

Family values in the Nineties



G E N D E R G A P O R G E N E R A T I O N G A P ?

In contemporary political discourse the themes of polarisation, fragmentation and division have become familiar. People are asking whether we are becoming more divided, whether agreement on core values is disappearing and whether we are seeing the emergence of groups with increasingly opposed interests and values (DiMaggio, Evans and Bryson 1996). In American society Hunter (1994:vii) writes about the deep and abiding cultural fragmentation, while Guinness (1993:167) describes the cultural chasm, and Wyszomirski (1994: 37) identifies an 'ideological polarisation in domestic and social concerns'.

However despite these claims, DiMaggio, Evans and Bryson (1996), who examined a wide range of social and political attitudes in America, concluded that there is no evidence that the United States has experienced dramatic polarisation in public opinion on social issues since the 1970s (p.738). Indeed they observe that in terms of social attitudes (including a range of family values) Americans have become more unified or, where sharp value differences existed, the differences have remained largely unchanged. They demonstrate that group differences in social attitudes (for example, between men and women, young and old, black and white, poor and wealthy, religious and not religious) have steadily declined.

While there is evidence of change in family values in America and Australia (Thornton 1989; Glenn 1991; Popenhoe 1993; McDonald 1995), there has been little research that examines whether family values are becoming more polarised.

There are different ways of looking at polarisation. It may be thought of as either a process or as a state. That is, we can focus on change (are we becoming more fragmented and divided?) or on difference (how great are the differences in social attitudes between groups?).

The first approach, which conceives of polarisation as change, requires systematic data over time and tracking trends. The second approach, which conceives of polarisation

DAVID DE VAUS explores the values that Australians hold about desirable family structures and family life and asks whether men and women and younger and older people have sharply different views about what families and family life ought to be like.

tion as inter-group differences requires information about specific groups making comparisons differences between these groups to examine how different the groups are from one another. This latter approach does not permit comment on whether we are becoming more or less polarised but it does allow us to identify the axes on which divisions are sharpest. That is, we can identify whether, in terms of social values, we are divided along class lines, ethnic/racial lines, religious lines, age lines, gender, or some other dimension.

Any conclusions about the extent or direction of polarisation of values depends on what we look at. We may be achieving greater consensus in some value areas but be becoming more divided in others. Groups may be similar in terms of some values but sharply divergent in others.

This article examines value differences between groups, not over time. The focus is on differences in a set of traditional family values – attitudes to working mothers, careers for women, gender roles, marriage, cohabitation, ex nuptial births, single parents, childlessness, divorce, sex outside of marriage, and homosexuality.

Sociologists and political scientists often see social class as the fundamental social cleavage. While class can be an important axis of polarisation it is too one-dimensional an approach. There are other axes along which society divides. Here, the focus is on value differences based on age and gender – two dimensions that are fundamental to the way contemporary society, and families in particular, are structured.

Since the way families operate can have quite different implications depending on a person's age and gender, we might expect that men and women and the young and the old will have different views about families and how they should be organised.

Apart from describing the extent to which people assent to a wide range of traditional family values, in this article the following three matters will be addressed. Is there a gender gap in family values? To what extent do younger and older people hold different sets of values about family functioning and structure? Are generational differences in family values greater or less than gender differences?

A Gender Gap?

Why bother looking at gender differences in family values?

First, over the last quarter century traditional gender roles have been strongly challenged and patterns of family formation and breakdown have undergone marked changes.

One of the features of family change over this period has been the greater need and capacity to make choices in relation to family formation and family life. Where there were once clear rules about family formation and strict sequencing of events, relatively clear role prescriptions, and a separation of work and home, there is now much more diversity and room for individuals to design their own rules and solutions. People need to make decisions about whether to marry or live in a de facto relationship, to cohabit before marriage, whether or not to have children, how to arrange domestic tasks, whether a mother of young children will work, how many children to have, whether to have children without being married, the role of a career in a mothers life, whether to remain married and so forth.

