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Quantitative Research Methods
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The mystery of the halcyon days:
An analysis of social class and traditional family roles

INTRODUCTION

The American family has become very diverse and undergone considerable changes throughout the prior decades. Between the 1970's and 2002, the share of children living in single-parent families more than doubled, from 11 to 27 percent, while the share living in two-parent families fell from 85 percent to 69 percent (Thomas & Sawhill 2005). Analysts and policymakers view the decline of marriage with much concern, as single-parent families tend to have fewer financial resources, putting them at a high risk of being poor. Recent political and social rhetoric calls for a return to the traditional "family values" of the 1950s, emphasizing the value placed on family, church, and home. These middle-class values and morality placed great emphasis on strict gender roles between married couples giving way to great unequal power, with the man as the sole breadwinner while the woman was tasked with child rearing and domestic duties. As income is the best predictor of an individual's ability to support their family, it is a crucial determinate of family structure and personal identity formation. Through analysis of secondary data provided from the General Social Survey I will examine how individuals from different income levels view a traditional male breadwinner- female homemaker family structure, determining if they are playing into the wider system of male power or patriarchy. Drawing from the conflict perspective, I predict that individuals from higher income levels will endorse these traditional family values, indicating they think women hold an inferior position and should stay at home; with males from higher incomes endorsing these values more so than women from the same income group. By utilizing questions and responses that explicitly inquire

about gender roles in the family, reported family income, and gender I will test my hypotheses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The decaying of the traditional family ideal of male breadwinner- female homemaker has been a common topic among politicians, religious leaders, and practitioners of capitalism. Admirers of these traditional 1950's family forms and values note that household arrangements and gender roles were less diverse and the marriages more stable than today. This completely ignores the fact that diversity was ruthlessly suppressed and that economic and political support systems for socially sanctioned families were far more generous in the '50s than they are today (Coontz 1995). Romanticizing this time period as the halcyon days when the family and church were most important, and middle-class values were shared by all obscures the actual social structure and imperatives of the times. Patti Swartz uses her experiences as a poor, homosexual woman growing up in the 1950's to critically analyze the myth of the '50's, and the "back to family values" rhetoric now used in the political sphere (2000). Through her personal exploration of the era, Swartz exposes the political and social attitudes that allowed McCarthyism and the cold war to flourish, as well as the extreme subordination of all women, people of color, and LGBTQ individuals through cultural messages and civil rights deprivation (2000). By perpetuating the "back to the family values" rhetoric, the 5% of the population that is in control maintains their economic, political, and social authority over the remaining 95% of the population or "others": poor, women, people of color, gay and lesbian, disabled, non-Christian. When we discuss family income inequality,

utilizing the Gini index helps compare the level of inequality families experience within the social class strata, allowing us to interpret the reasons behind the trend. The Gini index is a score between 0 and 1, with 0 representing complete equality (all families have the same income) and 1 representing complete inequality (one family has all the income) (Allison 1978). When we compare the score from 2011 (0.45) with those from prior years it becomes readily apparent that income inequality has increased dramatically and almost continuously since the beginning of the 1970s (Gini score 0.35) (Cohen 20015). The economic hardships many American families face has resulted in an accumulation of stressors on the family unit, which many ideologues wrongfully assume stem or are caused by the changes in family form. Sustaining and providing for a family has become increasingly difficult, as the median income drops, more families end up on the brink of poverty or with earnings below the poverty line, straining the family unit even further making it difficult to forge values for sustaining family values and intergenerational obligations. While we are in the midst of a moral and economic crisis, the romanticization of traditional families and gender roles will not produce the changes needed to reconcile individuals need for independence with their rights to dependence. The construction of family roles and structures need be developed around our current realities, shedding the traditional views in the process taking the burden off of women's back.

By taking a critical approach to the family roles within the 1950's traditional family form, it becomes readily apparent that men hold significantly more power and continually oppressed their partners. As individuals enter into relationships

and start families, the selection of their potential partner is based on each party's resources, strengths, and weaknesses that will maximize gains on both ends (Cohen 2015). The theory proposed by Nobel prize-winning economist, Gary Becker, views the behavior of marriage as a market place or social space in which people voluntarily search and compete for potential partners, constructing their own personal preferences and drawing boundaries between groups in the process (1974). Seen as a bargaining process, the marriage market is a place where individuals can strike the best deal they can, given the resources they have and rules they have to play by. When the resources between parties are unequal, the resulting "bargain" or marriage reflects the unequal distribution of power, embodying the competing interests of partners and connecting to the conflict perspective. The most classic example of the conditions of inequality through bargaining relationships and exchange theory is the division of housework between men and women. Cohen notes that men's greater potential earning power usually lends to their stronger bargaining position at the inception of the relationship, forcing women to accept an arrangement in which they are the weaker party (2015). In this situation women feel obligated to take on the more onerous and time-consuming household tasks and child rearing responsibilities, submitting to their own oppression. As women continue to enter into the workforce and increase their independence, they still maintain responsibility for more than half of the time spent on household tasks (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). In a strongly money oriented society, potential earning power is heavily influenced by the cultural capital one possesses, largely dictating the individuals ability to provide for themselves in life. Because the social

