

SEXISM IN AMERICA

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Introduction

In America, as elsewhere, sexism is rampant. While sexism and stereotypes impact both men and women, its affect on women is of primary concern as women are affected more negatively. While progress was made in the 1920's from the Women's Rights Movement to put women legally equal to men, discrimination and gender roles have made universal egalitarianism an entirely unrealized ideal. Still widespread are gender stereotypes, occupational sexism, sexist language, sexist advertising, and sexist humor.

The goal of this paper is to examine some of the potential factors that are related to or guide gender stereotypes toward women, by both men and women. The two factors of interest that we will explore are an individual's level of education, and how frequently an individual attends religious services.

Literature Review

There is ample literature on sexism in America from which we may build on. An indication of the American public's opinion on gender equality is their support for a "qualified woman for president", which has steadily increased nearing unanimity over the decades since the 1930's, only to drop-off somewhat in the 21st century (Erikson 2011, 111-112). While this offers some consultation as to the formal notion of women in positions of power, it unfortunately doesn't shed much light on the more subtle, widespread sexism in America. It's possible that individual's may appear open to the idea of a woman being president, but when tasked with the idea of working as a direct subordinate to a woman or as peers in their own occupation, they regress to more gender stereotypical thinking.

"Research on religion and sexism increasingly points to fundamentalism – an insistence that the Bible is literally true – as an important religious source of prejudice toward women. People associated with more fundamentalist denominations generally display more inegalitarian attitudes toward women than those in less fundamentalist groups" (Peek 1991). Traditional religions appear to justify gender inequality by claiming that they are as divinely mandated (Glick 2002). Thus, it's evident that religiosity has some impact on views toward women, and likely that impact will be a tendency to believe more traditionalist views, namely that women should not have an equal role with men in an occupational setting.

Likewise, it's been found that education amongst other variables are related to sexist attitudes, such as occupational prestige, marital status, and others (Peek 1991). Level of education negatively correlated with hostile sexist attitudes. This can likely be explained by the fact that education systems tend to challenge traditional beliefs and simultaneously afford women increased access to career opportunities. Similarly, educational facilities often overtly express egalitarian ideologies, which surely go along with the notion of gender equality (Glick 2002).

Theory and Hypotheses

We hypothesize that as an individual's regularity in attending religious services increases, so does the likelihood that they do not believe that women should have an equal role to men in the workplace. The theory behind this hypothesis is a near echo of the prior literature: traditional religions tend to contain notions that women and men have a divinely set role in society, and that role for women is primarily not occupational. Thus, it's likely that the leader of these religious ceremonies and likewise the religious texts contain content that portrays exclusively men in roles of power, occupation, or as protagonists while women remain largely in the household without occupation. Due to the fact that exposure to specified gender roles is a driving force in believing and observing those roles, we hypothesize that individuals who attend religious services more regularly and consequently are more often exposed, are more likely to uphold these traditionalist beliefs.

We hypothesize that the converse is true for education. That is, that as an individual's level of education increases, so does the likelihood that they believe that women should have an equal role to men in the workplace. As higher education introduces individuals to egalitarian concepts which should surely increase the chances that students would favor equal representation of women in the workplace, higher education institutions also attempt to practice such concepts themselves, perhaps more successfully than industry. Thus, individuals having attended higher education may have not only been exposed to more concepts of egalitarianism compared to their counterparts, they also may have seen closer instances of the equality in the makeup of their institution.

Data and Methods

Data for this research comes from the National Science Foundation (NSF) funded 2008 American National Election Studies (ANES) Time Series Study, produced by Stanford University and the University of Michigan. This is a raw data set of responses that does not contain or reflect any of the producers/funders opinions, findings, or conclusions. This was a face-to-face, cross-sectional, self administered survey with 2,322 respondents from the United States, conducted between September 2nd, 2008 and November 3rd, 2008 with a 63.7% response rate.

To test our hypothesis, we use a 2008 ANES question that asks respondents to evaluate their opinion on the the role of women in the workplace (our dependent variable). The exact question wording is as follows:

“Recently there has been a lot of talk about women's rights. Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government. (Suppose these people are at one end of a scale, at point 1.) Others feel that a woman's place is in the home. (Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7.) And, of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between, at points 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6. Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?”

