

***Intimate Commitment in the
in the New Economy:
A View from the U.S.***

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“Unequal Families & Relationships”

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Intimate Commitment in the New Economy: An Overview

- **Whither Commitment?**
 - Puzzle of Conflicting Trends in Gender & Relationships
- **What is the Context?**
 - Rise of Insecurity in Economic & Private Life
- **What are the Emerging Strategies?**
 - Growing Up in New Era of Gender, Work, & Family
 - Emerging Strategies: Clues from Heart of the New Economy
- **What are the Implications?**
 - For Future of Gender, Work, & Care
 - For 21st Century Social Policy

The Puzzles of Change: Conflicting Views of US Trends

- **Two Dominant, but Contradictory Perspectives**
 - **End of the gender revolution**
 - Women “opting out” of careers; labor force participation at plateau
 - Men resist domestic equality & parental involvement
 - Recreation of traditional courtship & marriage
 - VS.
 - **Rise of women & decline of men**
 - Women outpacing men in education, aspirations, & earnings
 - Men confused & threatened by women’s rising status
 - Rising individualism as men reject breadwinning & women reject marriage
- **Opposing arguments, but both posit linear change**

Why So Much Disagreement & Confusion?

- **New economy, like Industrial Revolution, is transforming economic & personal life**
 - Work & economic life: Predominance of hi tech & service jobs
 - Working class: Decline of unions
 - Middle class: Decline of employer loyalty
 - For men: From “careers” to “disposable” jobs & workers
 - Personal & family life: Diversity & fluidity in relationships
 - For women: From stability to uncertainty in marriage
 - Market-Domestic Connections: From “separate” to “blurred” spheres
 - Daily: Permeable space & time boundaries between home & workplace
 - Life Course: Unpredictable changes in adulthood
 - U.S. Cultural & Policy Context: Individual self-reliance, weak collective support

Consequences for Family, Work, & Gender Arrangements

- **Decline of predictability in work & marital paths undermines “gender bargain” between breadwinner husbands & caregiver wives**
 - Rise of Breadwinner Moms
 - 40% of U.S. households with children under 18
 - 1/3 are married mothers who earn more than spouse
 - 2/3 are single mothers (divorced & never married)
 - Rise of Optional & Fluid Relationships
 - Singlehood, Cohabitation, Delayed Marriage
 - Divorce & Remarriage
 - Same Sex Unions
- **Creates new uncertainties in work & private life**

Lives vs. Institutions: From Alignment to Conflict

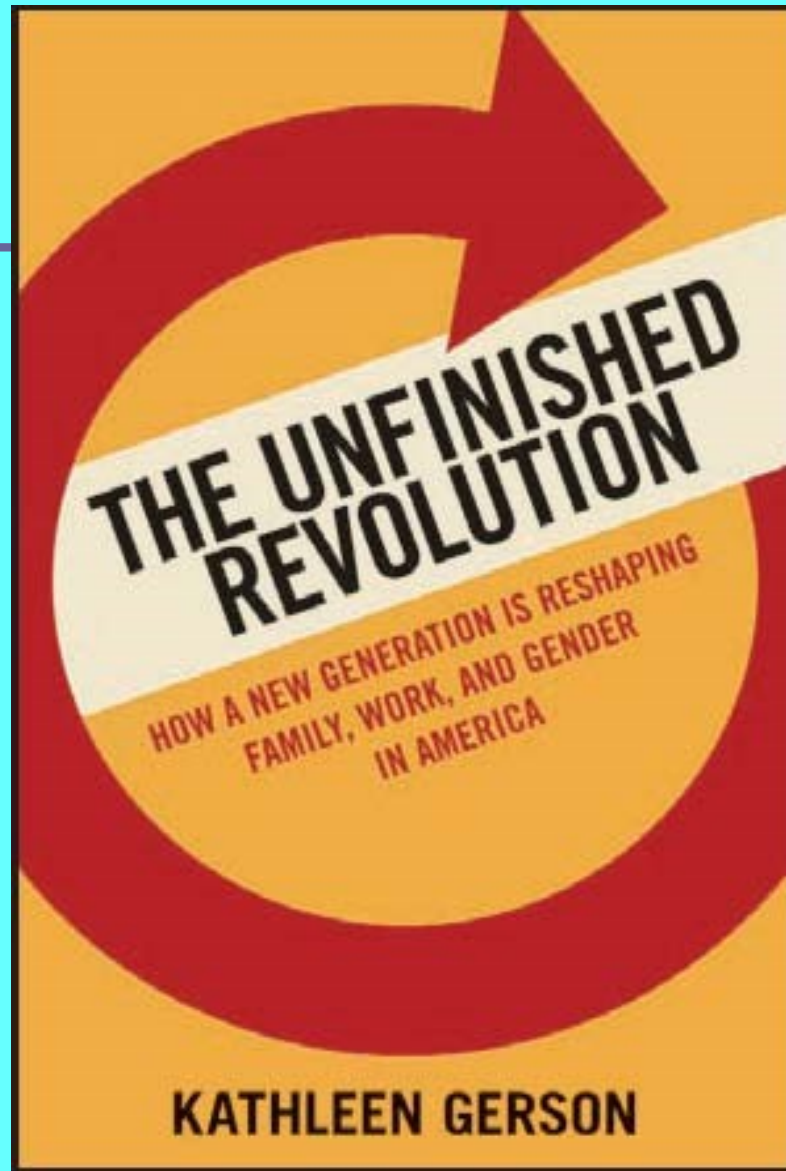
- **New economic & interpersonal uncertainties for individuals**
- **VS.**
- **Rigidity in U.S. work & caretaking institutions**
 - “Ideal worker” structures & norms
 - “Intensive parenting” caregiving structures & norms
 - Weak social safety net & ideal of traditional, self-sufficient families
- **Clash creates contradictions & cross-pressures**
 - Individuals: Tensions between economic self-reliance & care of others
 - Relationships: Tensions over division of work & care