As the capacity and need to make decisions increases, values will play a greater role in directing behaviour. Sharp differences in men's and women's values and expectations of family formation and

family life will have implications for family functioning, stability and wellbeing. The more that decisions about family-related behaviour are influenced by individual values than by the constraints of structure and convention, the more important will be any systematic differences in values and aspirations of men and women in relation to family life.

Second, over the last quarter century the women's movement has successfully challenged many aspects of traditional gender roles. There have been significant changes in the aspirations, expectations and behaviour of many women.

But we do not know whether men have been changing at the same rate or even in the same direction. Have men kept up with the changes or have the changes that are so evident in the lives of women produced a wide gap between the values of men and women in relation to families, family formation, children and the like? Have men retained more traditional family values while women have developed a new set of views about family life?

Finally, it is often argued that there are fundamental differences in the value orientations of men and women (Gilligan 1982; Beutel and Marini 1995). This view is represented in popular books such as *Men are from Mars: Women are from Venus* (Gray 1993) which presents a view of men and women wanting very different things in relationships.

There is a danger in exaggerating the distinctiveness of value differences between men and women. Even where a gender gap in value orientations has been established it is normally quite small (de Vaus and McAllister 1987, 1991). What is often a fairly marginal difference gets translated into stereotypes of 'men are like this' and 'women are like that' when in fact the differences between men and women are

often far less than the differences among men or the differences among women.

Such stereotyping contributes to gender-based social organisation, a point well made by feminist theory which has emphasised the extent to which gender is one of the fundamental cleavages in society.

A Generation Gap?

In this article differences in family values of people of different ages are examined *not* changes over time. Any differences between younger and older people can be interpreted in one of three ways.

The differences reflect social change. Younger people are different from older people because today's older people reflect the views of the past when they were growing up and forming their own values.

The differences reflect an ageing process. As people grow older they change their views. Today's older people may have once held views similar to those of today's younger people, but over time have changed their views.

A combination of the above. The views of today's older people may partly reflect the more traditional values of the time when they were young adults but these views may have been modified by general social change. The extent of difference between the generations may be narrowed by some older people accepting less traditional views that they may once have rejected.

Although the third interpretation is the most likely, we cannot decide from the available data which of these three explanations is most correct. We can simply observe the extent of any contemporary generation gap in family values.

Why look at generational differences in family values? Apart from the curiosity value, differences can have important implications for intergenerational relations. In the current climate where families are often required to take increasing responsibility to look after their own, the quality of intergenerational relationships will become an increasingly significant issue. Deep divisions between the values of the generations can disrupt the ability and willingness of the different generations to provide support and care for each other. If there is a significant generation gap we need to know about it.

Data Sources

The findings in this article come from the 1989–90 National Social Science Survey (4513 respondents), the 1993 National Social Science Survey (2203 respondents) and the 1995 Australian Family Values Survey (2129 respondents).

Together these three surveys provide an up-to-date picture of the views that adult Australians hold on a wide range of family values. All three surveys are national, random sample surveys and allow us

to generalise to the adult Australian population.

Where the same questions were used in different surveys the most recent survey has been used. For each question the percentages represent the percentage endorsing values that support traditional family norms. The higher the percentage the greater the level of support for these traditional values. Note that we cannot assume that if, say, 50 per cent gave a 'traditional response' then everyone else gave a non-traditional response. In a number of the questions quite a few people indicated that they could not decide what they thought.



Mothers in the Workforce

Before focusing on the gender and generation gaps it is worth observing the overall views towards working mothers. This is indicated in the first column of figures in Table 1.

Overall the acceptance of working mothers¹ is conditional on her responsibilities to her children and family. In general, respondents believe that mothers should give priority to their children and that working is frequently detrimental to the interests of their children and family. Very few (14 per cent) believe that families are happier if mothers work full-time, but only 29 per cent felt that women should spend most of their time on their family. However, there was strong support for mothers staying at home with preschoolers with most (78 per cent) believing that it is best for young children if mothers remain at home.