As our objective is to determine the fraction of respondents who believe that women and men should have an *equal* (that is, exactly equal) role in the workplace, we dichotomized the variable by recoding all responses other than 1 to be “unequal”, and left the remaining responses unchanged, as “equal”. This is an appropriate recoding because a response of anything other than equal (a “1”) indicates exactly the subtle gender stereotype that we’re trying to uncover. Moreover, all “Don’t know” and “Refused” responses were excluded from the analysis.

The first independent variable of interest is a respondent’s level of education. To measure level of education, we use a 2008 ANES question that has respondents enter the number of grades or grade equivalents (e.g. a response of “14” refers to all of elementary, middle, and high school and two years of college). We recoded the responses to more manageable groups: responses of “8” or less were recoded to “middle school or less”, responses between “9” and “11” were recoded as “some high school”, responses of “12” were changed to “high school graduate”, responses between “13” and “15” were recoded as “some college”, responses of “16” through “17” were

recoded as “college graduate or more”. Lastly, “Missing” responses were also excluded from the analysis.

The second independent variable of interest is a respondent’s frequency of attendance at religious services. To measure this frequency, we use a 2008 ANES question that has respondents select how frequently they attend religious services out of “Every week”, “Almost every week”, “Once or twice a month”, “A few times a year”, and “Never”. No recoding was necessary. “Missing” responses were excluded from the analysis.

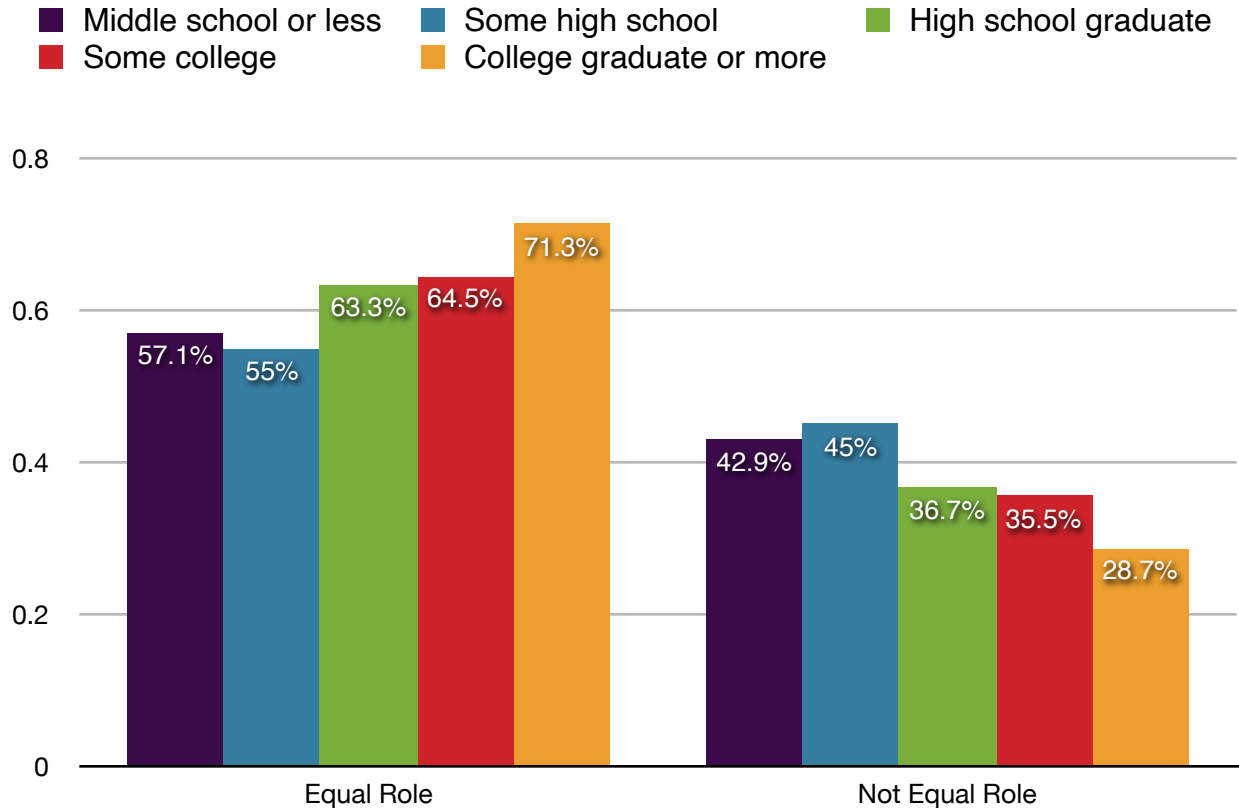
Results and Discussion

For the first independent variable, level of education, the findings aligned well with the hypothesis. Although the relationship is not monotonic (that is, each successive increase of education does not result in a strict increase in support for equality), the