New Dilemmas of Work & Care (not one-directional change)

- **New work-care conflicts**
 - Undermines received practices
 - Requires innovative responses
- **But no institutionalized resolutions or pathways**
 - No clear, socially supported responses
 - Instead, “damned if you do & damned if you don’t” options
- **What are emerging strategies?**
- **What do strategies imply for future?**
- **What policies to needed to achieve work-family integration, gender equality, & family security?**

Mapping the Revolution: Two Studies

- **Children of the Gender Revolution: Growing Up in Changing Families**
 - 120 interviews, ages 18 -- 32; 50% women, 50% men (5% LBGT)
 - Diverse locations in New York area (urban, suburban, ex-urban)
 - Diverse class, racial, & ethnic backgrounds
- **Work & Care in New Economy: Today's Emerging Strategies**
 - 120 interviews, ages 35 – 46; 50% women, 50% men (10% LBGT)
 - Diverse locations in Bay Area & New York (excluding wealthy)
 - Diverse class, racial, & ethnic backgrounds
 - Mix of “old” & “new” jobs (professional & nonprofessional, mainly in tech, service, education, & finance)



**THE UNFINISHED
REVOLUTION**

HOW A NEW GENERATION IS RESHAPING
FAMILY, WORK, AND GENDER
IN AMERICA

KATHLEEN GERSON

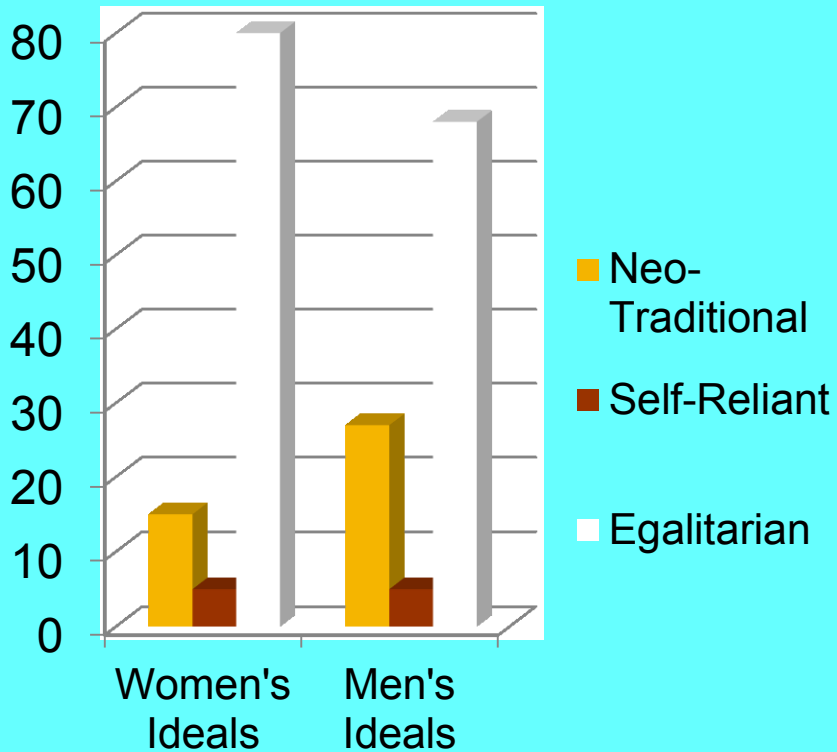
The Contending Options ***(from “The Unfinished Revolution”)***

