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Is Matriarchy the Shape of the Future?

Thursday, January 17, 2008



Some social changes creep along and are barely perceptible. Others are marked by the instantaneous arrival of a new technology, an earthquake, or an earth-shaking event like World War II. Some are foreseen, while others are surprises. Some should have been foreseen.

This is surely the case with one of the most significant social changes of our times — the emergence of a new American matriarchy.

Writing in *Reason* magazine, Jonathan Rauch explains:

Suppose you could memorize only a single demographic number and you set about choosing the one with the most far-reaching implications for change in America. You could do worse than 1.5.

Of course, there are plenty of possibilities: the birth rate, the teen-pregnancy or illegitimacy rate, the percentage of the population that is white or foreign-born, the percentage of elderly. But unpack 1.5 and you have the makings of a social inversion: a turning upside down of the male-dominated order that Americans have taken for granted since—well, since forever. The number 1.5 is, in this case, a ratio. According to projections by the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2017 half again as many women as men will earn bachelor's degrees. In the early 1990s, six women graduated from college for every five men who did so; today, the ratio is about 4-to-3. A decade from now, it will be 3-to-2—and rising, on current trends.

That's right. By 2017 women college graduates will outnumber male college graduates by a ratio of 1.5 — half again as many women. As Rauch acknowledges, no one is quite sure why this is happening, but a look around most major college and university campuses will be enough to verify the trend. Female students now outnumber male students in higher education.

Rauch puts the development into historical context, noting that feminism and other trends — including economic realities — attracted women into the workplace. Since the better jobs went to educated workers, women streamed into the colleges and professional schools, including law and medicine. By the late 1990s, women students actually outnumbered men on many campuses. By 2008, the pattern was both undeniable and advanced.

Rauch is among those who wonder why the rates of young men going to college have not kept pace with female enrollment gains. The job market still favors educated workers — perhaps even more than when large numbers of men entered college ranks decades ago. There is no clear reason why this is so . . . but it is.

As Rauch understands, this will mean huge social changes. “So what we are talking about, in all likelihood, is an America where women are better educated than men and where education matters more than ever,” Rauch explains. “Put those facts together, and you get some implications worth pondering.” That represents an understatement.

In Rauch's words:

A generation from now, the female lawyer with her male assistant will be the cliché. Look for women to outnumber

men in many elite professions, and potentially in the political system that the professions feed. (The election of a female president is a question of when, not whether.)

Women's superior education will increase their earning power relative to men's, and on average they will be marrying down, educationally speaking. A third of today's college-bound 12-year-old girls can expect to "settle" for a mate without a university diploma. But women will not stop wanting to be hands-on moms.

For families, this will pose a dilemma. Women will have a comparative advantage at both parenting and breadwinning. Many women will want to take time off for child-rearing, but the cost of keeping a college-educated mom at home while a high-school-educated dad works will be high, often prohibitive.

While those predictions point to the next decade, Rauch insists that the most basic revolution has already taken place. Thus:

In 2006, according to the Census Bureau, about 27 million American men held a college degree; so did about 27 million American women. This is a tipping point, however; not an equilibrium, because male college graduates tend to be old, and female graduates tend to be young. Among people age 65 and older, men are much more likely than women to be college-educated. Middle-aged men and women are at parity. Among young adults ages 25 to 34 years old, the college gap favors women almost as lopsidedly as it favors men among their grandparents' generation.

Here is the new reality:

In other words, today's young people already live in a world where, among their peers, women are better educated than men. As the grandparents die off, every year the country's college-educated population will become more feminized. In a couple of decades, America's educational elite will be as disproportionately female as it once was male.

The social impact of this revolution is huge. Look, for example, at a classroom of 12-year-olds. Fully one third of the college-bound girls will eventually have to settle for a husband who lacks a college education. As Rauch warns, this may well mean "a cascading series of psychological and emotional adjustments as American society tilts, for the first time, toward matriarchy." More specifically, "What happens to male self-esteem when men are No. 2 (and not necessarily trying harder)? When more men work for women than the other way around?"

The pattern is not limited to the United States. Most of the nations with advanced economies report similar trends.

Some will undoubtedly celebrate these trends. Ideological feminism can only applaud this reversal of history. Yet, truth be known, even many social liberals must find the trend worrisome. Their concern is not the fact that young women are going to college, but that young men are not. What about their own sons?

Christians committed to a biblical model of marriage and gender relations must look to this social revolution with a deeper level of concern. The most significant concern must be the long-term consequences of a new matriarchal world order. While Christians support the cause of higher education, the biblical worldview puts a higher priority upon the rightly ordered family and church. This dramatic social change will only serve to subvert that purpose.

What about our own sons? Are they being encouraged toward education and leadership in the home, the church, and the culture? If not, we will surely reap what we sow. If you talk to the young women on college campuses, you will find that many are asking the same question. Where are the young men?

In reality, most people are likely to experience the intuition that this is not a good development. A look into the future is truly troubling. A look at today's college enrollment is enough to verify that concern. There is something wrong with this picture.

