

WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND STRUCTURES OF FAMILIAL AUTHORITY AMONG FAMILIES OF OFFSHORE OILWORKERS

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ABSTRACT

Research on the links between work and the family has suggested the two affect one another, though for many years the prevailing assumption was that they do not (Kanter 1977). One area of this research has addressed the effects of women's employment on the distribution of power in marriage. A recurrent theme has been that women's employment increases power in families relative to males. This research further explores the effects of women's employment on structures of decision-making authority in families. The findings lead us to conclude that employment of women may provide resources and higher levels of prestige which in turn affect the structure of power in the family.

INTRODUCTION

Research on the links between work and the family has suggested the two affect one another, though for many years the prevailing assumption was that they do not (Kanter 1977). One area of this research has addressed the effects of women's employment on the distribution of power in marriage. A recurrent theme has been that women's employment increases power in families relative to males. Our research further explores the effects of women's employment on structures of decision-making authority in families. The families of offshore oil workers present a rare opportunity to explore the responses of family members to nonstandard work scheduling, especially as those responses may be conditioned by the employment status of women.

Offshore oil work requires periodic absences of husbands from their homes typically for a period of 7, 14, 21, or 28 days. Extended absences such as these may serve to increase the decision-making authority of wives. However, the literature suggests that the most important source of male power in families is economic dependence of women on men. If this is so, then even extended male absences will not likely alter authority relations. Oil families are an ideal context, then, in which to examine the influence of women's employment on authority in the family.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The interface between work scheduling and family life has been a topic of substantial concern to scholars in recent years (Forsyth 1992; Gramling, Forsyth 1987; Hughes, Galinsky and Morris 1992; Kanter 1977; Ladewig, McGee 1986; Pleck, Staines, Lang 1980; Staines, Pleck 1983). Because the work force consists in large part of employees with high family demands, researchers have given

attention to the varied courses of work/family interface (Hughes et al 1992). Research findings indicate that workers are experiencing difficulties managing their dual roles in the work place and the family (Voydanoff 1988). In addition, there has been a precipitous rise in the number of persons engaged in non-traditional work scheduling (Staines, Pleck 1983). This cache of research has found agreement on at least one issue; nonconventional work scheduling is both demanding and problematic for families (Gramling, Forsyth 1987).

Although a great deal of literature has been devoted to the effects of non-traditional work scheduling on the family, only a small portion of the research is concerned with those families in which the father/husband is regularly (or irregularly) absent from the home for extended periods due to his employment.

Specific vocations seem more vulnerable than most to structurally provoked strife caused by work and family role interface (Jones, Butler 1980). Merchant seamen (Forsyth 1992; Forsyth, Gramling 1990), military personnel (Hunter 1984; Hunter, Nice 1978), fishermen (Margavio, Forsyth 1996; Orbach 1977), offshore oil workers (Forsyth, Gauthier 1991; Gauthier, Forsyth, Bankston 1993; Gramling 1989; Morrice, Taylor, Clark, McCann 1985; Storey, Lewis, Shrimpton, Clark 1986); and long-distance truck drivers and jet-setting business executives are examples of workers in what Forsyth and Gramling (1987) have termed a "feast or famine" schedule.

Research on merchant seamen has found that wives of seamen have traditional outlooks, but that being given all the responsibilities when husbands are away conflicts with these traditional views (Forsyth 1992; Forsyth, Gramling 1990). Morrice et al (1985) confirmed this conflictual pattern among offshore oil worker families. The literature on

occupationally induced father absence among military families and fishermen support these findings as well (Hunter 1984; Hunter, Nice 1978; Orbach 1977). In addition, Forsyth (1992) suggested that alienation is high among members of families with non-traditional work schedules. The occupational demands of some careers may be so encompassing that they severely curtail family interaction (Jones, Butler 1980). The present research focusses on only one of these "vulnerable" occupations, the offshore oil worker.

The current study extends previous research of offshore oil workers' families (Forsyth, Gauthier 1991; Gauthier et al 1993). That research identified four categories of familial structural responses to periodic husband/father absence (Gauthier et al 1993). Although the defining characteristics of each type are numerous, the question of in whose role decision-making authority is located is the primary defining feature. A brief synopsis of the characteristics of the four responses is necessary here.

Father-Centered responses are those in which the male role is more powerful (Gauthier et al 1993). Forsyth and Gauthier (1991) identified three types of families which correspond to this description: those which alternate authority between the spouses, those in which women's authority is contingent, and those in which men have been replaced during their absence. Alternating authority families are those in which the wife relaxes her authority when the oil worker is onshore so that he may act in the traditional role of decision-maker. Contingent authority families are those in which women assume authority only for minor or emergency decisions which occur during male absences. Otherwise, serious decisions are delayed until males return. Replacement father families are those in which male relatives "replace" oil workers during their absences as disciplinarian, handyman, etc. The traditional male role usually occupied by fathers does not go unoccupied. Each of the three responses is, then, Father-Centered.

