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Times they are a' changin': effects of social structural positions and network characteristics on changes in gender-role attitudes among returning women students

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TIMES THEY ARE A' CHANGIN': EFFECTS OF SOCIAL STRUCTURAL POSITIONS
AND NETWORK CHARACTERISTICS ON CHANGES IN GENDER-ROLE ATTITUDES
AMONG RETURNING WOMEN STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1960's men and women's gender-role attitudes have become increasingly

nontraditional. The shift in attitudes has been attributed greatly to changes in women's

educational attainment and labor force participation. This thesis builds upon this line of work by

exploring the effects of returning to school on women's gender-role attitudes. Specifically, I use

quantitative and qualitative data collected on 44 married mothers across a ten-year period

beginning with their return to school in the early 1980s, focusing on the way in which women's

gender-role attitudes were affected by their increased educational attainment and their post-

enrollment labor force experiences. As part of the exploration of the effects of changes in

educational attainment, I also explore how educational similarity to members of the women's

social networks affected gender-role attitudes.   The combination of quantitative and qualitative

data showed women who completed their Bachelor's Degrees were more likely to develop

liberal gender-role attitudes than were women who dropped out of school after the initial return.

The analysis also revealed that employment experiences affected the women's gender-role

attitudes. In particular, taking nontraditional career paths appeared to result in less traditional

attitudes, as did continuous labor force participation, albeit to a lesser extent. Finally, women

whose networks were composed primarily of individuals who had not attended college were

substantially more likely to retain or develop traditional gender-role attitudes, while highly

educated networks had remarkably little influence in moving women toward liberal attitudes.

Analysis of the qualitative data revealed that the effects of educational attainment, labor force

experiences, and network structure were through both changes in the women's self-perceptions

and adaptations to pressures from both their new and preexisting foci of activity.

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1960's there has been a shift of gender role attitudes from more traditional to an egalitarian perspective in the general population of the United States (DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996; Harris and Firestone 1998; Peplau, Hill and Rubin 1993; Rice and Coates 1995; Scott, Alwin and Braun 1996; Suitor et al. 2003; Tallichet and Willits 1986; Thornton, Alwin, and Camburn 1983; Thornton and Freedman 1979; Weakliem and Biggert 1999). Many scholars attribute this change to two main factors: women's entrance into the labor force and increases in women's educational attainment.

The present study contributes to this line of work by exploring the effects of both of these factors on an increasingly common group of women—women who have returned to school while raising families. Between 1960 and 1998, the number of women students over 25 years of age on college campuses more than tripled (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975; 1990; 2001), a trend accompanied by growth in scholarly interest in this population (cf. Aslanian and Brickell, 1988; Badenhoop and Johansen, 1980; Cross, 1982; Hooper, 1979; Justice and Dornan, 2001; Katz, 1976; Ntiri, 2001). Despite the fact that a substantial proportion of nontraditional women students are raising families, research on this population has focused almost exclusively on the women's experiences as students. Consequently, little is known about the effects of returning to school on non-academic dimensions of women's lives, such as interpersonal relations, psychological well-being, attitudes, and career paths. The present study explores the long-term effects of returning to school while raising families, using data from a 3-wave study spanning 10 years.

The data are drawn from a longitudinal study conducted by Suitor in 1980-82 and 1991. Suitor studied the lives of 44 women who returned to school, focusing on the ways in which their

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new status affected their relationships with members of their kinship networks and friendship networks, including relationship quality, social support, identity and attitudes (Suitor, 1984, 1987a, b,c; 1988; Suitor and Keeton, 1997). She conducted in-depth qualitative interviews of the women and gathered data on almost 1100 members of the women's networks (kinship and friendship included). The set of articles that were based on the first two waves of data collection revealed that the return to school produced substantial changes in the women's interpersonal relationships and gender role attitudes. Although much of Suitor's work was related to issues of gender-role attitudes, such as changes in the women's work, school, and family priorities, in none of her articles did she focus specifically on the questions of the women's stated gender-role attitudes. Thus, while this thesis builds on Suitor's work on the effects of returning to school on women's lives, it takes a new direction—specifically, how did the return to school affect women's gender-role attitudes in the decade after the reentry as they completed their educations and moved into the labor force.

<center>REVIEW OF LITERATURE</center>

<center>**Explaining Changes in Gender-Role Attitudes**</center>

Educational Attainment

Social researchers have focused their attention on the factors that are associated with changes in gender role attitudes. This line of research has shown that one of the most important factors affecting gender-role attitudes is educational attainment. It is well documented in the sociological literature that one's educational attainment is associated with less traditional gender role attitudes (Blee and Tickamyer 1995; Cassidy and Warren 1996; Harris, Melaas and Rodacker 1999; Kiecolt and Acock 1988; Liao and Cai 1995; Macalister 1999; McBroom 1987; Peplau, Hill and Rubin 1993; Rice and Coates 1995; Thornton, Alwin, and Camburn 1983). For example, Harris and Firestone (1998) found that increases in educational attainment are positively associated with less traditional gender role attitudes in a nonlinear fashion. In other words, there are diminishing effects on changes in gender role attitudes with high levels of education (Harris and Firestone, 1998:250). Research has also shown that educational attainment also affects gender role attitudes by increasing women's participation in the labor force and decreasing their likelihood of marrying and having children (Kiecolt and Acock 1988; Liao and Cai 1995; Pascarella 1991; Suitor 2000; Tallichet and Willits 1986).

In addition to the general effects of educational attainment on gender role attitudes, specific types of education have a positive impact on egalitarian gender role attitudes. For example, Harris, Melaas and Rodacker (1999) and Macalister (1999) showed that women who participated in women's studies courses experienced a shift in gender role attitudes. Both studies reported that women experienced changes in their self-expression, gained a sense of commitment and responsibility, critical thinking, empowerment, and acknowledgment of diversity as a result

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of participating in women's studies courses. Overall, these students become less traditional in their attitudes as a result of their new women-centered perspective of academic study. Also, Liao and Cai (1995) revealed that educational attainment affected gender-role attitudes indirectly through one's life situations and social networks. Based on these studies, it is evident that educational attainment plays a significant role in influencing changes in gender-role attitudes.

Previous analyses of the data from the women's first year of enrollment in the university showed the sorts of substantial changes we would expect on the basis of the literature on educational attainment and attitudes. Suitor (1984; 1987a, 1987b, 1987c; 1988; Suitor and Keeton, 1997) found that educational attainment had a profound effect on many issues in returning women student's lives. For example, the original study showed that returning to school had consequences for interpersonal relationships--particularly for those women who were enrolled as full-time students. Consistent with classic theories of group affiliation (cf. Festinger, Schachter and Back, 1950; Gecas and Burke, 1995; Merton, 1968; Newcomb, 1943; Singer, 1981), full-time students were more likely than part-time students to adopt the academic community as a reference group, leading to changes in their attitudes and values. These changes manifest themselves in several dimensions of the women's interpersonal relations. Over the course of the women's first year of enrollment, many of the women became more likely than part-time students to give priority to the performance of their student role, resulting in declines in full-time students' marital quality (Suitor, 1987). The women also experienced substantial changes in their friendship networks. Almost all of the women reported a reduction in socializing with friends over the year. For full-time students, closeness and frequency of interaction with less educated friends declined substantially over the year, while part-time students retained high levels of contact with less-educated network members (Suitor, 1985, 1987a).