Education’s Effect on Opinion regarding Gender Equality in the Workplace

	Equal Role	Not Equal Role	Totals
Middle school or less	57.1%	42.9%	100%
Some high school	55%	45%	100%
High school graduate	63.3%	36.7%	100%
Some college	64.5%	35.5%	100%
College graduate or more	71.3%	28.7%	100%
Totals	65%	35%	100%

data does support the conjecture that individuals with more education are generally more likely to support the notion that women should play an equal role as men in the workplace. As opinion on gender equality in the workplace is a dichotomous variable, we may comment that out all respondents in our dataset, the median and mode was “equal role” and the mean was 0.65. The following graph also indicates the relatively steady increase in support for equality as level of education increases.



Before additional commentary is made, it is of great importance to first determine whether this relationship could be explained by other, prior variables, which would make the relationship between level and education and support of gender equality spurious. That is, we ask the question: is it possible that both opinions on gender equality and

level of education are caused by another, third variable, and consequently a change in this third variable would demonstrate an apparent, but not de facto, causal relationship between its dependents. Our examination of the two best candidates for such variables, age and gender, failed to wipe out the association. That is, for both genders and all age groups, this relationship manifested itself with similar significance in every category. For both genders, the percent of respondents who believed that women should have an equal role in the workplace increased almost monotonically across education levels, with “college graduate or more” respondents at a percentage point difference of 40 (for male) and 47 (for female) points (note: the difference without the control is of similar strength with a 42 point difference). Likewise, within each age group (“18-30”, “31-40”, “41-50”, “51-60”, “61-older”), the relationship was maintained with similar strength. Thus, we may safely conclude that the relationship is not spurious.

We may note that it’s possible that the individuals with “middle school or less” education could be the reason for breaking monotonicity (that is, the fraction of these individuals that support an equal role for women in the workplace should have been lower and in fact lower than individuals with “some high school” education) because there were so few respondents (less than 3%) who fall into this category, and thus there’s an increased chance for the sample to have high deviation from the true population statistic, compared to the other education levels which have far more respondents.

Now that we have ruled out spuriousness, we can safely examine the strength of the relationship. Using a measure of association, Somer's D, we find that the association is small-moderate (-0.07), however the approximate significance is $.001 < .05$, thus we may conclude that the observed differences are very unlikely to have been produced by random sampling error. This indicates that there is an association between