Mother-Centered responses are those in which the female role is more powerful (Gauthier et al 1993). Forsyth and Gauthier (1991) identified one type of family which corresponds to this description: those in which women maintain both the traditional male and female role responsibilities during times when oil workers are both present and absent. Women make the decisions regarding the

family, with no real involvement of the part of husbands, who, when present, are treated more as guests than as active, participating members of the family.

Egalitarianism responses are those in which power is equitably divided between males and females (Gauthier et al 1993). Forsyth and Gauthier (1991) identified one type of family which corresponds to this description: the egalitarian family. The literature on merchant seamen, military personnel, and fishermen (Forsyth, Gramling 1987, 1990; Gerstel, Gross 1984; Gramling, Forsyth 1987; Hunter, Nice 1978; Kaslow, Ridenour 1984; Orbach 1977; Sherar 1973; Tunstall 1962) has suggested that egalitarian relationships occur only between couples in which both partners are professionals. In fact, egalitarian relationships were not found to be present in the families of men in these other occupations with non-standard scheduling. However, Forsyth and Gauthier (1991) found some offshore oil spouses sharing responsibility and authority equally. For example, males in these families assumed traditional female tasks while at home - such as the care of infants and children, cooking, cleaning, and shopping.

Gauthier et al (1993) also identified the Unresolved response. Unresolved responses are those in which marriages have either ended in divorce, or continue despite ongoing, unresolvable conflict [like Cuber and Harroff's (1965) conflict-habituated marriage]. In these families, the assignment of decision-making authority is disputed over, and therefore, unresolved.

Blood and Wolfe (1960) considered economic power to be the primary factor influencing the distribution of power in marriage. Power increases with income, thus male power has traditionally been higher relative to female power because men have worked and women traditionally have not. Theoretically, male power in families should decrease when females are employed.

In fact, dual earner families do seem to experience a marital shift in power which results in both higher rates of male participation in traditionally female tasks such as housework and child care and female participation in traditionally male activities such as family decision making (Davidson, Moore 1996; Rank 1982). Storey et al (1986) seem to concur by suggesting that working wives of offshore oilmen in Canada tend to be more independent of their husbands than non-working wives.

Other research has examined the nature of occupations held by women in offshore oil families (Gauthier et al 1993). Specifically, these findings suggested that women who are employed in professional and managerial occupations were significantly less likely to be involved in male-dominated marriages. In fact, they were much more likely to be located in an Unresolved authority structure characterized by conflict over family decision-making authority. However, one intriguing finding of this research was that professional/managerial wives were unlikely to establish either Mother-Centered or Egalitarian relationships.

In the present study, we assume that decision-making authority reflects the distribution of power within marriage. We examine the relative influence of women's employment on participation in decision-making. Because of periodic absences of husbands in offshore oil families, we might expect that women experience high levels of authority in these types of families. However, if economic dependency is the main determinant of women's power in marriage, males' power in families will be retained (even in their physical absence) if women are unemployed. We expect the response types of power relationships in the marriages of oil workers to be systematically related to women's employment in the following ways: when women are employed, the structure of power will likely take a form which is not male-dominated, i.e. that of Mother-Centered, Egalitarianism, or Unresolved; conversely, when women are not employed, the structure of power will be Father-Centered.

METHODOLOGY

The Sample

The primary data for this study were gathered in one hundred sixty one face-to face interviews with families of offshore oil workers. All interviews were conducted by the authors and were funded, in part, through a grant from Minerals Management Services, U.S. Department of the Interior. These interviews were obtained through an availability sample because, currently, no comprehensive list of offshore oil employees exists. Our initial respondents were students enrolled in a university program for offshore oil workers. The project was also announced to other classes and members of the community in order to attain more interview contacts. At the conclusion of each interview, referrals were obtained from the respondents. All respondents were living in

the areas of Southwestern Louisiana and East Texas at the time of the initial interview. Interviews were conducted with both spouses, and sometimes with the children as well. In cases where the marriage had ended in divorce, we were able to interview only one of the spouses.

The initial interviews utilized open ended questions following an interview guide (rather than forced-choice responses) because of the exploratory nature of the research and the fact that little is known about the general character of families of offshore oil workers. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed for purposes of qualitative analysis. Interviews ranged from thirty minutes to two hours. The data for the present study were taken from the transcribed interviews using a systematic coding procedure.