Based on the combination of both Suitor's earlier findings using the same data set (Suitor 1987a; Suitor 1987b; Suitor 1987c; Suitor 1988; Suitor and Keeton 1997) and the literature on education and gender-role attitudes just cited, I anticipated that most of the women would have continued to develop less traditional gender-role attitudes across the decade. Thus, I anticipated that, in the aggregate, the women would have become less traditional. However, I believed that women who completed their undergraduate degrees would have experienced substantially more change across the decade than was experienced by the general population. This data set provides the opportunity to explore the effects of completing an undergraduate education in midlife during this period of rapid societal change, because while approximately three-quarters of the women who participated in the first two waves of the study school completed their Bachelor's degrees, one-quarter did not. I expected that those who completed their degrees would have experienced substantially more change in gender-role attitudes than did those who dropped out of school after their initial return. Based on the argument outlined above, I expected that the women who continued on to graduate school developed the most nontraditional attitudes across the decade.

Effect of Labor Force Experiences on Gender-Role Attitudes

Labor Force Participation. While I expected that the women's educational attainment would be the most important factor in changes in gender-role attitudes, the literature suggests that different aspects of women's labor force experiences would also be salient factors. Labor force participation has been found to have a positive effect on egalitarian gender-role attitudes (Harris and Firestone 1998; Paplau, Hill and Rubin 1993; Vella 1993; Scott, Alwin and Braun 1996; Tallichet and Willits 1986; Thornton and Camburn 1979; Thornton and Freedman 1979; and Thornton, Alwin and Camburn 1983). Scott, Alwin and Braun (1996) have found that with the increased importance of women participating in the labor force, general gender-role attitudes

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have become less traditional. On an individual level, Thornton, Alwin and Camburn (1983) found that work experience and labor market participation after marriage strongly influences individual's sex role attitudes to becoming more egalitarian. Clearly, it is evident that participation in the labor market is an important factor affecting changes in gender role attitudes.

Traditionalism of Career. The fact that many women who participate in the labor force hold traditional attitudes suggests that there may be particular job characteristics that affect attitudes above and beyond employment. In particular, characteristics of the occupation, such as gender-role traditionalism of the occupation, may affect attitudes. While there is substantial literature demonstrating that women with more traditional plans and lifestyles tend to choose careers that will allow them the flexibility to maintain those traditional paths (cf. Budig and England, 2001), there is no literature showing that entering traditional careers produces traditional gender-role attitudes. However, the literature discussed above regarding the effect of contact with group members on attitudes led me to anticipate that women who entered traditional jobs would be less likely to develop liberal attitudes across the decade while women who entered nontraditional jobs would experience a substantial change in gender-role attitudes.

Social Network Factors

Social network structures have an important influence on both the behaviors and perceptions on the lives of both men and women. Much research on interpersonal relations focused on the influences of both status similarity and participation in different foci of activity had on individual relationships (cf. Feld 1981; Feld 1982; Festinger, Shafter and Back 1950; Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954; Marsden 1988; Merton 1968). These studies overwhelmingly report that, following a status transition, individuals are more likely to reduce frequency of contact with individuals whom they were more similar to prior to entry in a new status and

"intensify the frequency of interaction" (Suitor 1997:53) with others whom they are now more status similar (Bell 1981 and Suitor 1987c). These new patterns of interaction, then, had an effect on the political and social attitudes of men and women and interpersonal relationships between individuals and their friends and family who comprise their networks (Bell 1981; Gouldner and Strong 1987; Larson et al. 1994; and Suitor 1987c).

One thread of this line of research has focused on the effects of status transitions and life events on women's social networks. This work has shown that people who acquire a new status are more likely to lower their frequency of contact with individuals with whom they have become less similar and intensified the frequency and interaction with other people that are more similar to them as a result of their new status (Gouldner and Strong 1987; Newcomb 1943; Suitor 1987; Suitor and Keeton 1997). For example, Suitor (1984) reported that women who return to college are acquiring a new status. As a result of this status change, returning students are in contact with people with whom they share their new educational attainment. The increased access to others with the same level of educational attainment allows them to develop a new reference group that may be more similar to their current position than was their previous reference group.

Suitor's work on mothers and intergenerational relations also demonstrates the effects of network structure on gender-role attitudes. The qualitative analyses she presented on relations with both friends and mothers suggests that poorly educated members of the women's networks applied substantial pressure for the women to continue to adhere to the traditional norms generally found to be associated with lower education, while better educated friends and parents encouraged the women to develop their goals in new and less traditional directions. For example, Suitor (1987) found that women's frequency of interaction with well-educated mothers

actually decreased, because these mothers were more understanding of their daughters' time constraints, while contact with poorly educated mothers was maintained because of the pressure mothers placed on their daughters to maintain high levels of contact.

In addition to this research on this specific data set, many other studies focus on how network characteristics affect one's gender-role attitudes. For example, Liao and Cai (1995) report that micro-situational perspectives, such as kin and family relationships, have important impacts on one's gender role attitudes. They first agree with Goode (1963) that the structural composition of one's social networks constrains one's attitudes and behaviors. They then explain that segregated role relationships are associated with close-knit social relationships, and egalitarian conjugal role relationships are associated with loose-knit social networks. In accordance with Fisher (1982), they found that social networks that contain close kinship ties produce individuals with traditional gender role attitudes; this is also correlated with a rural place of residence. Also, they report that a close-knit kinship networks mediates the effects of low educational attainment and traditional gender role attitudes. Based on this existing research it is evident that the nature of social networks is an important factor that effects changes in gender role attitudes.

METHODS

The Study

This study was designed to examine the lives of returning women students over a 10-year period[1]. The data used in this analysis make use of both quantitative and qualitative measures in order to examine changes in gender role attitudes. Data were collected about the respondent's educational experiences, employment experiences, and gender role attitudes.

In the fall of 1981, names of all incoming students 25 years of age and older were provided by the office of Undergraduate Studies at a large public university in the Northeast[2]. The women on the list were contacted by telephone by the researcher who explained the nature of the study and the criteria for participation. Criteria for inclusion in this study were that women had to (a) be at least 25 years of age; (b) have been married for at least three years; (c) have at least one child under the age of eighteen living at home; (d) be entering a university for the first time in at least five years; (e) be enrolled as a part-time or full-time matriculating student (Suitor, 1987). Provided that a woman met these criteria, she was asked to participate in two face-to-face interviews, one as soon as they had time and the other at the end of their first year at school.

