Changes in Sexual Identities

American society is in the early stages of a very dramatic revolution in the world of work and in its relation to the rest of human life. The foundation for this revolution lies in the development of a relatively stabilized, urbanized, industrialized — or postindustrial as it is now called — middle-class population and culture. Its seeds were the movement of the 1960s, which questioned traditional views of the family, or work, and of our whole value system with its strong emphasis on the economic institution. The youth movement may not have directly revolutionized the “establishment,” but it did raise some questions. The now-adult participants, as well as the youth of the 1970s, are not as heavily committed to hard work and making money nor to upward mobility as were the immigrants and the following two (or more) generations, which adhered to the Protestant work ethic with its puritanical rigidity and saw obvious rewards in pulling themselves out of the ghetto and into the “good life.”

The seeds of the new revolution are also found in the pre-Friedan movement of women out of the isolated home, once the children started or finished grade or high school, and into their own competence-building schooling and/or paid employment. Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, preceded by Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and the less well known Richard LaPiere’s *The Freudian Ethic*, opened fully the questioning of the logic and consequences of the way our society had developed. The effect of the feminist movement is felt far beyond its membership. Recent change-inducing submovements of a variety of forms, including both men’s and women’s consciousness-raising groups, encounter groups, assertiveness training programs, “flexible careers” employment agencies, etc., supported by a mushrooming
of literature in the form of books, periodicals, and pamphlets, are the small plants growing out of these seeds. Also growing is the refusal of many men to be geographically transferred at stages of life which they deem bad for the family — or to be transferred at any stage. The growing divorce rate can also be seen as a revolutionary symptom, as people get out of traditional marriages which stifled them personally, being yet sufficiently unsophisticated and bewildered by all the freedom from constraints to be able to change that marriage creatively instead of trying with a new mate to establish a more fulfilling relationship.\(^8\) The plants of the new social changes are still young, and they must offset centuries of prior change which thrust Europe and America out of the preindustrial societal systems and into their present condition. In order to understand what is happening now, we must examine the previous systems and the past changes.

**Pre-Industrial Europe**

Ariès points out in his *Centuries of Childhood* that life prior to the eighteenth century, at least in western Europe, was very public.\(^4\) There were no distinct lines separating the family from the rest of the home or the community. In the village, social interaction, work, leisure, and political arrangements were made in the road, as people went from one small plot to another, to church, or just out of the homes. Everyone interacted with a variety of others regardless of age or sex, and the work groups consisted of mixed members with a division of labor by age and by sex — although cooperative units were formed when needed. The Nobel prize-winning *The Peasants* by Reymont\(^5\) also describes such a public life in a Polish village, with nonfamily members residing in many homes. This was true, to an even greater extent, in the manor homes. These homes traditionally housed children of other families who served as servants, tutors, scribes, etc., and the large “common room” served many functions at all times of the day and night. Folding tables were brought out at meal time, folding beds at night. Many people were born and died in such rooms.

Shorter\(^6\) finds life in the towns of England or France also very public. Laslett and Wall\(^7\) enumerate all the people living in a baker’s home/shop combination in their book, and many of the new historians cite the work and interaction in shops and streets of both men and women.

Women were members of guilds, according to Oakley,\(^8\) and widows inherited the businesses of their husbands with whom they had worked and managed them with the help of different kinds of workers. Mothers did not rear their children, or at least did not do so alone. Among the upper classes in France, for example, mothers sent infants to wet nurses in villages, and
few people invested much attention or affection in young children because of the high death rate.\textsuperscript{9} Children as young as seven years of age were sent to other homes to be servants, and returned only at about age fourteen. Multiple child-rearers existed at all levels of the whole society; socialization methods differed among classes. Marriage was embedded in a network of relations, and was not considered to be a primary or affectionate bond.\textsuperscript{10}

Early paid labor came in the form of cottage industries, with capitalists farming out raw material to village homes where the wife and children—sometimes with the help of the men—processed it into a finished product. When factories introduced steam and large-scale machinery, all members of the family left the home to work in them, often moving in order to live near the factory.\textsuperscript{11} By then the family had become private, the household structure had developed specialized rooms (with the servants of the upper classes restricted to their quarters), and visitors were admitted only during special hours.