The notion that the mother's primary responsibility is to the family is highlighted

by the fact that most people (83 per cent) believe that even when all the children are at school the mother should not work full-time.

On the question of working mothers, women held remarkably similar views to men. Women and men were indistinguishable regarding their views about mothers not working full-time even when children are at school, and in rejecting the view that a family is happier if the mother works full-time.

Where men and women were different the differences were small. Men were only slightly more likely than women to say that mothers should remain out of the workforce completely when they had preschoolers, or to say that full-time working mothers harms families.

Age differences in attitudes about working mothers were greater than gender differences. Compared to younger people, older people saw a woman's role primarily as a mother and believed that a woman's responsibilities as a mother should take priority over those of a job.

Table 1 shows that the older people were the more likely they were to believe that: mothers should not work full-time; a working mother is harmful for preschool children; women should spend most of their time on their family; a family suffers if a mother works full-time; and it is best for young children if the mother stays home.



Careers for Women

While people accept that a woman might seek a career, this reflects acquiescence more than enthusiastic support (Table 2).

Table 1 Attitudes towards work and family responsibilities of women (per cent agree)

	Gender		Age					
	All	Male Female	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
Women should not work full time even when youngest at school ¹	83	84 83	73	81	86	88	93	93***
Best for young children if mother is at home ¹	78	80 77*	67	73	77	88	93	94***
Women should stay at home with preschooler ¹	68	71 66**	54	63	72	74	80	85***
Family suffers if woman works full time ²	60	65 55***	40	52	55	66	72	82***
Women should spend most time on family ¹	29	30 29	19	19	27	38	47	59***
Disagrees that family happier if woman works ¹	14	14 14	14	15	15	14	14	14*

p<.05 *p<.01 ***p<.001 ¹NSSS 198990 ²NSSS 1993 ³AFVS 1995

Table 2 Attitudes about careers for women (per cent agree)

	Gender		Age					
	All	Male Female	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
If woman works her main responsibility is still to home and children ³	73	68 76***	50	69	70	80	90	93***
Being a housewife is as fulfilling as working ¹	48	44 52*	38	41	48	55	62	69***
Women prefer children to jobs ¹	39	42 37**	25	27	38	49	63	72***
Wives who dont need to shouldn't work ³	37	38 37***	16	31	31	44	57	64***
Married women shouldn't seek a career ¹	20	21 18	12	13	21	24	32	30***

p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001 ¹NSSS, 1989-90 ²NSSS, 1993 ³AFVS, 1995

Almost three-quarters believe that if a woman works her family should remain her top priority. Although relatively few people (20 per cent) say that a married woman should not seek a career, twice as many believe that wives who don't need to work should not work (37 per cent).

There was little evidence of a gender gap regarding women having careers. Men and women were at one in saying that: children should be the top priority for women; wives who do not need to work should not work; and married women should not seek a career.

Men and women differed in some unexpected ways regarding careers for women. Women were more likely than men to say that: being a housewife is as fulfilling as working (52 per cent women compared with 44 per cent men); and the home should remain the top priority for a working woman (76 per cent women compared with 68 per cent men).

The generation gap about women having careers was much greater and more consistent than was the gender gap. On every measure older people held more traditional attitudes. Being older made more difference to men than to women but, in general, within each age group men and women held fairly similar views about the role that work should play in the life of mothers.



Gender Roles

Table 3 shows that there was majority support for the traditional arrangement where husbands

focused primarily on work and wives concentrated on the family (51 per cent), and husbands protect their wives (75 per cent).

However, people say they believe in domestic equality. Only 5 per cent thought women should still do most of the domestic work even if they worked full-time; less than one in five (18 per cent) believed that husbands should earn the larger salary; and very few (11 per cent) accepted that the husband should have the prime decision-making role in the household.