classes are geographically and socially segregated, they tend to exhibit distinct types of cultural capital. Although difficult to recognize and quantify, cultural capital refers to the range of different skills, habits, preferences, types of knowledge, and lifestyle that come to be associated with people who share different class positions in society (Callero 2013). Despite cultural capital being evenly dispersed across the social classes, some forms and types are valued more, eliciting more respect and deference possibly providing access to greater amounts of economic capital (material resources, stocks, bonds, etc.). As earning power becomes more central to the formation of identity, some people will internalize their evaluations creating a low sense of self worth. For many people, the size of their paycheck is not a result of individual ability; discrimination is more apt to shrink take home pay, especially for minority men and women (Esterchild & McDaniel 1998) . As different social classes hold different sets of cultural capital, the family structure and parenting practices also differ substantially.

Whenever we think of families and individuals grouped into a social class, the concept of class identity forms. As people become more aware of the sense of belonging to a distinct social class, they internalize and enact the formalized ways of life and patterns of interaction. As the income inequality between families increases, the threat of slipping down has been a constant worry for many families. Family behavior differs significantly according to social class. For example, research has shown people with lower incomes are less likely to marry. And people with less schooling have more children than those with higher levels of education and have a higher risk for divorce. Combined with the forces that have increased economic

inequality in recent decades, these trends mean that we find children who live with married parents concentrated in higher-income families, and those who live with a single parent (most often their mother) skewed toward the lower end of the income scale, often in poverty (McLanahan and Percheski 2008). Because of the growing number of families in poverty, a lot of concern about family structure and social class focuses on three kinds of scarcity that makes it more difficult to overcome poverty. McLanahan and Sandefur identify that money is the most important factor separating the experiences of children with parental incomes less than \$25,000 and those above that point (1994). The difficulties these families face just to meet their basic needs, stresses the familial unit and the children's self-confidence. Families and single mothers who are in poverty will also have significantly less time to spend with their children, as they are working to support their families. The lack of time-spent parenting significantly limits supervision and support for children as they age. Lastly, McLanahan and Sandefur identify the frequent lack of social capital in lower class families as a negative influence on children (1994). The smaller family network and available resources will constrain their economic potential as they grow up. Family structure clearly has effects on children's lives and their development in many ways, but there are also many outside influences that help shape children's upbringing and family form. This being said, the importance of social class and identity bear significant influence on children's socialization and the familial unit.

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

The literature and theories I have discussed are all building blocks to my own research question. By applying the conflict perspective to the institution of marriage, the framework for the proposed research becomes relevant. Most of the literature and prior research centers on the actual division of household work among couples and how this bargaining process reflects the larger system of male dominance. This approach to the matter of gender dynamics within relationships does not take into consideration the thoughts and feelings each partner holds about how they should behave. Throughout socialization, the media and cultural norms influence our views; which we at times may not outwardly express because the need to conform, comply, or obey is too overwhelmingly strong. By explicitly inquiring about views on traditional family forms, the individual can express their true values and views towards the male breadwinner-female homemaker family form, despite its reality being out of reach for their own family. Most studies that I reviewed before formulating my own model examined gender dynamics through qualitative research on nontraditional gender dynamics in marriages. Out of these descriptive studies, they typically distinguished the differences according to race-ethnicity categories. The analysis conducted in this study shows how each social group on average responded to the notion of 1950's family forms and then further divides the average response according to gender. My hypotheses are stated below:

H1: As social class increases, individuals are more likely to endorse
traditional family forms