Wars of centralization developed nation-states in Europe, and the breakdown of the power of manor lords facilitated the creation of a nationally motivated mass education system. Ariès claims that childhood as a concept with a set of relations to adults emerged only after the creation of the school system.\textsuperscript{12} In any case, boys (and later, girls) were taken from the home and schooled into a literate national culture. The youths learned skills necessary for marketing themselves to employers, and were thus freed of the power of the patriarchal family line. Simultaneously—and the new historians disagree as to the major factor causing this change—restrictive or so-called protective legislation started moving women out of the factory and into the home to take care of the children. These historians do agree, however, that women lost many rights following the removal of production from the home and their exclusion from the productive sphere of life outside of the home. This loss was particularly strong in societies focusing on the Protestant ethic, which judged work for pay to be more valuable than other effort, and economic success to warrant even harmful adjustment by all other institutions.

By making the focal institution of society the economic one, western Europe and especially the United States developed societies of abundance for most of their members, but at cost to many other aspects of their lives. The older generation was justifiably left behind geographically and culturally during social mobility. Siblings moved in different directions in the social system. Friendship was pushed aside or converted into a mere social companionship which was not allowed to interfere with the man’s work and career. Religion was modified so it would not interfere with the business world, and life became increasingly segmented with separate value and
personality packages. Puritanism ensured that leisure time was spent in "recreation" of energy for the workday and "seriousness of purpose was heightened by strong religious feeling; the average man locked himself in his office and his wife in his home." Even the middle-class home lost its place as a center of societal life; the husband and children returning to it wanted peace, not excitement. Not surprisingly, the role of housewife lost the stature it had had in the previous world.

The nuclear family was freed from control by older generations and siblings from the male family of orientation, but it simultaneously became boxed into a highly interdependent small unit, lacking automatic external support systems. If a man has to go out of the home to make the money by which the home and the family are sustained, and servants no longer exist as an available set of supports (because better pay is available working in other occupations), then someone must stay home to care for the small children. That someone became the wife-mother, isolated from societal life in all but the upper classes by her 24-hour vigil and held responsible for all consequences of her socialization of the children. The burden of total emotional and social support all day long between the mother and the children is reportedly dysfunctional to the mental health of both, as psychologists and sociologists have been saying for years.

The stage of intensive child-rearing is, however, short; by midlife, the American woman faces thirty years of healthy and energetic life with no major function, especially during the approximately fifteen years when she is separated from her husband due to his death, or possibly before that as a result of divorce. In the meantime, the husband has had to make a life-constraining decision about which occupation he will pursue, and he must continue working there, with one or two shifts in his career, until he dies or retires. As Fromm pointed out, the marketing mentality of American society even deprives him of some of the pleasure of retirement, because his worth as a man is measured by what he is worth to employers, and retirement implies that he is no longer worth anything.

By the late 1950s American society had settled down, having absorbed millions of immigrants who accepted the basic value system. Nevertheless, there were tremendous intergenerational struggles as people were socialized into a different type of world than the village, or as the ethnic community fought with their children who wanted to "make it" the American way. An elaborate ideology and value system justified our entire way of life as "natural" with the help of neo-Freudians such as Helene Deutsch. Women were supposed to stay at home contentedly and not be involved seriously in the life outside it. Voluntary associations and volunteer work were permissible, but only if such activities did not interfere with the flow of life at home. Men
were taught to put all their efforts into their jobs, accepting any demands made upon them as an inevitable consequence of a system which paid them for sacrifices, so that they could own homes, cars, and have well-fed and well-clothed families. In order to function this way, they were taught always to protect themselves from others and to be "strong," i.e. never to show physical or emotional weakness.

Social Roles of Americans, Now and in the Future

I began to study American urban women between 1956 and 1966 because I was aware of the tremendous gap between what I observed as a foreigner and sociologist and what I was reading about the family in this country. I came directly from Poland to Champaign-Urbana for high school, received my M.A. at the University of Illinois, and went on to the University of Chicago for a Ph.D. When we finally settled in a suburb of Chicago, I was startled to meet women who were entirely different from those I had been reading about in American books and periodicals. These were the years of Generation of Vipers, The Lonely Crowd, The Organization Man and Modern Woman: The Lost Sex. Although the behavior of young Chicago-area women displayed competence and creativity, their self-definitions were not positive. "I'm just a housewife," was the most frequently given answer to occupational questions. At the same time, these women did not feel right about wanting to go back to work, because they accepted the idea that wives and mothers should stay at home. The double-bind effect, of living in a society which trained them to be competent and then both put them in a role defined as not requiring competence and forbade other roles, took an enormous toll on these women. Society simply did not understand the social forces which made life for them so difficult at three stages: (1) when they suddenly left social roles outside of the home and found themselves in the home alone with a small infant, (2) when they were left with an "empty nest" for varying amounts of time when only halfway through life and without new direction, and (3) when they became widowed.