Generally, men and women agreed about gender roles. They were indistinguishable regarding the views about husbands earning more than wives, who makes the decisions, and sharing domestic work. Men and women differed only slightly regarding two questions.

More men than women (56 per cent compared with 45 per cent) accepted the traditional male breadwinner model where it is the husband's job to earn the money and the wife's to look after the home. More men than women (82 per cent compared with 69 per cent) felt that a husband provides protection for his wife.

The generation gap was much greater than the gender gap. Older people were more likely to believe in traditional gender roles. This can be illustrated with a number of examples.

Older people stress the male breadwinner role much more than do younger people. While 85 per cent of those aged 70 or over believed that the husband should

earn the money and the wife should look after the home, only a quarter (24 per cent) of those in their twenties felt this way.

While 43 per cent of those aged at least 70 believed that a husband should earn a larger salary than his wife, only 8 per cent of those in their twenties felt this way.

While 94 per cent of respondents aged 70 or older stressed the protector role of husbands, only 68 per cent of those in their twenties acknowledged a protector role for husbands.



Marriage, Cohabitation and Ex Nuptial Children

Taken overall there was no consensus supporting a traditional view of marriage – that is, a view that values a legally sanctioned marriage as a source of fulfilment, as a prerequisite for sexual relationships, or as a requirement for having children. Typically, only between one-third and one-half held views consistent with the traditional view of marriage (Table 4).

Just over a third (38 per cent) believed that married people are happier than single people. Less than a third (32 per cent) disapproved of men and women living together without planning to marry. Only a minority (39 per cent) believed that people in de facto relationships should be treated differently from those who are legally married. Just over half (53 per cent) condemn having children without being married.

There was some evidence that men held more traditional views regarding marriage. Men were more likely than women (44 per cent compared with 30 per cent) to think that married couples are happier than single people. They were also more likely than women (65 per cent compared with 57 per cent) to believe that married people should do as much as possible together.

However, men and women held identical views about cohabitation, de facto marriage and ex nuptial children.

Generational differences about marriage were more marked than gender differences. The older people were the more likely they were to value marriage, doing things together as a couple, and in opposing living together or having children before marriage.

The older people were the more likely they were to believe that married people are happier than single people (22 per cent of those in their twenties compared with over half of those aged over the age of 60 years).

Less than 20 per cent of those under 40 compared with about 55 per cent of those aged over 60 disapproved of couples living together without planning to marry.

Less than 30 per cent of those in their twenties compared with over three-quarters of the 60 plus age group disapproved of having children without being married.

Table 3 Attitudes to gender roles in families (per cent agree)

	All	Gender		Age					
		Male	Female	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
Husbands job is to earn the money & wives is to look after family ² (breadwinner role)	51	56	45***	24	34	42	60	70	85***
Husband should earn more than his wife ³ (breadwinner role)	18	18	18	8	12	13	22	27	43***
Husband should make the important decisions ³ (authority role)	11	11	10	7	10	8	12	13	17**
Husband provides protection for his wife ³ (protector role)	75	82	69***	68	65	68	84	88	94***
If a wife works full time the husband & wife should share household tasks equally ³ (domestic division of labour)	5	6	4	5	5	5	5	4	6*

p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 ¹ NSSS, 1989-90 ² NSSS, 1993 ³ AFVS, 1995

Table 4 Attitudes towards marriage, cohabitation and ex nuptial children (per cent agree)

	All	Gender		Age					
		Male	Female	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
Husband and wife should try to do most things as a couple ³	61	65	57***	42	51	61	67	75	85***
Married people are generally happier than single people ³	37	44	30***	22	28	37	47	48	54***
Ones really important relationships are in the home ³	80	83	77**	69	72	79	85	92	93***
Disapprove of a man and woman living together without planning marriage ³	32	30	33	16	19	30	38	49	59***
Law should not treat de facto same as married ³	39	41	38	26	30	39	48	51	54**
Not acceptable to have children without being married. ³	53	52	53	29	40	52	64	75	82***

p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 ¹ NSSS, 1989-90 ² NSSS, 1993 ³ AFVS, 1995



Sole Parenting

While about 60 per cent of respondents rejected single parenting there was greater acceptance of single parenting than in the past when single parents were both less common and more ostracised than they are today.