H2: As social class increases, men are more likely to endorse

traditional family forms

H3: As social class increases, women are less likely to endorse

traditional family forms

PROPOSED RESEARCH DESIGN

By conducting secondary analysis over the General Social Survey, my study intends to distinguish the relationship between social class, gender, and views on traditional family forms. Funded by the National Opinion Research Center, the GSS intends to gather the attitudes, behaviors, and background characteristics of the American population. This nationwide survey first conducted in 1972, has received pressure to be conducted every even numbered year. The survey questions in the GSS center on the "GSS replicating core", gathering background information and measuring attitudes making the survey last around 90 minutes on average. The GSS is the US member of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), in which they develop a cross-national module that focuses on a different subject matter area. By focusing on different subject matters such as, the role of government, social inequality, national identity, religiosity, the GSS can monitor more trends and compare American's response to that of other nations. By conducting this survey interview in a face-to-face manner, the GSS successfully captures American's values with a high degree of accuracy. The face-to-face interviews and the large sample size of 2,044 for the 2010 data, all provide data that is representative and ready to be utilized for secondary analysis. The variables I utilized for my own study required little recoding, so I mainly ran analysis on the pre-existing variables. To measure social class I used a survey question on family income. The variable "Income06"

posed the question “In which of these groups did your total family income, from all sources, fall last year-2009-before taxes, that is. Totally income includes interest or dividends, rent, Social Security, other pensions, alimony or child support, unemployment compensation, public aid (welfare), armed forces or veteran’s allotment.” The response categories for this variable were letters a-y, which all listed different ranges of income. To analyze this variable for my study I ran a test to discover the frequency dispersion of responses, providing quartiles for the number of responses chosen. After distinguishing how to divide the responses into four evenly weighted categories, I recoded INCOME06 into a completely new variable SES1 that contained the four categories representing the 4 social classes. The new variable SES1, labeled “Social Class” contains the categories: lower class- those individuals with family incomes under \$1,00 to \$22,499, working class- those with family incomes from \$22,500 to \$49,999, middle class- those with family incomes of \$50,000 to \$89,999, and upper class – individuals with family incomes of \$90,000 and over. By converting this variable with a multitude of possible responses into an ordinal variable with only 4 values, interpreting the results of my analysis would be simplified. The second variable utilized in this analysis labeled “FEFAM” is an ordinal variable that uses a Likert Scale to rate how people feel towards the statement “It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.” This variable required no recoding and was already excluding the missing cases. By utilizing this ordinal variable that gathered respondents opinions on the statement, the concept behind the question is identifiable. By operationalizing the issue of gender roles within

marriages into this variable, the question overtly inquires about bias the respondent may have. The design for the study proposed centers around these two variables and will also utilize respondents' gender to further distinguish responses. By using SPSS to test the three hypotheses, this study will provide insightful evidence of how and if social class standing influences attitudes towards traditional family structure, indicating subtle bias against women. The analysis of parametric data is based on analysis of variance (ANOVA) to evaluate the response categories (FEFAM) as a function of social class (lower class, working class, middle class, upper class) and sex. The differences between mean scores of the social class groups will be compared in the results section, along with a comparison of group variance. By running a post hoc test in addition to ANOVA, distinguishing which groups mean differ significantly will be easily accomplished. This study offers very limited explanation as to why there are differences between the groups, but will be a good starting point for further investigation into the relationship between social class standing and attitudes on gender roles.

RESULTS

Table 1
Frequency distribution of family social class

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Lower Class	513	28.4	28.4
Working Class	494	27.4	55.8
Middle Class	446	24.7	80.5
Upper Class	352	19.5	100.0
<i>Total</i>	1805	100.0	

Table 2
Frequency distribution of attitudes to
“better for man to work, women tend home”

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	107	7.5	7.5
Agree	404	28.5	36.0
Disagree	610	43.0	79.1
Strongly Disagree	297	20.9	100.0
<i>Total</i>	626	100.0	

After recoding the variable INCOME06 into social class (SES1) and excluding all the missing cases, the sample size was 1805 respondents. Grouped into the four separate social class categories the sizes of each group are shown in Table 1. The frequency of responses to the variable FEFAM are shown in Table 2 (above). The frequencies of responses are very centralized within the middle two responses, disagree and agree, with the average response being 2.77. The centralized dispersion of responses to the statement shows the continued divide between male breadwinner-female homemaker values, reflecting the overall trend in these values over the decades. The oneway analysis of variance (ANOVA) used to evaluate responses, as a function of social class standing, will compare the means for the four groups, and also simplify the process of calculating statistical significance. By utilizing this statistical analysis, the means of the groups will be compared, in addition to a comparison of group variance, specifically the ratio of between-group

variance to within-group variance.