Despite a complete lack of societal support and understanding, American women began in the 1960s to create their own solutions to these problems. Coffee-klatches provided opportunities for the sharing of solutions, in much the same way that brainstorming sessions do for people in other occupations or work groups. Sharing child-care and housewife activities became commonplace. Spock's book and books by other experts provided greater feelings of competence in the role of mother than were provided by many pediatricians. New subcultures were developing in the suburbs and inner...
city which lessened the heavy pressure of traditional norms. Gradually, wives and mothers were slipping out of the back door of the house, going to school and even to work. That movement has grown considerably since the 1960s, aided by the feminist movement and particularly by the door-opening book, *The Feminine Mystique*, which caught women's imaginations more than any other book that analyzes the ideology rigidifying their lives. Although few women are members of the divergent branches of the feminist movement, its influence on them — and on men — has undoubtedly loosened the mold of the past and will provide the impetus for future revolutionary changes.

In the meantime, some of the hidden hostility between men and women in American society, so apparent to visitors and new members, surfaced. The middle-class, middle-aged man, working hard to earn more money while fearing that his death was around the corner, deeply resented the initial stages and the more vocal branches of the feminist movement which labeled him the "oppressor." The movement has mainly shifted focus to the system within which both men and women are functioning, trying to change its inflexible demands and discriminatory policies. For the most part, men have not joined forces with the women because they are still fearful of their own careers and reputations to a degree which makes them unwilling to challenge the system (despite the benefits they — as well as their wives — could accrue from changes). It will take an immeasurable amount of time before the fears instilled in boys will weaken sufficiently to permit them to go through the painful reexamination of values and goals when they reach adulthood (or at any time, for that matter) which women are now undertaking. It may take another generation of boys growing up with less sexist socialization by self-examining mothers before women and men become willing to join forces to push for a greater balance and flexibility in the life course, and for a change in the values that serve as guides for involvement in social roles. So far, men's sensitivity groups are appearing mainly on campuses, while the business world has focused, not surprisingly, more on encounter groups and assertiveness training.

Thus, the feminist movement — and Betty Friedan is one of the spokeswomen and leaders of this movement — has caused a realization by women that the system must be changed through cooperative effort in order to free life into a variety of time segments, worked out through teamships. People who are reexamining both the relationship between work and other social roles and the rhythm of occupational engagement are finding a variety of solutions to the current problems of men and women. There is no economically insolvable reason for work and other roles to be organized in the way which they currently are in America. Two people can hold a single job more efficiently than can one in a majority of occupations, whether the team
be composed of a husband and wife or two persons with similar training who do not want to work full-time for other reasons but cannot afford part-time pay. Abbott Laboratories has a chemist position which is currently being filled very satisfactorily by two people. Gustafus Adolphus College has split an academic job in a similar manner, and librarianship positions would appear to be naturally suited to this practice.

Flexibility can be introduced differently at many stages of the life course. For example, if a couple decides to share a life together, they can plan the most efficient set of role complexes possible. If both cannot continue school, the man can probably drop out with a higher income from a job than can the woman, who can then continue to be trained for a better-paying and more satisfying occupation than those held by most women. The child-bearing and -rearing stage does not have to be entered by a couple in their teens or young twenties, when it is more logical for the couple to invest in further training, a start at a career and saving money for their years as parents. Careers do not have to have a steady line; in fact, much of the recent research shows that most people do not have steady careers anyway, for a variety of unplanned reasons. When a child is born, the couple can alternate parenting, either by both taking 2-person jobs, or by handling a traditional 2-person single job, held by the mother or the father. There is a variety of ways in which being parents and working can be combined in the early years of a child’s life. In addition, these years when a child is young comprise a very short segment of a person’s life, and other, social roles can be pushed into the background because of the importance of the parental role for both the mother and the father. The isolated household is also dysfunctional, if not harmful, at that time, so joint households or across-threshold cooperative ventures can be initiated without tying people down to such arrangements for decades.

The next stage of the life course can involve both partners and children in a variety of social role complexes, depending not on tradition or happenstance, but on planning with long-range goals and values in mind. Some couples may opt for a heavy concentration of effort on the career of one member; others may find ways of comfortably containing dual career arrangements with high levels of concentration and commitment. A third type of dyad may distribute efforts more evenly among several roles at varying stages of the life course, including enjoying friendships, leisure-time pursuits, contributing to voluntary organizations upon which communities are dependent, parenting, etc.