The design of the study called for approximately equal numbers of full- and part-time students; since there were fewer full-time students than expected who met the criteria for participation, additional full-time students were recruited with the same procedures the following

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1 In the present analysis, I focused on T2-T3 rather than T1-T2-T3. My decision was based on the fact that the major foci of the thesis were the processes of change that occurred once the women completed their educations and entered the labor force. Further, the present analysis was designed to extend Suitor's analysis of T1-T2 changes, which greatly focused on these issues. Finally, the Felton scale was administered only at T2 and T3, making some of the central issues of the thesis impossible to examine from T1-T3.

2 This description of the procedures was presented in Suitor's previous work using this data set (cf. Suitor, 1986, 1987, 1988; Suitor and Keeton , 1997; Suitor, Pillemer and Keeton, 1995).

year. The students interviewed during the second year did not differ systematically in any way from those interviewed the first year; therefore, the data from the two years were combined. Sixty-one women met the criteria for participation and continued their studies throughout the year, 54 (72%) of who were interviewed at both waves. In 1991, Suitor completed interviews with 44 of the original respondents. The present paper focuses on the 44 women from wave three, with supplemental information from data collected in the first two waves.

The Respondents

The age of the 44 respondents ranged from 25 years of age to 59 at T1, with the mean of 37 years (SD=5.86). At T1, respondents had been married 16 years on the average (SD=5.31; range 3-26). Less than one-tenth of the respondents had only one child (9%), forty-three per cent had two children, nearly one-third had three children (32%), and approximately one-sixth had more than three children (16%). Nearly half of the respondents had a total family income greater than $35,000 at T1 in 1980 (44%), nearly a third had incomes between $26,000 and $35,000 (30%), and approximately one-quarter had incomes less than $25,000. All of the women were white and non-Hispanic.   By T3 nearly 84% had completed their Bachelor's degrees. At T3, 77% were still married to the same person, 16% of the women had become divorced and 2% had become widowed; 5% of the women had divorced and remarried.

Measurement

Dependent Variables

Changes in Gender-Role Attitudes. Changes in gender-role attitudes were assessed using two measures: a) the respondent's perceptions of the ways in which their attitudes had changed; and b) differences between respondents' scores on a standard gender-role attitudes scale at T2 and T3.

Respondents' Self-Reports of Changes in Gender-Role Attitudes. At T2 and T3 the

respondents were asked: Do you think that your ideas about women's issues or other social or

political issues have changed at all over the past several years since you entered the university?

The responses were originally placed in categories by Suitor (Suitor, 1987) into categories of: 1)

more traditional, 2) no change in attitudes; and 3) less traditional. To determine intercoder

reliability, I coded the raw data again and compared my codings to Suitor's. Eighty-seven per

cent of our coding decisions were in agreement

Changes in Gender-Role Attitude Scale Scores[3]. The second way in which I measured

respondents' gender-role attitudes was using scores on the eight-item Felton Sex-Role Attitudes

Scale (Felton et al. 1980) which respondents were administered at T2 and T3. The scale asks

respondents whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the

following statements: a) It should be the husband's duty to support his wife and children

financially; b) Mothers should put their children before themselves; c) The needs of a family

should come before a women's personal ambitions; d) In general, a man is a better boss or

supervisor than a woman; e) A woman's place should be in the home; f) A woman's most

important task is to raise children; g) Unmarried women are more likely to feel empty or

incomplete than are married women; and h) Women with young children should not work

outside the home. The alpha reliability coefficients for the scales were .68 at T2 and .79 at T3.[4]

To assess change in gender-role attitude scores, I followed a three-step procedure. First, I

computed a change score by subtracting each woman's score at T2 from her score at T3. Next, I

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3 I conducted a factor analysis and found these eight items loaded on the same factor.

computed the mean and standard deviation of the change score (mean=7.12, SD=5.22). The

frequency distribution of the change scores ranged from -3 to 18. Only 14% of the change scores

were negative, indicating greater traditionalism, and none of the change scores were zero,

indicating no change. Given the distribution of positive scores, I felt it was important to further

classify cases, rather than having one category of "more liberal." The mean change of the

positive cases was 8.5 (S.D.=4.1). I considered classifying the positive cases that were at or

above the mean as "substantially more liberal" and the positive cases below the mean as

"somewhat more liberal." However, since the literature demonstrates quite strongly that, in the

aggregate, women's gender-role attitudes in the country changed substantially across the 1980s

(cf. Bianchi et al., 2000; Rice and Coates, 1995; Suitor et al, 2003), I felt that it was important to

use a classification procedure that would differentiate between those women who experienced a

somewhat average change, in the context of changes in the general population, and those whose

attitudes truly had changed considerably, relative to both the general population and the present

sample. Thus, I decided to classify the positive change scores one standard deviation above the

mean as "substantially more liberal" and those positive scores less than one standard deviation

above the mean (of positive scores) as "somewhat more liberal. This procedure resulted in each

case being classified as "more traditional," "somewhat more liberal," and "substantially more

liberal."

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[4] For those scale items that had missing values, I replaced the missing value with the mean of that particular item. I
did this in only two cases.

Independent Variables

      Social Structural Position

      <u>Educational Attainment</u>. I created this variable based on respondent's reports of whether or not they received their Bachelor's Degree between T2 and T3. Responses were coded 1) no and 2) yes.

      <u>Graduate School Attendance</u>. I created this variable based on women's reports of whether or not they attended any graduate school courses during the past decade after they completed their Bachelor's Degree. Responses were coded 1) no and 2) yes.

      <u>Labor Force Experience</u>.[5] To create this variable, I analyzed respondent's reports of whether or not they were employed at T2 or at T3 or both. Responses were coded as 1) T2 non-employed, T3 employed and 2) T2 employed, T3 employed.

      <u>Traditionalism of Occupation</u>. To create this variable, I compared respondents' occupations at T2 to their occupations at T3 to determine whether their occupations had become more traditional, less traditional, or remained unchanged in terms of gender-role traditionalism. To determine into which category each case fell, I used the gender distribution of each occupation, based on data collected and published as part of the Current Population Survey for 1992 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993). I coded each occupation as traditional if more than 60% of the occupants were women, as nontraditional if less than 40% of the occupants were women, and as gender-neutral if between 40% and 60% of the occupants were women. I coded each woman's occupational change from T2 to T3 as 1) more traditional occupation at T3 than

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5 . I excluded one case that was non-employed at T2 and non-employed at T3.

T2, 2) no change in gender-type of occupation from T2 to T3, and 3) less traditional occupation at T3 than T2.