Frequency of Religious Attendance's Effect on Opinion regarding Gender Equality

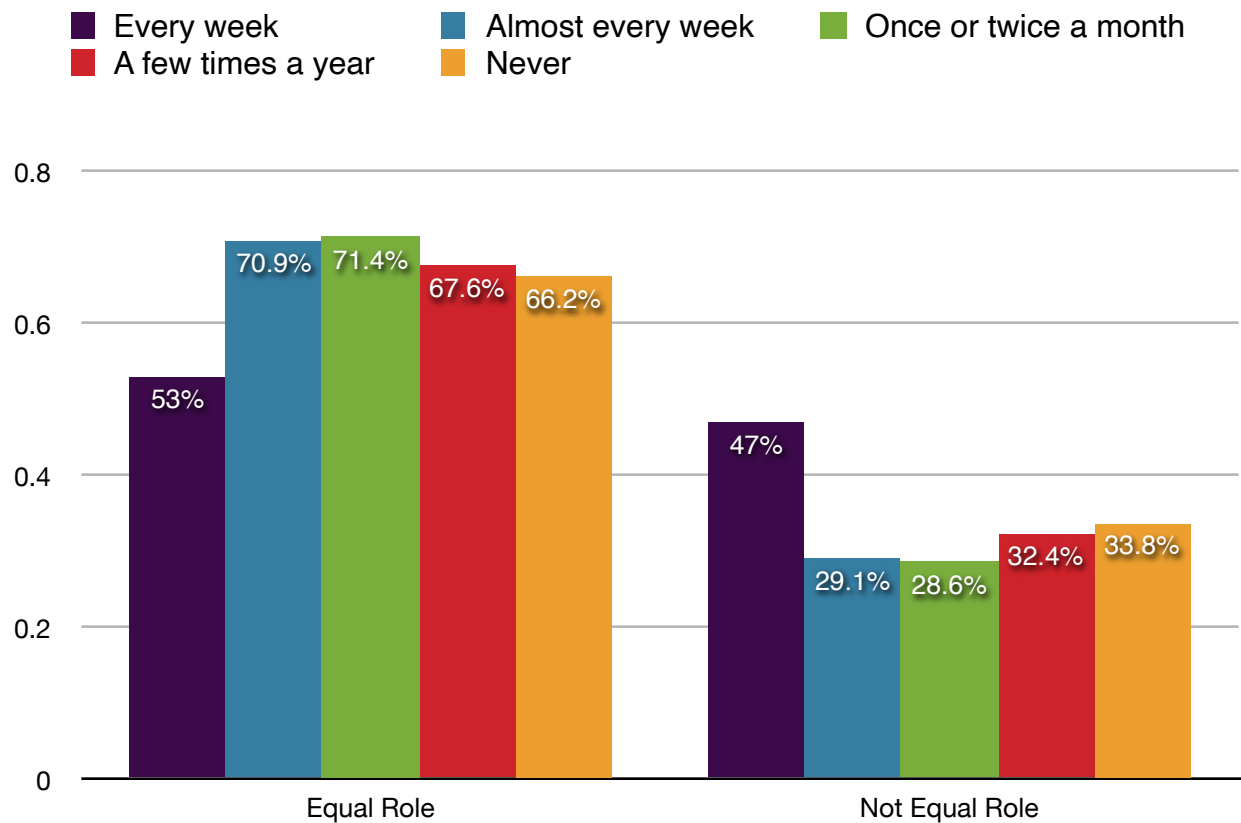
	Equal Role	Not Equal Role	Totals
Every week	53%	47%	100%
Almost every week	70.9%	29.1%	100%
Once or twice a year	71.4%	28.6%	100%
A few times a year	67.6%	32.4%	100%
Never	66.2%	33.8%	100%
Totals	64.8%	35.2%	100%

in the Workplace

level of education and opinion on role of women in the workplace, but simply their correlation coefficient is not very large.

We may now proceed with our second proposed independent variable: frequency of attendance at religious service. We see that, as hypothesized, a relationship does exist and in the correct direction, however it is not as strong as the relationship between education and support for equality of women in the workplace.

Again, before proceeding we must control for our two proposed prior variables: age and gender, to ensure that the relationship between these two variables is not spurious. We find that, again, there is not a significant difference between any of the categories of age nor the categories of gender, so we may proceed with our analysis.



From the above graph, as well as the table, we easily notice that this relationship is not as strong as the relationship between level of education and opinion on equality of women in the workplace. We can note, however, that there is still a clear difference

between each pole of religious service attendance (53% of respondents who attend religious service “every week” believe in an equal role for women in the workplace compared to 66% of respondents who “never” attend religious services). Calculating a measure of association, Somer’s D, we that the association is small (-0.05), even compared to the previous measure of association (-0.07) for level of education. However, yet again the approximate significance is $.019 < .05$, thus we may conclude that the observed differences are unlikely to have been produced by random sampling error.

Conclusion

For the most part, our research and results did support our originally posed hypothesis. However, It’s important to note that neither of the relationships were very strong or strong (based on the absolute value of their measure of association), and thus it would be reasonable to conclude that more research would need to be conducted to reject the null hypothesis that there is no causal relationship between opinion on roll of women in the workplace and level of education/frequency of attendance at religious service. Independent of this result, however, it’s important to reflect on and investigate the behaviors and attributes that may be responsible for sexist attitudes, as once the causes behind sexist attitudes are established, measures can be taken to correct them with the goal of a more egalitarian society.

References

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