Table 3.
Attitudes towards “better for man to work, woman to tend home”
analysis of variance (ANOVA)

	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation
Lower Class	352	2.71	.878
Working Class	350	2.68	.866
Middle Class	308	2.86	.850
Upper Class	238	3.03	.782
<i>Total</i>	1248	2.80	.859
	df	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3	9.768	.000
Within Groups	1244		
<i>Total</i>	1247		

There was a significant effect of social class standing on attitudes towards male breadwinner-female homemaker family at the $p < .05$ significance level for the four groups [$F(3,1244) = 9.77, p = 0.000$]. The group means, shown in table 3, indicate respondents from lower class families ($M=2.71$) significantly have different mean attitudes towards traditional family forms than respondents within the upper class (3.03). The difference is significant between respondents in the lower class and upper class, but determining where else the significance exists requires a post hoc test to compare each condition with the other 3 conditions. The post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for respondents in the lower class families ($M = 2.71, SD = .878$) was significantly different (mean difference = $-.319$) than respondents from upper class ($M = 2.86, SD = .782$). The mean score for working class families ($M = 2.86, SD = .850$) was also

significantly different than upper class respondents ($M = 2.86$, $SD = .782$) with a mean difference of $-.347$. Despite the statistically significant difference of means between the middle class and working class ($-.174$) the substantive significance of this difference is limited. However, the middle class families mean score did not significantly differ from the mean score for the upper class (mean difference = $-.172$) or mean score for the lower class respondents (mean difference = $.147$).

Table 4.
Attitudes towards “better for man to work, women tend home”
by social class & split by gender/sex

	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation
Males			
Lower Class	119	2.65	.798
Working Class	159	2.56	.839
Middle Class	147	2.72	.850
Upper Class	118	2.95	.749
<i>Total</i>	543	2.71	.824
Females			
Lower Class	233	2.74	.916
Working Class	191	2.79	.877
Middle Class	161	2.98	.833
Upper Class	120	3.11	.807
<i>Total</i>	705	2.87	.878

Having determined that the relationship between respondents’ social class and their attitudes towards traditional family roles is statistically significant, diving the respondents according to gender will further the analysis and compare differences between the groups. A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted an additional two more times to compare the effect of social class on attitudes towards “better for man to work, women tend home” splitting the tests by gender. There was

a significant effect of male's social class standing on their attitudes towards male breadwinner-female homemaker at the $p < .05$ level for the four conditions [$F(3, 539) = 5.439, p = 0.001$]. To determine where the significance exists, running a post hoc test revealed that the mean score for working class men ($M=2.56, SD=.839$) was significantly different than men in the upper class ($M=2.95, SD=.839$), with a mean difference of $-.389$ ($P = 0.001$). The mean score of lower class men ($M=2.65, SD=.798$) was also significantly different than that of upper class men (Mean Difference = $-.302, P = 0.023$). Taken together, these results suggest that men in the upper social class more strongly oppose traditional family forms. Specifically, our results suggest that men in lower social classes are more likely to hold favorable attitudes towards a male breadwinner- female homemaker family form. Men within the middle class do not seem to differ significantly on their views, more often than not disagreeing with traditional family forms. The difference between mean scores on women's attitudes towards male breadwinner- female homemaker family roles according to their social class position also proved to be statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level [$F(3, 701) = 6.167, p = 0.000$]. Using a Tukey HSD test for post hoc comparison, the analysis showed that the mean score for women from the lower class ($M= 2.74, SD= .916$) was significantly different than the mean score of women from the upper class ($M= 3.11, SD= .807$). The mean difference of these two groups was $-.366$ and had a p value of 0.001 . The mean difference between women from the working class and women from the upper class also proved to be statistically significant, with a value of $-.323$ and p value of 0.008 . Taken together, these results imply that women from the upper class overwhelmingly disagree with traditional

1950's family roles, while women from the lower and working class are seemingly accepting of these family forms. The significance of these findings should be analytically interpreted. Despite being statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level, the relationship between social class and attitudes on family roles not what I hypothesized. The first two hypotheses were rejected, while the third hypothesis was accepted. The results of the analysis proved to be insightful and will be the basis of future studies.

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to discover the effect of social class position on one's attitude towards tradition male breadwinner-female homemaker family forms. By dividing the family income variable into four even quartiles, comparing the mean score for responses among the groups and calculating the significance was simplified. The statistically significant mean differences between the views lower and upper class men and women's hold towards traditional family forms reflect the greater differences these two distinct familial units share. While the first two hypotheses proposed were rejected, the differences discovered provided substantive significance that will prove useful for further analysis. Despite the weakness of the hypotheses posed, this study does offer hope of greater validity and reliability for further analysis using the General Social Survey. Obviously, the study should be replicated with the variable family income quantified more precisely would allow a deeper understanding of the differences in attitudes according to more specific income groups. After further quantitative research on attitudes of traditional family forms, a qualitative study would prove partial insight as to why

lower class individuals agree with traditional family roles when it is so out of reach for their own life.

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