Nevertheless, as shown in Table 5, more than 60 per cent said that a single father was unacceptable for raising a child; 57 per cent said that a single mother was unacceptable for raising child; and 62 per cent believed that two parents are needed to bring up a child.

Men were more likely than women to reject single parenting. Gender differences in this regard were sharpest among younger people, and younger women were the least likely to reject single parenting.

Only one-third of women in their twenties rejected single mothers or fathers as an acceptable arrangement for rearing children; and only 39 per cent of women in their twenties compared with 51 per cent of men of a similar age believed that two parents are needed to bring up a child.

The older people were the more they rejected single parenting. On each of the single parenting questions only about 40–45 per cent of those in their twenties rejected single parenting while between 70–80 per cent of those over 50 rejected single parenting.



Childlessness

Consistent with increasing levels of childlessness and a declining fertility rate there was a relatively widespread acceptance of childlessness as an option and less emphasis on the need to have children than was the case in the past.

Only half (48 per cent) believed that children are necessary for a complete marriage, a view that contrasts with the traditional child-centred view of marriage. Only 47 per cent of people felt that life is incomplete without children, and only 16 per cent believed that women need children to be fulfilled (Table 6).

In line with many other family values the gender gap regarding childlessness is modest. Men and women were at one in rejecting the view that a woman needs to have children to be fulfilled, and men were only marginally more likely than women to think that having children is important for a marriage or for a complete life.

The generation gap regarding childlessness is much greater than the gender gap. The older people were the more likely they were to think that having children is important. The older people were the more likely they were to have a child-based view of life, marriage and women.

Compared with those in their twenties, the 70 plus age group were more likely to believe that: a childless marriage is incomplete (68 per cent of those aged 70 plus compared with 35 per cent of 20–29-year-olds); life is incomplete without children (70 per cent compared with 36 per cent);

and a woman is only fulfilled if she is a mother (35 per cent compared with 9 per cent).



Divorce

There was a certain inconsistency in the views people held about divorce. Table 7 shows that there was a widespread view that marriage should be for life (78 per cent) and that people should enter marriage without even entertaining the possibility of divorce (87 per cent). Marriage should be approached with the intention of it being permanent, and over two-thirds (70 per cent) believed that it is too easy to get a divorce.

At the same time, the commitment to marriage was conditional on happiness and fulfilment and, there was agreement that since things can and do go wrong, divorce is acceptable under certain circumstances.

Only 14 per cent said that marriage should be for life if the couple is unhappy; only 29 per cent rejected divorce when a couple cannot work out their problems; and only 19 per cent believed that an unhappily married couple should stay together just for the sake of the children. Less than half (44 per cent) thought that, regardless of individual happiness, a marriage should remain intact if a partner becomes mentally or physically disabled.

Despite the different impacts of divorce for men and women there were remarkably few gender differences in attitudes towards divorce. Men and women were at one in: rejecting the view that marriage is for life even if a couple is unhappy; believing that it is too easy to get a divorce; and thinking that it is wrong to marry without the intention of it being a lifelong relationship.

Where men and women held different attitudes about divorce, men were more opposed to divorce. They were more likely to say that: marriage is for life (81 per cent men compared with 76 per cent women); an unhappily married couple should stay together for the sake of the children (24 per cent men compared with 15 per cent women); and if a partner becomes mentally or physically disabled that the other person should remain in a marriage regardless of their own happiness (48 per cent men compared with 39 per cent women). Young women in particular were especially unlikely (only 18 per cent) to accept this 'in sickness and in health' view of marriage.