In order to avoid missing data, callbacks were conducted. Forty-one household interviews were incomplete prior to the callbacks. For the data pertaining to this research, we were unable to contact only four of the households from whom we were missing information.

Techniques of Analysis

Because the data were obtained from an availability sample, analysis of the data requires a non-probability statistic that will somewhat correct for this problem. Chi-square is used to determine significance. Phi is the correlation coefficient used to provide a measure of the strength of the association between variables. Given the relatively small sample size ($n=161$) and especially given the fact that this is an exploratory study, we accept significance at the .10 level.

Operationalization of the Variables

The dependent variable is type of decision-making (authority) structure and is composed of the four categories discussed above: (1) Father-Centered; (2) Mother-Centered; (3) Egalitarianism; and (4) Unresolved. These are nominal variables which are treated dichotomously as either present or absent for each power relationship under consideration.

The independent variable is employment of the wife and is defined as devotion of time and energy to an activity inside or outside of the home for the purposes of receiving a salary. This nominal variable is also treated dichotomously in that women are considered either unemployed or employed (regardless of

Table 1: Women's Employment By Unresolved Authority Structure

Women's Level of Employment	Familial Response			
	All Others		Unresolved	
	#	%	#	%
Unemployed	71	49	11	65
Employed	73	51	6	35
Total	144	100	17	100

N=161, DF=1, Chi-Square value=1.443, $p=.230$, Phi=-.095

Table 2: Women's Employment By Father-Centered Authority Structure

Women's Level of Employment	Familial Response			
	All Others		Father-Centered	
	#	%	#	%
Unemployed	32	47	50	54
Employed	36	53	43	46
Total	68	100	93	100

N=161, DF=1, Chi-Square value=.707, $p=.401$, Phi=-.066

Table 3: Women's Employment By Mother-Centered Authority Structure

Women's Level of Employment	Familial Response			
	All Others		Mother-Centered	
	#	%	#	%
Unemployed	63	48	19	66
Employed	69	52	10	35
Total	132	100	29	100

N=161, DF=1, Chi-Square value=3.011, $p=.083$, Phi=-.137

Table 4: Women's Employment By Egalitarianism Authority Structure

Women's Level of Employment	Familial Response			
	All Others		Egalitarianism	
	#	%	#	%
Unemployed	80	58	2	9
Employed	59	42	20	91
Total	139	100	22	100

N=161, DF=1, Chi-Square value=17.850, $p=.000$, Phi=.333

the number of hours involved).

RESULTS

Families in the sample are most often the Father-Centered type (58%), with Mother-Centered the second most common (18%), followed by Egalitarianism (14%) and Unresolved (11%) families. The median age of the offshore oilworkers in the study is 38, while the median age of their wives is 34. Most of the husbands have high-school diplomas (50%), though a substantial number have either some college or a college degree (33%). The women in the study also tended to be mostly high-school educated (47%), or have either some college or a college degree (29%). The respondents are overwhelmingly white and married (89% each). Only 6 percent are divorced prior to the time of the study. The majority (99%) of the families have children, usually two in number (45%). The relationships between women's employment and types of authority structures are presented in Tables 1 through 4. Interestingly, as shown in Tables 1 and 2, employed women are no more likely than unemployed women to establish Unresolved relationships in marriages to offshore oil workers ($p=.230$). Furthermore, unemployed women are not significantly more prone to establishing Father-Centered relationships ($p=.401$).

In addition, the association between women's employment and Mother-Centered

authority structure is significant ($p=.083$) but opposite the expected direction ($\text{phi}=-.137$). Employed wives are significantly less likely to be involved in female-dominated marriages than are unemployed wives.

Consequently, as we see in Table 4, only the Egalitarianism authority structure is significantly more likely to emerge ($p=.000$) in the marriages of employed women. Although previous research on the effect of higher occupational status of women on power in the family was unable to identify the source of Egalitarianism (Gauthier et al 1993), the present findings seem to suggest that a simple paycheck may be enough.

However, this may be a function of the inclusion of part-time workers in the category of the employed. It may be argued (Luxton, Rosenberg 1986) that women who work part-time do not earn enough money (and therefore do not have sufficient power) to foster (especially) Egalitarian and Mother-Centered responses. For the sake of discussion, we performed an analysis in which part-time employment is combined with non-employment. The results indicate that even when only full-time employment is considered, women are still significantly more likely to be involved in Egalitarianism ($p=.000$). However, such is not the case for Mother-Centered relationships. Additional analysis showed that when part-time employment is excluded, women are no longer