Network Characteristics: Respondent's Network Members' Level of Education

At T1, T2, and T3 respondents were asked a "series of questions regarding whom the women used as confidants for a variety of subjects. In the fall, the women were asked with women they talked about their schoolwork, their children, financial problems, arguments with their husbands, problems with other relatives, day-to-day problems and 'other personal problems'. They were also asked with whom they were the most likely to together or talk on the phone. For each of these items, the women could name an unlimited number of individuals....For each network member who was mentioned, information was collected on the individual's educational attainment" (Suitor, 1987: 228). The T1 network includes all of those people mentioned at T1 while the T2 network includes all of those people named at T1 plus those named at T2 for the first time. Suitor created a measure of the mean educational level of network members at T2.

FINDINGS

Changes in Women's Gender-Role Attitudes

Overall, the women's gender-role attitudes became considerably more liberal across the decade (Table 1). In terms of the women's reflections on whether their gender-role attitudes had changed across the decade, more than 34% of the women reported that their gender-role attitudes had become more liberal across the decade since the interview at the end of their first year of enrollment, while only 12% reported that they had developed more traditional attitudes, and 54% reported no change. According changes in their scores on the Felton Sex-Role Attitudes Scale, more than 80% of the women had developed more liberal attitudes, while 14% had become more traditional, and only 5% had experienced no change in their attitudes.

As noted in the methods section, I collapsed the change score data into categories of "more traditional" "somewhat more liberal" and "substantially more liberal" for the analyses of explanations of gender-role attitudes change. Using this procedure, 14% of the women became "more traditional", 68% became "somewhat more liberal", and 18% became "substantially more liberal." It is important to note that I used the collapsed change scores rather than the raw change scores throughout the analyses.

Explaining Changes in Gender-Role Attitudes Across the Decade

As I discussed in the introduction and conceptual framework, my independent variables can be grouped into two general categories: a) social structural positions, including the women's educational attainment and occupation; and b) network characteristics, in this case, network members' average educational attainment.

Social Structural Positions

Respondents' Educational Attainment. As shown in Table 2, based on the

respondents' self reports of changes in gender-role attitudes, women who completed their

Bachelor's Degrees were more likely to report that they developed more liberal gender-role

attitudes than did those women who did not graduate (39% versus 20%). The same pattern was

found using the collapsed change scores from the Felton scale. Women who received their

Bachelor's Degrees were more likely to have developed substantially more liberal gender role

attitudes than were women who did not graduate from college (21% versus 9%).

Many of the women's comments indicated that they attributed the change in their gender-

role attitudes to their educational attainment:

> I found myself to become more liberal, in school and in my outside life.
> I found my issues on women's issues changed drastically. I wasn't too
> sure about ERA and I've changed my total concept on that. I've
> changed my views on abortion. I've changed my views on many major
> women's issues.   On women working outside of the household.
> On....matter of fact, I was just approached by NOW…to start a NOW
> chapter over here. Yes, I've changed, drastically. (Interviewer: Why do
> you think you've changed so much?) I think I've seen the indifference
> that women have suffered tremendously. And I think I've seen the
> point of view of how women should have choices rather than to be told
> that we're run by a male-dominant society, and say "This is how it is.
> And you have no choice." (Interviewer: What do you think made you
> realize that, or perhaps see those things differently?) I feel (my
> professor in) Women in Health has changed a lot of my views…And I
> still have a lot of old-fashioned views, and I still have a lot of different
> things in my mind as to how I feel society should be, but I've changed
> tremendously. Many people saw it. (104)

Interestingly, several other women also focused specifically on women's studies courses when discussing the effect of the return to school on their gender-role attitudes[6], as in the case of one of the women who reported substantial changes in gender-role attitudes:

> I took a course called Women & Humanities, and it was a really revealing course about how women have evolved over a certain time period. It made me more aware of some issues. There are particular issues that are women's issues that men do not experience. (221)

Often the changes appeared to result from a change in identity and self-esteem—factors that are closely related to women's gender-role attitudes:

> (I: What do you feel is the most important thing that you gained from your college education?) The ability to have what it took to go on. That I wasn't stupid as my husband often called me. ..(I gained) self-esteem. I needed to be in a position to be independent from a bad situation (her marriage) and (I found that in school). (126)

A second woman who reported that the most important change resulting from her return to school was her identity and self-confidence linked her return to school to her ability to terminate her marriage. In an earlier part of the interview she reported that finding her "sense of self" was the most important change she had experienced as a result of returning to school. At a later point she explained the relationship between her return to school and her decision to leave her relationship:

> (I: Do you believe that your return to school had a role in the termination of your relationship?) Absolutely. School was the catalyst. It provided me with the things I never had from my marriage. The relationship, communications, support, it gave me everything. (122)

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6 This effect is not unique to the university or to any particular program or discipline; respondents' reports indicated that they were influence by several different professors; none of the women reported being influenced by the same professors.

Based on the combination of both quantitative and qualitative findings, my expectations are confirmed that educational attainment has an effect on both the aggregate and individual changes in gender-role attitudes across time.

Graduate School Attendance[7]. The effects of graduate school on the women who completed their Bachelor's Degrees were less strong and consistent than I had anticipated. According to women's self reports, graduate school appears to have served as a buffer against becoming more traditional, but did not substantially increase the likelihood that the women would develop substantially more liberal attitudes, as shown in Table 3. Thirty per cent of those who did not attend graduate school became more traditional, compared to only 8% of those who did attend. However, there is no indication that graduate school augmented women's liberal attitudes; in fact, the data would suggest the opposite. In contrast, the analysis using changes on the Felton scale indicated that women who attended graduate school were both less likely to become traditional (20% versus 8%) and more likely to become substantially more liberal (25% versus 10%).

I expected that the qualitative data would be able to shed some light on the question of the effects of graduate school on the women's attitudes, but they did not. While the women often discussed the effects of undergraduate school on their attitudes, as indicated above, they virtually never made any reference to graduate school when explaining changes in their gender-role attitudes.

Labor Force Experience. The analysis of the effects of labor force experience on gender-role attitudes revealed findings that were generally, but not always consistent with my

expectations. In particular, changes in labor force participation did not consistently reveal a positive effect of continuous employment, while changes in actual occupation did conform to expectations. In terms of women's self reports of changes in gender-role attitudes, those who had been unemployed at T2 but moved into the labor force by T3 were much more likely to have reported that their gender-role attitudes had become more liberal, as shown in Table 4, a finding counter to my expectation that continuous labor force participation would lead to more liberal attitudes. However, analysis of the change scores on the Felton scale showed that women who had been continuously employed were more likely to have developed "substantially more liberal" gender-role attitudes.

The analysis regarding changes in occupation yielded far more consistent results. Women's self reports indicated women who moved into in nontraditional occupations between T2 and T3 were more likely to report that they had developed liberal attitudes than were women who continued to be employed in traditional occupations (46% versus 35%). The analysis of changes on the Felton scale were considerably stronger, but in the same direction. Women who entered nontraditional occupations between T2 and T3 were far more likely to have developed substantially more liberal attitudes by T3 than were women who remained in traditional occupations (46% versus 10%).