Age made virtually no difference to people's views about the ideal of marriage being a lifelong commitment. Young and old alike believed that marriage should be for life and should be approached with the intention of it being so.

However, there was a generation gap regarding the circumstances in which

Table 5 Attitudes towards sole parenting (per cent agree)

	Gender			Age					
	All	Male	Female	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
Single father not okay to raise kids ¹	61	69	54***	44	55	66	71	78	80***
Single mother not okay to raise kids ¹	57	64	50***	41	51	63	65	71	73***
Two parents are needed to bring up a child ³	62	68	58***	44	53	64	70	75	83***

p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 ¹ NSSS, 1989-90; ² NSSS, 1993 ³ AFVS, 1995

Table 6 Attitudes towards childlessness (per cent agree)

	Gender			Age					
	All	Male	Female	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
Childless marriage is incomplete ¹	48	52	45***	35	44	47	58	64	68***
Life is incomplete without children ¹	47	50	43***	36	39	44	54	64	70***
A woman is only fulfilled if she is a mother ³	16	17	15	9	11	13	14	23	35***

p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 ¹ NSSS, 1989-90 ² NSSS, 1993 ³ AFVS, 1995

Table 7 Attitudes towards divorce (per cent agree)

	Gender			Age					
	All	Male	Female	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
Marriage is for life ³	78	81	76*	80	75	72	78	84	84**
Disapprove of marrying thinking that divorce is an option if it does not work out ³	87	86	89	88	89	86	86	91	86
It is too easy to get a divorce ³	70	69	71	63	64	71	69	78	84***
If partner becomes mentally or physically disabled you should stay in marriage regardless ³	44	48	39***	26	34	42	51	65	60***
Reject divorce even if all other solutions fail ³	29	31	27*	36	35	29	26	20	17*
Should stay together for the children ³	19	24	15***	11	13	18	23	25	37***
Marriage for life even if unhappy ³	14	15	13	9	8	12	15	20	27***

p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 ¹ NSSS, 1989-90 ² NSSS, 1993 ³ AFVS, 1995

people would entertain ending a marriage (Table 7). Older people were much more likely than younger people to say that: it is too easy to divorce; the 'in sickness and in health, for better or for worse' view of marriage is appropriate; marriage is for life even if a couple is unhappy; and a couple should stay together 'for the sake of the children'.



Sex Outside of Marriage

Although there is widespread rejection of extramarital sex (83 per cent), there remains a group of 17 per cent who reject traditional notions of monogamy and believe that extramarital sex is acceptable, at least under some circumstances.

People are far less rejecting of premarital sex but acceptance of premarital sex depends considerably on the context. Relatively few (21 per cent) condemn premarital sex if the couple is in love but almost two-thirds condemn casual one-night stand premarital sex (Table 8).

This is an area of family values where there are consistent gender differences on every measure. Unlike most of the other family value areas where any gender gap is in the direction of men holding more traditional views, the gender gap in relation to sex outside of marriage is in the opposite direction. Women were more likely than men to express traditional attitudes towards non-marital sex.

Across all age groups more women than men disapprove of premarital sex. While almost three-quarters of women rejected casual premarital sex (74 per cent) only half (52 per cent) the men do so; 45 per cent of women compared with 31 per cent of men condemned premarital sex if a couple is attracted but not in love.

Older and younger people alike were united in their disapproval of extramarital

sex. However, there were sharp generational differences regarding premarital sex, particularly regarding premarital sex between a couple that is in love. More than half (52 per cent) of those aged over 70 compared with only 9 per cent of those in their twenties condemn premarital sex if the couple is in love.

The generation gap is not as stark regarding casual premarital sex, but it is nevertheless very clear. About 80 per cent of those aged over 50 compared with about half of those aged under 40 condemn casual premarital sex.