significantly less likely to be in Mother-Centered relationships ($p=.177$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results support the theory that money is power, and therefore that employed wives have more power in marriage than do unemployed wives. However, employment does not increase female power to a disproportionate level, as it seems unlikely that Mother-Centered authority structures will emerge. On the other hand, employment sufficiently empowers women so that Father-Centered authority structures are unlikely to occur either. Ultimately, the findings lead us to conclude that employment of women may provide resources and higher levels of prestige which in turn affect the structure of power in the family. The probability of women's participation in Egalitarian relationships is significantly altered. In conjunction with previous findings (Gauthier et al 1993), it seems evident that although egalitarianism in marriage is, at least in part, a function of women's employment status, wives' occupations must not be of a status that is disproportionate to that of oil workers. Unequal status in the workforce has been shown to lead to conflict in the family. However, our findings suggest that when women are employed in jobs of relatively equal status to husbands' jobs, egalitarianism seems likely to emerge.

Still, women's employment cannot be the only predictor of gender equality in marriage, as evidenced by the fact that so many women in our study were employed but were not located in an egalitarian relationship. In addition, though nearly all of those women who were in egalitarian marriages were employed, a handful of women who were not employed found the path to gender equality. Consequently, further research is required in order to more adequately specify the determinants of gender equality in marriage, particularly as it is shaped by non-standard work scheduling. Because the number of persons engaged in both unconventional work scheduling and multiple jobs continues to increase, we can predict that problems emerging from these schedules will also rise. Further research should therefore continue analyses of familial constructs as responses to unconventional work scheduling.

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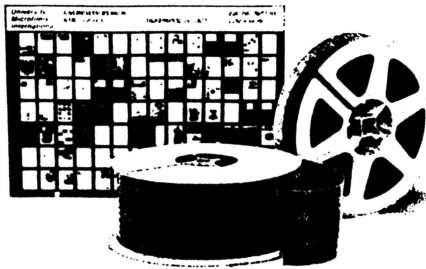
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TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION REVISITED: AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

African American children are victimized by poverty, discrimination, and even adoption policies which keep them in foster care and in institutions. Transracial adoption, one avenue to alleviate the problem, is burdened with controversy that need to be resolved. This article explores the opinions of African American college students on transracial adoption. It was found that transracial adoption was preferred to foster care or institutionalization, and that children need a permanent home regardless of the adoptive parent's race.

INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that in the United States more than 150,000 children are adopted each year. About 50,000 African American children are available for adoption, and 35,000 of them are boys. In addition, there are about 250,000 African American children in foster care nationwide (Bartholet 1991; Greene, Kulper 1995; Morisey 1990). White parents have adopted Asian and Native American children for the past four decades (Zastrow 1993).

Overall, the average waiting period for adoption is more than 2-1/2 years, and minority children, especially African Americans, wait up to five years (Owen 1994; Rodriquez, Meyer 1990).

About 8 percent of all adoptions are transracial or transethnic, with about 1 percent being adoptions of African American children by white parents (Flango, Flango 1993; Stolley 1993). Although a number of special adoption projects have been initiated to help encourage placement of African American children in same-race placements, African American children are far less likely to be adopted than other children of similar age and behavior (Barth, Courtney, Berry 1994; Barth, Courtney, Needell 1994; Bartholet 1993).

About three decades ago, some white couples began adopting African American children. Their desire to adopt African American children raised a controversy that is still unresolved and which adoption workers face today. In 1972 the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW), issued a statement that denounced transracial adoption in all cases, referring it to an act of "racial and cultural genocide." Rationales posited by NABSW included:

- 1) the need of young African American children to begin at birth to identify with all African American people in African American community;

- 2) the necessity of self-determination from birth to death, of all African American people; and,
- 3) the philosophy that African Americans need their own to build a strong nation. (Davis 1992; Hogan, Siu 1988)

Concern over the impact of transracial adoption on the long-term psychosocial and identity development of African American children has been expressed by African-American authors (Chestang 1972; Chimenzie 1975; Jones 1975). Other observers have questioned the legality and constitutionality of race-conscious policies in the adoption process. They contend that adoption policies have resulted in "melanin management", where white and African American applicants have shown a preference for lighter -skin over darker-skin children (Bartholet 1993). The victims of this adoption practice are the children who are left in foster homes and other institutions. This article extends the previous research on transracial adoption by reporting on the opinions of African American college students regarding transracial adoption.

RESEARCH ON TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION

Substantive research that has compared the psychosocial development of African American children adopted and raised by whites to those raised in same race environment is very scarce. Few studies emerged during the 1970s and 1980s which attempted to determine whether and to what extent the psychosocial development of African American children are detrimentally affected by transracial adoption. Virtually nothing has been written on those topics in the 1990s, but significant gaps in our knowledge about transracial adoption continue to exist. However, Zastrow (1976) compared the satisfactions derived and problems encountered between transracial adoptive