Women's comments indicated that they were often aware of the effect that employment and occupational choice had on their gender-role attitudes. For example, a woman who had

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7 Respondents used in this analysis are only those who obtained their undergraduate degrees; therefore, the sample size (N) is different for this analysis.

worked her way to the position of director of community and professional outreach for the

county social work agency by T3 after being a full-time housewife at both T1 and T2 explained:

> Well, in terms of women going to work and a woman having a vocation of her own, and the self-esteem she has, and a woman's place doesn't always have to be at home. (Interviewer: And why do you think they've changed?) Because I've met other women who are doing these things. And, life's circumstances have almost pushed these issues right in front of my eyes. In order to survive, a woman almost has to grasp onto a lot these things, that I can't be at home, that I have to go out pull my own weight, you know. (106)

In some cases, the women explained that the gender-related problems they encountered while

trying to succeed at their nontraditional jobs had fueled the changes in their attitudes. One

woman who had been a full-time housewife until the return to school had established a

successful business contracting social services by T3:

> I would think I'm a little bit more progressive than I thought I was. I do think that women, there is a subtle, uh, men treat women different. If you work in a man's, say the ole buddy system, like a lot of department heads at the town hall, they are mostly men. There is a difference, it's hard to put your finger on it, but it does exist. And I think that women just have to deal with it, be straight forward about it. Deal on a one-to-one basis with it in the work place and be sure that they are getting accomplished with they need to do. Not to let a man treat you in any way different from the others. You have a professional way that you get it done. You don't let them put you off because you are a woman, be persistent. (123)

In some cases, women whose gender-role attitudes became substantially more liberal did not

move from traditional to nontraditional occupations, but moved from lower prestige positions in

traditional occupations to positions of leadership. For example, one respondent who worked as a

nurse before returning to school moved to the position of director of social work in a medical

setting:

> I became a radical, I definitely always had the title "women's libber." And have since changed to feminist. (I: Why do you think they have changed?) I was never satisfied with being a housewife, I was never

> satisfied with being a nurse. There was more to life than being a wife.
> I don't even use that title. (203)

Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings mentioned above, women who enter the labor force after graduating from college were more likely to develop more liberal gender-role attitudes than were those who were continuously employed across the decade. In combination, those who became employed in less traditional occupations were more likely to become less traditional in their gender-role attitudes across time than were those who both remained employed in their same type of occupation and those who became employed in more traditional occupations over time. In contrast, however, the qualitative data highlighted the effects of both labor force participation and traditionalism of occupations to show that, while traditionalism of occupations may not affect any substantial changes towards liberalism, changes in levels of occupational prestige do affect some of these women's move towards liberalism across the decade.

Network Characteristics

In contrast to my expectations about women's self-report of gender-role change over time, women with a highly educated network were less likely to report becoming more liberal in their attitudes over time. Only 29% of the women whose mean network educational attainment was over 13 years reported that they had developed more liberal gender-role attitudes, while 50% of those whose networks had an educational mean of 12 or fewer years reported that they had developed more liberal attitudes.

However, using the change scores on the Felton scale, I found that women with better-educated networks were somewhat more likely to have developed substantially more liberal attitudes. Further, the primary distinction was between women whose mean network education

level was 12 or fewer years and women whose networks had higher mean levels of education, regardless of whether means were in the between 12 and 13 years or the over 13 years categories (12% versus 18% and 20%).

The qualitative data showed a trend suggesting that perhaps women's less educated networks provided a stronger pull toward remaining more traditional than women's better educated networks provided a pull toward gender-role liberalism. The women's statements suggested that members of less educated networks often expressed concern that the women were "outgrowing them," particularly in cases in which the women's husbands were also poorly educated, and most of their friends were met through work. One woman whose husband had not completed high school and whose average network educational attainment was below 12 years explained:

> My friends can't even understand me... I would say that the majority [of my neighborhood friends] don't even think people should be going to college…They think I'll come off my high horse and be okay [if I drop out]…Friends I associate with who aren't in school [say] "What are you trying to prove?"(104)

Often less educated friends' and relatives' responses to the women's enrollment were fueled precisely because they felt that the respondents' gender-role attitudes were changing. One of the women's husbands explained:

> A few [friends] may not like her going to school because it's almost like not liking the idea of feminism or something like that. Not liking the idea of a woman breaking out of the stereotypical role that makes some people feel comfortable. (119)

> Diane thinks that women should stay home and take care of children first and she has mentioned that often. (120)

Contrary to my expectations, analysis of the data does not show that having a highly educated network motivated these women to become more liberal in their gender-role attitudes. However, I found that having a poorly educated network provided a pull towards traditionalism among these returning women students. Both the attitudes and behaviors of poorly educated members of the respondent's network had a slight effect on the changes in gender-role attitudes of these women who returned to school across the decade.

Pulling Patterns Together

Up to this point, I have discussed women's educational attainment, employment, and specific occupations as greatly separate factors affecting the women's gender-role attitudes. Examining in greater detail the experiences of some of the women provides and integrated picture of the ways in which these factors combine to affect gender-role attitudes.

The Move Toward Becoming More Liberal

Susan[8] (111)[9] was a full-time student who completed her Bachelor's Degree between T2 and T3 in sociology and began law school in 1987. Both before returning to school and during school, Susan was employed as a secretary at a law firm. By T3, however, she had completed her law degree and been hired as a lawyer at a large public interest law firm. Her network had an average level of education at Time 2–some college, as did her husband. She remained married across the decade. When she returned to school, the younger of her two children was ten. Susan said that she first returned to school in order to fill up the extra hours in her day that she had just being a housewife and a mother. Her children were getting older and starting school and she wanted to take a few classes. She planned on just taking a few classes but then found herself

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[8] The names used in these qualitative analyses are pseudonyms.
[9] The numbers following the names of respondents corresponds to the ID number they were assigned at T1.

addicted to learning and realized that she was now a full-time student in a major university and loving it.

As a result of her return, her husband felt that she was wasting her time, but ultimately he thought it was okay "as long as dinner was on the table at 6:00." Therefore, although Susan had assumed a new status in her life as a full-time student, her husband still expected her to maintain her traditional family roles. She showed her husband that it was possible to not lower her standards that she had now and still had enough time to fit school into her schedule. At T1 Susan was positive about the way she managed her multiple roles as a wife, student and mother with great caution by lengthening her day and organizing her schedule. At T2, however, she explained that she only lengthened her hours she was awake during the day and lowered her standards of housework in order to manage her role, she gave up on trying to organize and schedule her days. She was having a hard time juggling her time fairly between everyone in her family and herself, while still trying to keep her own identity as a student. She reported that:

> I would stay up later in the evening to study...because I wouldn't
> be able to sleep if I hadn't studied for the test. I'd do what had to
> be done with the kids and then I'd study until the wee hours of the
> morning.