Homosexuality

As Table 9 shows, the majority of respondents disapproved of homosexuality and homosexual relationships. About two-thirds condemned homosexuality under all circumstances, with 72 per cent condemning male homosexuality and 66 per cent condemning female homosexuality. Slightly less than two-thirds (63 per cent) rejected the notion of homosexuals being able to legally marry, and 71 per cent rejected the proposition that homosexuals should be allowed to adopt children.

There is an interesting gender difference in relation to attitudes towards male and female homosexuality, with men, but not women, distinguishing between male and female homosexuality.

Men condemned male homosexuality more than did women but men and women were indistinguishable in their attitudes to female homosexuality, with 66 per cent of men and 66 per cent of women condemning female homosexuality. Men condemned male homosexuality more than female homosexuality (77 per cent

compared with 66 per cent), while women condemned male and female homosexuality to the same extent (67 per cent compared with 66 per cent) (Table 9).

The greater opposition to homosexuality amongst men was not even across all age groups. It is greatest among younger people where men were considerably more opposed than young women. This gender gap tapered off so that among those over 50, men and women were virtually indistinguishable in their attitudes to homosexuality.

The older people were the more likely they were to oppose homosexuality, the legal recognition of homosexual relationships or homosexual adoption. About 90 per cent of those aged 60 or over compared with 60 per cent of those under 40 believed that male homosexuality is always wrong. Almost 90 per cent of those aged 60 or over compared with only 55 per cent of those in their twenties opposed homosexuals being able to adopt children.

The majority of people stressed that caring for young children should take priority over work for mothers, and supported the traditional breadwinner role for men and family role for women.

The generation gap regarding homosexuality was greater among women than among men. That is, the difference between younger and older women was greater than between younger and older men. In particular, younger women reported much less opposition to homosexuality than any other group.

Overview

The majority of people in the three surveys discussed here held many traditional family values. A large majority of respondents stressed that caring for young children should take priority over work for mothers, and the majority supported the traditional breadwinner role for men and family role for women. They believed that a family suffers if a mother works full-time.

Most people saw the home as the locus of what is important in life, and a clear majority thought that husbands and wives should try to do most things as a couple. A majority believed that two parents are needed to bring up a child and felt that it was not acceptable for single parents to bring up a child.

Most people believe in the ideal of life-long, monogamous marriage and think that it is too easy to get a divorce. Almost two-thirds condemn casual premarital sex, and over two-thirds condemn homosexuality and homosexual relationships.

There was, however, also evidence of a shift away from certain traditional family values. There was general acceptance of women working so long as children and

Table 8 Attitudes to sex outside of marriage (per cent agree)

	All	Gender		Age					
		Male	Female	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
Disapprove of casual premarital sex ¹	64	52	74***	47	52	67	78	83	83***
Disapprove of premarital sex if attracted but not in love ¹	38	31	45***	24	24	37	53	60	69***
Disapprove of premarital sex even if in love ¹	21	19	24***	9	12	19	31	39	52***
Extramarital sex is wrong ²	83	80	86**	87	82	79	85	87	78***

p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 ¹ NSSS, 1989-90 ² NSSS, 1993 ³ AFVS, 1995

Table 9 Attitudes towards homosexuality

	All	Gender		Age					
		Male	Female	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
Male homosexuality is always wrong ¹	72	77	67***	63	61	72	81	89	89***
Female homosexuality is always wrong ¹	66	66	66	54	54	68	78	85	87***
The law should not treat homosexual couples the same as married ³	63	70	56***	45	54	64	70	80	78***
Homosexual couples should not be able to adopt children ³	71	80	68***	55	68	73	81	88	88***

family came first. People were not defining women merely in terms of children. Only a minority thought that women prefer children to jobs and very few believed that women need children to be fulfilled. There was a *belief* in gender equality in the home regarding domestic labour and decision-making. Only a minority saw marriage as making people happier than single people and only about one-third rejected cohabitation and de facto living. Only a half thought it unacceptable to have children outside of marriage.