- **“Neo-traditional”**
 - Enduring commitment to partner
 - Each “specializes” in breadwinning or caretaking (even if both hold paid job)
- **“Self-reliant”**
 - Don’t count on partner (whether single or married)
 - Prepare to “be on own” (whether single, married, or co-habiting)
- **“Gender flexible”**
 - Enduring commitment to partner
 - Personal blending of work & care
 - Egalitarian sharing of earning & caretaking
 - BUT “equality” is vague: equal division? gender-neutral? take turns?

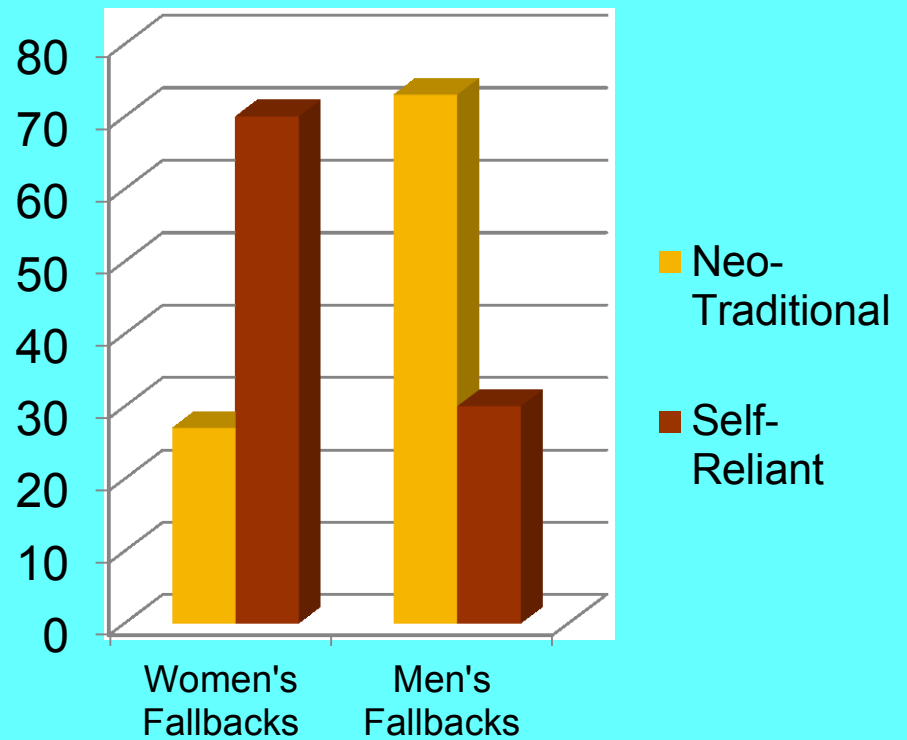
Ideals vs. Fallback Positions

(from "The Unfinished Revolution")

Work-Family Ideals



Work-Family Fallbacks



Emerging Strategies: Clues from New Economy Strongholds

- **How are people responding to gap between ideals & options?**
 - People living at cutting edge of change: Silicon Valley & NY Area
 - Age group facing peak pressures to build work & family commitments
- **Dominant Patterns**
 - Reluctantly Neo-Traditional (about 1/3)
 - Going Solo (about 1/3)
 - Reflects trends toward traditionalism and individualism
- **Emerging Patterns**
 - Uneasy Reversals (15 percent)
 - Egalitarian Compromises (15 percent)
 - Gender transgressive trends, but facing big obstacles