Higher education has become much more flexible and responsive to a variety of people in the past few years; there are all kinds of students in libraries. The area of societal activity which is only now beginning to open
up occasional and exceptional flexibilities is the economic one, and it is here that basic values and activity patterns must shift in the future as people become less willing to sacrifice other aspects of their selves and social roles for the job and the money it pays. The current organization of work into time slots and occupational packages, with the constant emphasis on the career line (varied as it is within different occupations), has made life rigid to the extent that people are increasingly dissatisfied. We are now experiencing not only a "revolt of the client" but a revolt of the professional and other occupation-holders as well. There is consistent evidence that increasingly competent human beings are, and will be, making demands on the system to change and become more flexible. Organized protests are being supplemented by the less visible ones, such as the patient referral system and the changing patient-doctor relations created in one-to-one interaction.

There have been dramatic changes in the lives of Europeans and Americans in the past few centuries. Some of these are judged by most observers as generally beneficial in that they have increased health and longevity, opened up a variety of resources to a variety of people, and created economically abundant societies. Some of the social roles and relations of these people have suffered, however, from the strong emphasis on the economic institution and the insistence that other institutions adjust to its demands, as well as from the rigidification of work engagement and schedules. The relatively isolated nuclear family, the high-pressured male breadwinner, and the underutilized abilities of women for a major part of their lives are costs (particularly in America) which many people are no longer willing to pay. Various indicators of change are apparent on the American scene and they are apt to grow rapidly in the near future, pushing on the world of work to become more flexible and more evenly balanced in its control over the other social roles of its participants, including all those people who are now discouraged from participating. Changes in interpersonal relations are in greater evidence in America than are changes in the way people are engaged in the large bureaucratic organizations, particularly in those relations where most men, half of the women, and those close to them are now economically dependent.

REFERENCES

1. Of course, there are still large segments of this population who, because of discrimination or recent arrival, are still members of the lower class, not fully urbanized and lacking sophisticated occupational skills; however, they form a smaller proportion of the total than was true, for example, at the turn of the century.


10. Ibid.

11. Oakley, op. cit.


22. Friedan, op. cit.


Response

It was refreshing to hear Lopata discuss something that I have been talking about for a long time, while not always finding the justification I needed for saying some of the things I do about librarianship. Sometimes I have a tendency to annoy people by trying to reduce librarianship to humanism, but I feel very strongly that this is where its base must rest if it is going to be a part of the society we are talking about.

Shera and several other library historians have told us that libraries were born in an age when the household was formed for a specific economic purpose. At that time, people's roles in life were generally predetermined and it was very difficult to achieve an upward mobility. It was hard to come by the means for role change. The education system in this society took a long time to get going, and libraries only slowly developed a reputation for being the university of the poor, as well as being the continuing university for the well-to-do. Now, people's roles in society have changed, as Lopata has indicated; society's needs also have changed to the point that libraries are saying: "I guess we are going to be extinct any moment now!" "We're about to drop through the cracks in civilization!" "Close the door and let's all go home!"

Such remarks are all hogwash. It is not true! Society needs information now more than it has ever needed it before, and it needs it in the form of stored knowledge. Knowledge comes in multiple forms, as we know. To say that the library is solely an institution of education, or solely an institution of recreation, is to misapply what society is asking of libraries. Society is asking us to recognize, as Lopata has said, that people want to be their own competent contenders with life. There was a time when a doctor would treat his patient by applying spider webs and poultices; similarly, in Gone with the Wind, "run and get the hot water and lots of sheets" set the scene for "birthin' babies." Everyone expected to contend with the problem.

It is very difficult for most human beings to communicate today with a doctor. It is extremely difficult for human beings to communicate with lawyers. It is extremely difficult for human beings to communicate with each
other, because we are a multilevel society based on a multiplicity of values. We are told, for example, that national values are changing, yet in order to change our old values, we need to measure ourselves against the values we know and the values being proposed. We do not like to do this in public, for we have been conditioned to believe that life is no longer public, it is private. We hide in our houses and apartments, and in our automobiles with the windows rolled up so that we can talk to ourselves, but not to others. We listen to radios talk to us; we allow television to show us things and talk to us. We don’t talk back. We need two-way communication and one of the few places to find it is in the library, because the library allows us to carry on a dialogue with a book, and indulge our insecurities without embarrassment and in privacy.

