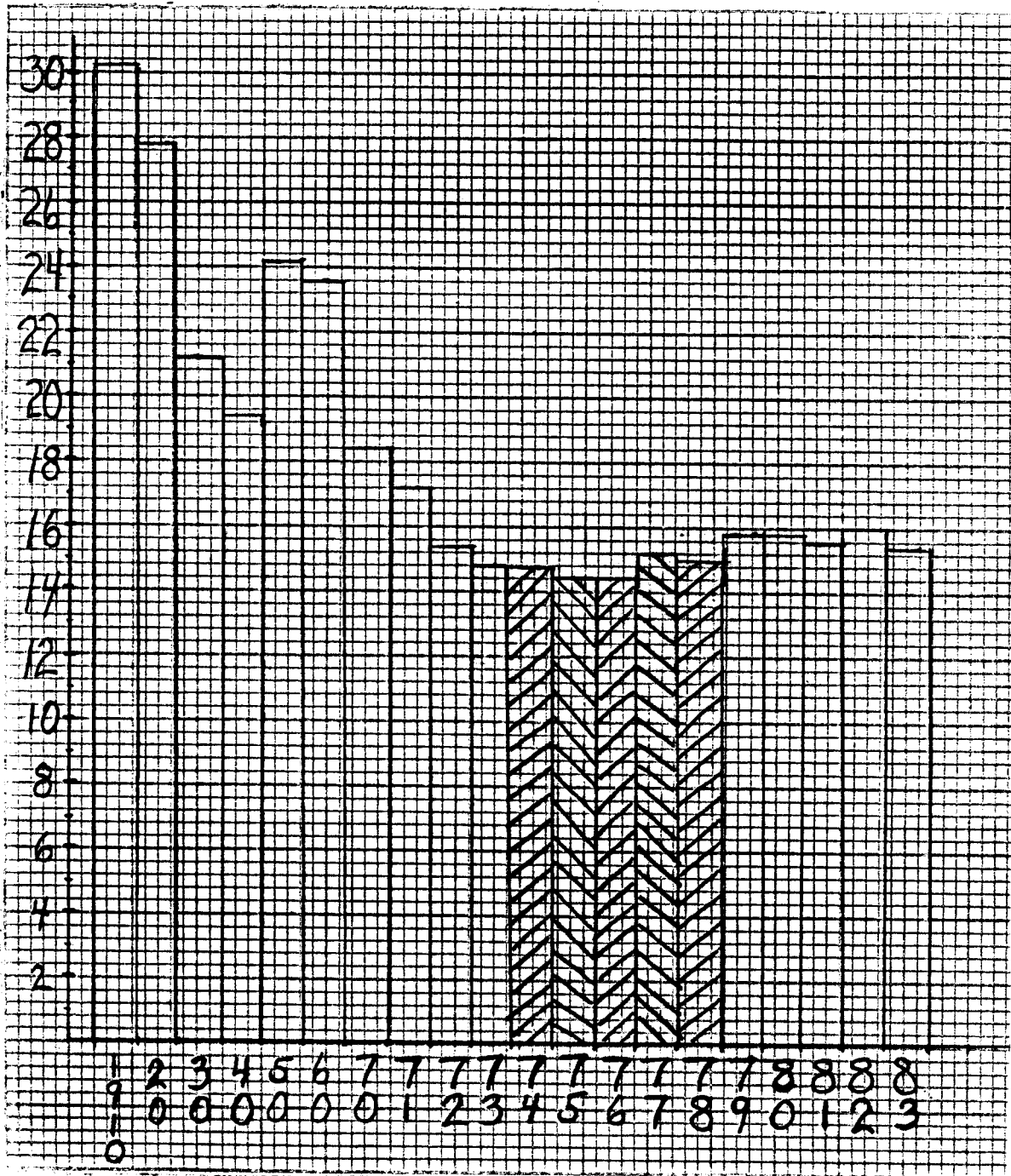
With these two hypotheses now set, I would like to take each one individually and examine its validity through an analysis of the data which I have gathered.

The first hypothesis--that a drop in fertility rates has caused an influx of women into the workforce, which has caused an attitude change--will now be examined. Upon looking at a graph of the fertility rates over the past 75 years one can see the dramatic drop that occurred in the mid-1970's. A bar graph appears on the next page.

United States Fertility Rates*

(1910 - 1983)

LIVE
BIRTHS
PER
1000



YEARS

(Data compiled from 1985 Information Please Almanac)

* Figures represent number of live births per 1000.

Examining the years in question (1974-1978), one sees the fertility rates ranging from 14.9 to 15.3 per 1000. These rates represent an all-time low in United States history. As we look at the years immediately following 1978, we see a rise begin in the rates again. These unprecedented fertility rates that occurred from 1974 to 1978 must be seen as significant. With the lowest fertility rates in American history, it would follow that for many women there was more free-time to do as one pleased. What did the women do with this new found free-time? Well, a look at the labor force statistics provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that from the period 1974 to 1978 there was a steady rise in women entering the work force.

Employment Percentages

By Sex

(1974 - 1978)

	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>
MEN (16 years old and over)	72.7	69.7	70.1	70.9	71.9
WOMEN (16 years old and over)	42.5	42.0	43.2	44.4	46.3

It is interesting to note that during this period labor percentages for women rose by 3.8% while labor percentages for men dropped 0.8%. So, while women's fertility rates were dropping, causing them more free-time, their work force rates were rising. I would conclude saying it is this influx of women into the work force

caused by a drop in the fertility rates, that has caused an attitude change among the general population. As the public sees more and more women entering the work place, and others have the opportunity to work with women in the work area, I believe an attitude shift occurs. With women entering the work force and showing their equality, the notion that they belong in the home is displaced with the notion that they belong, and can properly function in, the work place.