In contrast, however, by T3 she seemed both overwhelmed and guilty about being a student, but she put herself first. Susan also stopped writing lists of things to do. She used to make up lists and put them on the refrigerator so that she would not forget what needed to be done. Now she said she does not do that anymore. She remarks that she now has no

> time to either spend with the kids or bake the cakes that I used to bake, or
> fuss with dinners, and, what else... wax and strip my floor every Friday
> night...There's just so many years you can wax and strip your floors
> every night before you finally say 'I've had enough.'

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In addition to her reports of managing her multiple roles, Susan reported that she

perceived changes in her gender-role attitudes over time. At T2 she explained that her ideas

about appropriate behaviors for men and women have changed radically. She explained:

> Well, I was in the Cinderella syndrome. I was brought up on fairy tales,
> and prince charming and my duty was to my family only. [I used to]
> derive a great deal of satisfaction from just changing diapers and
> washing and stripping my floor every Friday night. So I have come a
> long way. And it hasn't all been approved of by [my husband].
> Gradually he came along, but I was pulling him screaming and fighting
> me every step of the way.,,I was an ugly old caterpillar before (laugh),
> and I've sort of like come out…of this cocoon of parochialism. And I
> finally succeeded in doing it…I guess it went into hibernation again and
> it didn't come out until I was much older and on my own.

At T3, when asked how her idea's about men and women's behaviors should differ have

changed, she said that they had changed as a result of school and they continue to be pretty much

the same, she is still liberal. She explained how she grew up in a very traditional household and

it was difficult to every see herself becoming liberal, but she said that she has changed and had

attributed that to her being in school. She states that:

> I think probably [my gender-role attitudes changed by] going back
> to school. You know, the exposure of other people's opinions, and
> realizing that maybe what I felt all along wasn't so out of whack, in
> spite of where I grew up people are people, and there's good and
> bad everywhere. You know, it's like something that I always felt,
> but I never really felt confident enough.

By 1991 (T3), Susan had graduated from college and had re-entered the labor force. She

had still remained friends with people she met while in school. Then in 1987 she went to law

school. She said that for her, getting her degree brought her a job - she could not get a job with

just a BA so she forced herself to go on so that she could get a good job. Before she returned to

school she was trained as a secretary. She didn't feel like she could keep doing that so she went

back to school to get more education. By T3, she was an attorney at a public interest law firm.

She reported that in her job:

> I'm completely autonomous, I have direct client contact.

During her time in school, Susan was surrounded by a highly educated network. She explained that by the end of her first year at the university, she had to cut back on having contact with her friendship network:

> I've also cut down my friendship network. We used to have card games or go bowling or something with the neighbors. We don't do any of that anymore.

In sum, Susan's experience illustrates the way in which educational attainment and nontraditional occupational choice come together to affect changes women's in women's gender-role attitudes, thus reflecting the patterns shown by the quantitative analysis.

Going Against the Tide: Becoming More Traditional Across the Decade

Beth's (201) experiences also mirror the patterns shown by the quantitative analysis regarding the importance of both career choice and educational attainment. Both her choices and the outcomes, however, differed markedly from those of Susan. On the basis of other factors that affect gender-role attitudes, one might expect that she would have experienced substantial changes across the decade. In particular, her husband was highly educated as was her network. However, Beth left school following her initial return when she became pregnant with her fifth child. When she did return to the labor force, she pursued a traditional career in nursing. Not surprisingly, she was one of the few women in the study to experience a move toward more traditional gender-role attitudes across the decade.

Beth (201) returned to school when her youngest child was only 2 years old but did not complete her Bachelor's Degree. Both before and during school she was non-employed, but she became employed over the decade as a foster care nurse in a nursing home, which is considered a

traditional type of occupation. Her husband graduated from college and he was an engineer. Her network had high mean level of education (16 years), but this was mostly due to her network being composed of her husband's friends.

Her husband seemed generally supportive about her return to school, but he did make some negative comments about her enrollment and the time it took away from the family. She usually managed her multiple roles as a wife, student and mother by organizing. Beth reported that she didn't 't have any ideas on how men and women's behaviors should differ, nor did she think that her ideas had changed. However, she agreed with what she thought her husband's perception was about women. "He doesn't like loud, abrasive women. I don't either really."

Beth began her third semester in college shortly after the T2 interview, but left school because she got pregnant in 1985, and she said, "that was it." She never returned to school and moved on with her life after the baby. When the baby was about a year old, Beth began a part-time position working as a nursing assistant, but did not advance to full-time until 1989. Beth stated that her occupation was nurse at a nursing home in 1989, but her description of her suggested that she was office worker who engaged in traditional secretarial tasks. She said that she had more freedom and autonomy in her new position, but, as a clerical employee, she worked under close supervision and had little autonomy. She said that she accepted the job because she wanted to be able to stay at home and be with her family. Beth talked to her friends about some of the difficulties she faced while being employed full time. Despite their high average level of education (15 years), they did not encourage her employment:

> I had a couple of friends who thought I was crazy to work full
> time. They thought I should work part time, because I was just
> at home for years, I didn't work at all.

By 1991 when she was interviewed a third time, she had developed considerately more traditional gender-role attitudes than those she expressed at T1 or T2. At T1 she said that she really didn't know whether she thought that there should be differences in men's and women's behaviors. By T2, she said that she didn't think that her ideas had changed, and that she still liked

> …women who are softer. I can stand abrasiveness more in
> men than women. Loudness. Although at times I'm kind
> of loud myself. I just don't know [whether men's and
> women's behaviors should differ].

By T3, her statements had become more decidedly traditional:

> I think women are softer and men are harder [and
> that she wants] them to be "male" and "female."

She was also one of only four women whose scores on the Felton scale declined across the decade—a decade in which gender-role attitudes in the general population had become decided more liberal. Further, her score from T2 to T3 decreased by three points, the greatest decrease found in the sample.

In sum, Beth provides an example of how educational attainment and occupational traditionalism combine to affect women's gender-role attitudes. However, in contrast to Susan, whose gender-role attitudes became markedly more liberal over the decade after completing school and pursuing a nontraditional career, Beth's became decided more traditional after following the opposite path from Susan in both important respects.

Effects of Educational Attainment Versus Occupation

As shown in the quantitative analysis, the effects of entering a nontraditional occupation were even greater than the effects of completing college. Karen (215) provides an example that

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occupational choice may override the effects of low educational attainment in terms of gender-role attitudes.

Karen returned to college when her youngest child entered school. Karen had begun college immediately after high school but had dropped out shortly thereafter, returning again shortly after her first attempt, but leaving yet again. She explained that she returned to school while raising her family because she felt she was "stagnating." Interestingly, considering her later occupational choices, she was one of only 15 women in the sample who returned entirely for personal fulfillment, as opposed to career interests. She was also one of a small number of women who returned for personal reasons who did so despite some opposition from her husband. Karen's gender-role attitudes were somewhat liberal even at the time of the first interview,

> I don't know. I think you should treat people the way you
> would like to be treated. It doesn't depend on gender. It
> depends on how you would like to be treated.