As Lopata pointed out, career patterns are not consistent. Life itself is not consistent. We never know from one day to the next what problems we will have to face. We do not know what changes are going to take place, and if we do not have the ability to access the information we need to deal with change, we go down for the count. All of us know people who have been unable to cope. We have known of entire societies that have been unable to cope. Therefore, we must build change into institutions at the same time that we are encouraging change in human beings.

A fair amount of research in the area of speech communication points out quite clearly that we cannot exist without communicating. We start communicating almost from the very first moment of life. We receive messages, send messages, and miss messages. We do this as long as we draw breath . . . and there is even speculation that we do it thereafter. Once we realize that there is this consistency of communication need and demand, it becomes easier to comprehend why human beings become so frustrated, hurt and withdrawn when they cannot fully exercise the joy of communication, i.e. when they cannot find the things they need to know in order to function. So when we say that we need to push institutions to change, we need to accept wholeheartedly the fact that we ourselves change every moment.

The words spoken at the beginning of this institute cannot be retrieved. They have gone into time and are going to stay there, and no amount of wailing or editing of the transcription is going to change the communication that took place here in these last few moments. We are all in a continuum of time; to try to go back and change things in the past is futile, but to accept the fact that we are changing now, and will change tomorrow, is pertinent.

Someone asked earlier this week if the library was an agent of change because of its seemingly natural stance as a knowledge-transfer agent. Libraries are effective change agents when they meet a need; neutrality doesn’t
work. There are some notable examples in literature. I still think that one of the most moving sections of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is the discussion of what the library did for the man. I think some of the most moving experiences I have had are those of people honoring me by coming to the library to ask me to help them develop some knowledge they need. Some of the knowledge people sought was of the kind librarians downgrade, simply because they did not realize they were being communicated with as a prohuman. One woman who had lost her two children in a concentration camp wanted to read every book in a series that appeared after the war recounting concentration camp life. Several of the staff tried to thwart her in this, saying that she was hurting herself and she was indulging herself. She was not. She was exorcising her fears and her sense of guilt because she was not able to save her children. She had every right to this knowledge transfer. She got it, and eventually found the peace for which she had searched.

This is the kind of knowledge transfer I am talking about. It happens at the academic level, too. I see it with my students who act as transfer agents in their social science courses when they are assigned research. They are sent off to discover what knowledge might exist that the professor is looking for on which to base research, and where it might be found. The first few ventures of this exchange between the student and the client is one of fear and distrust on both sides. The exercise ends up with both the client and the student congratulating each other on a successful information transfer, and hoping they may do it again soon, because they both learned, profited, and found a kind of peace and comfort.

Libraries are changing, and they help people change. They are agencies of social justice, and they should be. It is very difficult for librarians to accept this. It is too easy just to sit back and not to worry about justice, or about what materials blindly handed out at a library can do to individuals, or about the value of the individuals themselves. Such librarians do not try to help people; they just dispense whatever pills happen to be on the shelf. We all want justice, and are demanding a nation with a new, hard set of ethics. I think the ethics of librarianship is something to be very proud of — when practiced, not preached.

Shera used the words, “the clients of libraries are the elite.” In our eyes, the elite of librarians are those who understand us, who understand the cataloging system (God help them), who understand why we are there in spite of ourselves. I have seen some very adroit elite outfox many a librarian who was spread-eagled over his or her collection. I have also seen many people, who had no intention of being the library elite, find the knowledge, peace and joy they were looking for in the library in spite of the librarian and the system.
When the library is functioning as a change agent, as a social justice agency, the client discovers that the library is merely there to facilitate the individual's confidence in whatever is needed. There are no strings attached — no exams, no tests, no certificates to carry under your arm. It is what goes on in your mind that counts. Thus, the library elite are the people who accept the library with joy and constant use for the rest of their lives.

When we say we are trying to reach out, that is what we are trying to reach out for: to pass on to people the ability to understand for themselves who they are. One of the best places they can find it is in searching for themselves in the materials that are available in libraries.

I don't want to be a doctor; I just want to feel that when I need medical help, I'm getting justice. I don't want to be a lawyer; but I want justice, and I can't get it if I don't know how, when or where to look for it. If one can accept some of the premises offered by Lopata and evaluate them in terms of the social changes that we know have taken place, then it will be understood that it is people we are talking about, people who need to be communicated with, and who need only to find the knowledge they want — whether it be to bake a cake, build a house, discover a new idea, or find peace.