The belief in the need to have children was not all that strong, with less than a half

Most people saw the home as the locus of what is important in life, and a clear majority thought that husbands and wives should try to do most things as a couple.

thinking that a marriage or life is incomplete without children. Although the majority did not approve of sole parenting, a substantial minority thought that it is quite acceptable. Divorce was widely accepted and the 'for better or worse' view of marriage was a minority view, as was the view that an unhappily married couple should stay together 'for the sake of the children'. Only a minority condemned non-casual premarital sex, and a substantial minority did not condemn homosexuality or homosexual relationships.

The gender gap in family values was much less than any generation gap. On every issue where there was a gender gap the generational gap was much greater. For many values men and women were indistinguishable and the differences that did exist were generally small and hardly justify stereotypes of men and women holding widely divergent views about families and family life.

Men and women were at one in their agreement about women having a career and the priority of home and family. They both supported the idea of equal decision-making and sharing of household work (also see Dempsey elsewhere in this issue of *Family Matters*). They held similar views about cohabitation, de facto relationships and ex nuptial children, and in rejecting the view that women need children to be fulfilled. Men and women shared the ideal that marriage should be for life, that it is too easy to get a divorce but that divorce is appropriate if a couple is unhappy.

Males held more traditional family values than women in some regards. Men were a little more inclined to think that mothers of young children should be at home and that full-time work by women is detrimental to family wellbeing. More men than women endorsed the role of breadwinner and protector for men and family carer for women. Men, more than women, thought couples should do things together, believed that married people are

happier and that the really important relationships are in the home. Men, compared with women, were more opposed to single parenting and stressed the value of having children. They were more opposed to divorce and to homosexuality and homosexual relationships.

However, in some regards women were a little more likely to hold traditional family values. Women were more likely than men to believe that home and children should remain the top priority for a working woman and to say that being a housewife is as fulfilling as being employed. Women were more opposed than men to premarital or extra marital sex.

Older people were more traditional than younger people on virtually all issues. The older people were the more likely they were to endorse a traditional position regarding family values. There was no consistent point that

clearly divided the age groups (for example, under forties and over forties); generally traditionalism increased steadily with age.

We cannot be sure whether this pattern is because people become more traditional as they grow older or because the views of older people reflect more traditional times in which they formed their views.

We have seen that the young are the least traditional and that where there are gender differences it is usually women who are the least traditional. On a number of family values the combined effect of age and gender produced a particularly non-traditional group. On a number of issues young women stood out as being by far the least traditional group.

Young women in their twenties were the least likely to: oppose single parenting (36 per cent oppose); disapprove of male homosexuality (54 per cent disapprove); oppose homosexuals adopting children (44 per cent oppose); think that married people are happier than single people (11 per cent agree); believe that a mother should stay home with their preschool aged child (50 per cent agree); say that a married couple should do as much as they can together even if it means less independence (36 per cent agree); believe that a husband should make the important decisions in a household decisions (4 per cent agree); say that a husband provides protection (60 per cent agree); oppose treating de facto relationships the same as registered marriages (20 per cent oppose); and believe in the 'for better or for worse' view of marriage (18 per cent agree).

Is there evidence of gender-based and age-based polarisation of family values?

The clearest and most consistent finding is that there is a marked generation gap in family values, with older people holding more traditional views than younger people.

The evidence for gender-based polarisation in family values is much more

equivocal. The gender gap emerges only with some values and is quite modest. Similarity between the views of men and women is much more apparent than are differences. Where differences do exist it is usually in the direction of men holding more traditional family values than women.

Young women in their twenties stand out as a distinctive group. On a number of measures they have the least traditional family values – they are less traditional than other women and less traditional than their similarly aged male peers. Whether this reflects that young women are in the vanguard of family value change or whether young women hold a particular set of views which become more traditional as they grow older, establish careers and have families remains to be seen.

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Note

¹ Throughout this article, the shorthand terms 'working mothers' and 'working women' are used to refer to women in the paid workforce. Naturally this does not imply that those not in the paid workforce are not working.

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