By the time of the T2 interview, Karen's gender-role attitudes had become decidedly more liberal:

> I don't see where [men and women] should differ. I have one
> little famous saying. That there's only one thing a man can do that
> a woman can't, and that's become a sperm donor.

Karen went on to elaborate on why she thought that her ideas had become more liberal:

> Why? Well, when I married my husband, I was a very dependent
> person. I was raised to do what other people told me. Especially if
> that person happened to be older than myself. My very
> chauvinistic husband told me that I had to learn to be independent
> and learn to stand on my own two feet. And I did so, and he will
> tell you that he created a Frankenstein, because I went the opposite
> way. And we've had a lot of trouble and a lot of hard luck since
> we've gotten married. A lot has happened to us. And each time
> something happened I'm...I have been forced to be more and more
> independent. And I've learned that I can do it myself. And every
> time something difficult happens in my life, it only serves to make

me stronger than I've been before. I was a very, very weak person
emotionally, I think when my husband married me. Not
intellectually, not emotionally. And I think I characterize myself
as very strong.

Had Karen continued in school, we might not have been surprised that her attitudes

continued to change across the decade, despite the fact that her husband was a high school

graduate and her social network also had an average educational level of twelve years. However,

Karen's life changed shortly after the T2 interview in ways that might have stalled the change in

her gender-role attitudes:

My husband has had major illnesses. They have had an impact on
ME! What I've had to deal with in life, plus they had a major
impact on my children. Things happen though. And, uh,[it has
been] a tough 11 years. At the time, that I originally took part in
this survey, I was working, going to school, working full time,
going to school full and also taking care of the house and the kids.
Who obviously, were a lot younger at the time. When my
husband became ill, something had to go. And it was the school
that went.

In part pushed by becoming the sole provider for her family, Karen began pursuing

nontraditional career path because it offered greater earnings, and in 1986 she entered

management and became a supervisor and a section chief for the IRS. She explained that

because of her leadership position, she does not do the same things as a regular tax examiner

would do. For example:

As a manager, I take the job home with me. I have worked 12
hours a day, six days a week, and 8 hours on Sunday. I have
brought work home [and for] hour's worked at home. Those are
things a tax examiner would not do.

Karen was the only women in the study to experience a move toward more liberal

gender-role attitudes across the decade without finishing her Bachelor's Degree. Karen's change

scores, as measured by the Felton scale, indicated that she became even more liberal across the

decade, although she did not perceive that her attitudes regarding gender had changed. In fact, her scale score on the Felton scale increased by 15 points—the second greatest change of the entire sample.

Although Karen does not state directly that her career has changed her gender-role attitudes, the relative effects of school and work on her attitudes is evident when examining her description of these two stages in her life. When asked in what ways she felt she benefited most from school, she replied:

> I obviously learned a lot [in school]. I had a lot of different experiences and I met a lot of people, uh, from all age groups and I shared a lot of experiences with them. Through the educational processes, that might have been limited otherwise.

Her answers about work, however, were much more definitive and enthusiastic:

> (Interviewer: If money were not a consideration, would you prefer to be employed full time, part time, or not be employed?) I think I would probably prefer to be working full time. You're expected to know, or at least have the ability to access the answers to give them…I like dealing with people and uh, when you're in management you deal with people at all levels. In addition, you're dealing with customers, taxpayers, and hopefully you can help them with whatever their problems are. And when you help them, it's a nice feeling. Especially because people have such a negative viewpoint of the IRS. If you can leave them with a better impression, that's a nice feeling.

She summarized her work experiences across the previous decade with the statement:

> Oh, my gosh. I've become a lot more independent. We could spend volumes on everything that has happened since 1981.

In sum, Karen provides an example of the greater effects of nontraditional occupation and continuous employment than education. Again, given the educational attainment of Karen's husband, friends and relatives, and the fact that she left school after only a year, we would certainly have expected that her gender-role attitudes would have either remained unchanged or

possibly become more traditional. However, pursuing a high paying nontraditional occupation to support her family resulted in considerably more in her gender-role attitudes than almost any other women in the sample.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study explored the effects of educational attainment, labor force experiences, and social network structure using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data on 44 married mothers who returned to school. Both the qualitative and quantitative data revealed that the women who were most likely to have become substantially more liberal in their gender-role attitudes were those who had completed their undergraduate educations. This pattern is consistent with a large body of literature showing that individuals' attitudes regarding social issues, including women's issues, become more liberal as they complete more years of education (Blee and Tickamyer 1995; Cassidy and Warren 1996; Kiecolt and Acock 1988; Liao and Cai 1995; McBroom 1987; Peplau, Hill and Rubin 1993; Rice and Coates 1995; Thornton, Alwin, and Camburn 1983).

Contrary to my expectations, continuing to graduate work had no further effect on the women's gender attitudes. Thus, it appears that undergraduate education is the most important educational attainment in terms of attitude change. While I expected that women who were involved in graduate school would be more likely to report change in their gender-role attitudes over time, the literature does lend itself to support these specific findings. For example, Harris and Firestone (1998) found that women's gender-role change is positively associated with educational attainment. However, there was no further effect beyond completing undergraduate school.

It is also interesting to note that when the women pursued particular areas of study associated with more liberal attitudes, such as women's studies and sociology, they were especially likely to experience changes in their gender-role attitudes that they attributed to

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school, as shown in the case studies. This finding mirrors other work on the effect of women's studies on gender-role attitudes (Macalister 1999; and Harris, Melaas and Rodacker 1999).

The analysis also revealed that employment experiences affected the women's gender-role attitudes. While much of the literature has focused on the affects of labor force participation (Harris and Firestone 1998; Paplau, Hill and Rubin 1993; Vella 1993; Scott, Alwin and Braun 1996; Tallichet and Willits 1986; Thornton and Camburn 1979; Thornton and Freedman 1979; and Thornton, Alwin and Camburn 1983), the present study gives equal attention to the issue of occupational choice. My analysis revealed that taking nontraditional career paths resulted in less traditional attitudes, as did continuous labor force participation, albeit to a lesser extent. The qualitative data were consistent with the quantitative analysis in suggesting even greater effects of labor force experiences than educational attainment. Not only was the relationship between gender-role attitude changes and occupational choice stronger than that between attitudes and education when comparing the crosstabular analysis, but in the case studies as well. The case studies suggested that although educational attainment and occupational choice generally worked together to move women toward greater traditionalism or liberalism, as in the case of Susan and Beth, when these factors diverged, occupational choice had a greater effect on gender-role attitudes than did educational attainment, as in the case of Karen. Taken together, these findings were consistent with the literature available on the positive effects that labor force participation has on changes in gender-role attitudes (Harris and Firestone 1998; Paplau, Hill and Rubin 1993; Vella 1993; Scott, Alwin and Braun 1996; and Thornton, Alwin and Camburn 1983). However, the findings suggest that traditionalism of career may be even more important in explaining attitudes than is labor force participation, consistent with Budig and England's (2001) work on job characteristics.