Hypothesis Two concerns educational attainment of women from 1974 to 1978. The contention is that during this period women graduating from the colleges with bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and doctorates was steadily rising which, again, caused a rise in the number of women in the workforce. And, again, as in Hypothesis One, it was this rise in women entering the workforce that led to the attitude change that was earlier demonstrated to have occurred from 1974 to 1978. Let us look at the enrollment figures in the institutions of higher education from the fall of 1973 to the fall of 1977. These figures appear on the following page.

ENROLLMENT PERCENTAGES
FOR INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

(1973-1977)

<u>Total Enrollment:</u>	<u>Fall '73</u>	<u>Fall '74</u>	<u>Fall '75</u>	<u>Fall '76</u>	<u>Fall '77</u>
United States	9,602,123	10,223,729	11,184,859	11,012,137	11,285,787
Men	55.9	55.0	54.9	52.8	51.3
Women	44.1	45.0	45.1	47.2	48.7

<u>Bachelor's Degrees Conferred:</u>	<u>1974-1975</u>	<u>1975-1976</u>	<u>1976-1977</u>
United States	945,776	925,746	919,549
Men	55.8	54.5	53.9
Women	44.2	45.5	46.1

<u>Master's Degrees Conferred:</u>	<u>1974-1975</u>	<u>1975-1976</u>	<u>1976-1977</u>
United States	277,033	311,771	317,164
Men	57.0	53.6	52.9
Women	43.0	46.4	47.1

<u>Doctorate Degrees Conferred:</u>	<u>1974-1975</u>	<u>1975-1976</u>	<u>1976-1977</u>
United States	33,816	34,064	33,232
Men	80.9	77.1	75.7
Women	19.1	22.9	24.3

(Source: Department of Education Statistics--1979)

It can be seen that, while total enrollment in institutions of higher education rose from the fall of 1973 to the fall of 1977, women accounted for the largest part of the rise. While men's percentages dropped each of the five years surveyed, women maintained a steady rise in enrollment percentages.

In the area of bachelor's degrees conferred, there was a drop in the total number given from the fall of 1973 to the fall of 1977. But, women receiving bachelor's degrees rose during this period. It was the men that accounted for the drop in bachelor's degrees conferred.

The number of master's degrees conferred rose during this period. Men dropped dramatically while women, again, accounted for the large rise in master's degrees conferred.

In examining doctorate degrees conferred one sees a fairly stable number being given out during this period. But, again, as men receiving doctorates dropped, women receiving doctorates rose steadily.

One can surely see that women were making great strides in educational attainment during this period. Noting a rising level of women's educational attainment, one can assume that these women were entering the workplace after graduation. Recalling the labor force chart we examined earlier, there was, indeed, a rise in women entering the work force at this period in time. This can be attributed directly to the rise in educational attainment of women. And, once again, this influx

of women into the workforce causes an attitude change in the general public. With more and more women entering the workforce, it must be seen that attitudes will continually be modified to suit the changing face of the workplace. Of course, as one sees women competing equally in the work area, they must eventually be swayed to modify or change completely their view on the issue of where women belong in our society.

Conclusion

The statistics from the National Elections Study have demonstrated that an attitude change has occurred in public opinion from 1974 to 1978. I have advanced two hypotheses to explain why this change has occurred. Both hypotheses conclude with the idea that with women entering the workforce an attitude shift has occurred. And, again, the data demonstrated that women have been entering the workforce in record numbers. Why have they been entering the workforce in record numbers? Well, one reason could be the drop in fertility rates from 1974 to 1978. This drop was so dramatic that the numbers have never been so low ever in United States history. With more free-time on their hands, these women have entered the workforce. Additionally, a steady rise in the number of women entering institutions of higher education while all else either fell or remained constant, becomes important in analyzing women in the workforce. It is a general posit that those with college degrees enter the workforce after graduation. One then must assume of the women having received degrees during 1974 through 1978, not being different from any others, also entered the workforce. Therefore, these two incidents--a rise in women's educational attainment and a fall in fertility rates--can be seen as contributing factors leading to the rise of women in the workforce. This then, is the reason for the changing attitudes among members

of our society during 1974 through 1978. In Public Opinion Quarterly, fall 1974, it was stated that "In general, this (attitude change) seems to have been due to women themselves. Directly, their attitudes have changed the most; indirectly, they have built the movement, and that seems most likely responsible for the change in the spirit of the times, which is reflected in the attitudes of both men and women."³ It is this general push that women have had on that has put them in the schools and in the workplace. It is this push that will continue to change attitudes of the general public.

Women are making great advancements in their position in our society. They will continue to advance as our society continues to accept women in the workplace. Attitude changes are often caused by situation changes. This is true in this case. The workplace is changing each day with the continual rise in the number of women in the workforce. As long as this situation does not reverse itself (and there is no evidence that it will), attitudes towards women's role in society will continue towards the idea that they belong in the workplace and not simply in the home.

E N D N O T E S

1. Encyclopedia Brittanica, "Women's Rights,"
1983 Edition, Volume 19, p.193.
2. Craig R. Ducat and Harold W. Chase, Constitutional
Interpretation, pp. 446-456.
3. Public Opinion Quarterly, fall 1974, p. 225.