Back to the Future: Reluctantly Neo-Traditional

- **Becoming Neo-Traditional (33%)**
 - Partners aspire to vague visions of equality
 - But economic pressures leave fathers with time-demanding jobs & on-call constantly
 - KYRA: After years of more successful career, followed husband to new job; with young child & one on way, unable to resume own career
 - TIM: Wants to care for new child, but can't cut back or take time off; physician wife pulls back from work, but grows angry
 - **Result:**
 - By default, mothers perform carework, pull back from paid work
 - Fathers overworked, with little family time
 - Tensions in relationships
 - Commitment endures, but equality is undermined

Too Much or Too Little? Navigating Adulthood Without a Partner

- **Going Solo (33%)**
 - Hoped for lasting relationship
 - But job and/or relationship setbacks
 - Left without a committed partner (men & women)
 - Rearing children on own (women)
 - MICHELLE: Facing unplanned pregnancy, partner left & had child on own, but moved from CEO of nonprofit to more secure, less demanding job
 - JASON: Job setbacks & periods of unemployment led to breakups; with lack of secure work, feels “unmarriageable”
 - **Result:**
 - Singlehood in lieu of commitment
 - Single parents doing it all; childless feel disconnected
 - But personal networks help with care & social connection

Trading Places: Uneasy Gender Reversals

- **Reversing Breadwinning & Caretaking (15%)**
 - Couples hoped for equality
 - But women found steady “old economy” jobs & men hit roadblocks or pursued risky job paths
 - 16% of U.S. stay-at-home parents are men
 - DOLORES: Thrived in career; husband followed & became primary caretaker, but his inability to find steady work fuels resentment of both
 - ADAM: Relied on wife’s stable job & modest income to pursue dream of “making it big”; cares for son, but copes with stigma
 - **Result:**
 - Women chafe as sole/primary breadwinner
 - Men struggle as can’t meet “breadwinner” standard
 - Commitment becomes fraught & uncertain
 - Work & care remain “separate spheres”

Trying to Beat the Odds: Egalitarian Compromises

- **Fighting for equality, but overwhelmed & unsure (15%)**
 - Committed partners, each with time-demanding jobs
 - CARMEN: Upward mobility as administrator for series of start-ups, but no time for having children; sharing care of nieces & nephews with spouse
 - DANNY: Split childcare by working at home half-time, but unable to trust in other caretakers; exhausted & uncertain about sustaining 50-50 arrangement
 - ALEC: Has equally work-committed partner, but no time for parenthood
 - **Result:** Choice between
 - Juggling work & care -- exhausting & difficult to sustain
 - Or avoiding care responsibilities

Explaining Divergent Strategies: Common Dilemmas, Different Compromises

- **Beyond “tradition” vs. “individualism,” diverse commitment patterns**
- **Personal preferences cannot explain outcomes**
 - Women & men share egalitarian values: integrating & sharing work & care
- **Instead, exposure to new economic & family uncertainties offer different options**
 - Job insecurity creates high work demands for some & too little work for others
 - Relationship fluidity leaves some without partners & others in relationships with uncertain futures
- **Diverse paths, but difficult trade-offs & conflicts for all**

“Doing It All” vs. “Having It All”: What Works?

- **For most, aspirations subverted by institutional barriers**
 - “Neo-Traditionals” & “Singles”: Irresolvable conflicts between commitment & equality
 - “Reversers” & “Egalitarians”: Dearth of structural & cultural supports undermine efforts to create more egalitarian forms of intimate commitment
- **Small proportion able to achieve egalitarian ideal**
 - Secure, flexible work for both partners
 - Time boundaries at work & support network of caretakers
 - Able to share work & care, without undue sacrifice to self or relationship
 - But these arrangements are rare & difficult to sustain

Where Do We Go From Here?

Politics & Policy in Era of Uncertainty

- **Politics: Reframe the Debate**
 - Inexorable economic & social shifts, not moral decline, are reshaping relationships
- **Policy: Create Institutional Supports for New Gender Bargain**
 - Integration of work & care
 - Flexible, egalitarian relationships
- **Restructured Social Safety Net**
 - Programs: “Use it or lose it” leave policies, publicly supported dependent care, flexible work paths with caregiving timeouts, economic support for transitions
 - Legal protections: Limits on working time, no gender or caregiving discrimination
- **Conclusion**
 - Without institutional realignments, patchwork of inadequate, individualist strategies will impose costs on relationships & society

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