Finally, women whose networks were composed primarily of individuals who had not attended college were substantially more likely to retain or develop traditional gender-role attitudes, while highly educated networks had remarkably little influence in moving women toward liberal attitudes. The qualitative data showed a trend suggesting that perhaps women's less educated networks provided a stronger pull toward remaining more traditional than women's better educated networks provided a pull toward gender-role liberalism. The women's statements suggested that members of less educated networks often expressed concern that the women were "outgrowing them," particularly in cases in which the women's husbands were also poorly educated, and most of their friends were met through work. In contrast, better-educated network members appeared to facilitate the returning students' attachment to school and the labor force.

It is important to note that it is always possible to question causal ordering when examining changes over time, this study being no exception. However, one strength of the present study is the ability to utilize the combination of quantitative and qualitative data to both reveal patterns and allow the respondents' statements to illuminate the processes underlying these patterns. Thus, while I cannot be certain that the causal ordering is as I have outlined, the women's explanations provide support for my argument.

The patterns of findings from the present study can be used to suggest several directions for future research on the effects of education and employment experiences on women's gender role attitudes over time. First, according to Merton (1968), the most crucial threshold in terms of the effect of education on attitudes is the completion of high school. It might be argued that the most important educational threshold by this point in history is college rather than high school—

an argument that would be consistent with the findings of the present study. Further empirical investigation of changes in gender-roles as individuals reach these educational thresholds could determine whether Merton's (1968) argument is supported in the 21st century.

Second, future research should be conducted on more diverse populations to examine the effects of returning to school in midlife. For example, the present sample is composed of only white non-Hispanic women, while an increasing proportion of retuning student across the country is African American, Hispanic, and Asian (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). Further, the women in the present study attended a prestigious nationally recognized research university. However, most women who return to school enroll in community colleges and less research-focused undergraduate institutions. Thus, both the educational experiences and the employment opportunities available to the women in the present study may differ from those of most returning students, both of which may have accelerated changes in the women's gender-role attitudes.

In summary, this thesis reveals a pattern of change that mirrors those shown by Suitor's earlier explorations of changes in women's attitudes across the first year of enrollment. The analysis presented here, however, demonstrates that the changes Suitor saw shortly after the women returned to school continued as the women completed their educations and entered the labor force. Further, as the women moved into the labor force and the time since they left school lengthened, the effect of occupational choice appears to have become even more important in explaining changes in gender-role attitudes than was their educational attainment. As the number of returning students continues to grow in the United States, it is important to expand our

understanding of the affects of returning to school on women's lives, including their values and attitudes.

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Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Changes in Gender-Role Attitudes Measures

	Percentage
Women's Self Reports of Changes in Gender-Role Attitudes between T2 and T3	
More Traditional	12%
Same	54%
Less Traditional	34%
	100% (n=44)
Change Scores on the Felton Sex-Role Attitudes Scale from T2 to T3	
More Traditional	14%
Somewhat More Liberal	68%
Substantially More Liberal	
	18%
	100% (n=44)

Table 2: Effects of Educational Attainment on Changes in Gender-Role Attitudes[10]

	Educational Attainment by Time 3	
	Did Not Received Bachelor's Degree	Received Bachelor's Degree
Women's Self Reports of Changes in Gender-Role Attitudes between T2 and T3		
More Traditional	10%	12%
Same	70%	48%
Less Traditional	20%	39%
N	10	33
Change Scores on the Felton Sex-Role Attitudes Scale from T2 to T3		
More Traditional	18%	12%
Somewhat More Liberal	73%	67%
Substantially More Liberal	9%	27%
N	11	33

10 The n's for the following table do not sum to 44 due to missing cases.

Table 3: Effects of Attending Graduate School on Changes in Women's Gender-Role Attitudes

	Attendance in Graduate School Between T2 and T3	
	No	Yes
Women's Self Reports of Changes in Gender-Role Attitudes between T2 and T3		
More Traditional	30%	8%
Same	20%	58%
Less Traditional	50%	33%
N	10	24
Change Scores on the Felton Sex-Role Attitudes Scale from T2 to T3		
More Traditional	20%	8%
Somewhat More Liberal	70%	67%
Substantially More Liberal	10%	25%
N	10	24

Table 4: Effects of Labor Force Participation on Changes in Gender Role Attitudes

	Labor Force Experience	
	T2 unemployed/T3 employed	T2 employed/T3 employed
Women's Self Reports of Changes in Gender-Role Attitudes between T2 and T3		
More Traditional	—	17%
Same	43%	58%
Less Traditional	57%	25%
N	24	14
Change Scores on the Felton Sex-Role Attitudes Scale from T2 to T3		
More Traditional	33%	4%
Somewhat More Liberal	66%	62%
Substantially More Liberal	—	33%
N	15	24

Table 5: Effects of Traditionalism of Occupation on Changes in Gender-Role Attitudes

	Traditionalism of Occupation		
	More Traditional	Same	Less Traditional
Women's Self Reports of Changes in Gender-Role Attitudes between T2 and T3			
More Traditional	15%	20%	—
Same	50%	50%	54%
Less Traditional	35%	30%	46%
N	20	10	11
Change Scores on the Felton Sex-Role Attitudes Scale from T2 to T3			
More Traditional	15%	27%	—
Somewhat More Liberal	75%	64%	54%
Substantially More Liberal	10%	9%	46%
N	20	11	11

Table 6: Effects of Women's Network Members Mean Educational Attainment on Changes in Gender-Role Attitudes

	Respondents' Network Members Mean Educational Attainment		
	12 years or less	13 years or less	16 years or less
Women's Self Reports of Changes in Gender-Role Attitudes between T2 and T3			
More Traditional	—	9%	17%
Same	50%	54%	54%
Less Traditional	50%	36%	29%
N	8	11	24
Change Scores on the Felton Sex-Role Attitudes Scale from T2 to T3			
More Traditional	25%	9%	12%
Somewhat More Liberal	62%	72%	68%
Substantially More Liberal	12%	18%	18%
N	8	11	25

VITA

The author was born in Fairmont, West Virginia and lived there until she was five years old. She arrived in Baton Rouge on her sixth birthday and has lived there ever since. She attended Baton Rouge Prepatory School until fourth grade. She then moved to Parkview Baptist and stayed there to finish high school. She started college in 1997 at Brigham Young University and graduated with a Bachelors of Science in Sociology in 2000. She then moved back home to attend Louisiana State University in August 2000 and will obtain her masters in May 2003.