

The Tolerant Majority

While culture wars continue to rage over gay marriage, over the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, and over adoption by LGBT couples, a quieter sea change is under way in the average American's perceptions of the LGBT community. The leaders of this change are, perhaps surprisingly, straight men.

According to a new report by Gallup, the percentage of adults stating that gay and lesbian relations are morally acceptable has now crossed the 50 percent mark, the first time that this symbolically freighted divide has been crossed. The growing acceptance of the LGBT community, which has accelerated since 2006, has been driven almost entirely by changes among men and, in particular, men under the age of 50. Although women are in general more tolerant than men, we now find that men are more likely than women to view gay and lesbian relations as morally acceptable. There is also evidence of increasing tolerance of LGBTs among Catholics and political moderates.

What does this mean for the struggles of the LGBT community to achieve equal rights? Because the public is now evenly split on LGBT issues, the short-term expectation is of continuing pitched battles over such matters as gay marriage. But if the momentum for equal rights continues to build, then the currently contentious period may ultimately come to be viewed as something of a last stand for oppositional groups.

Lydia Saad. 2010. "Americans' Acceptance of Gay Relations Crosses the 50% Threshold." Washington, D.C.: Gallup, Inc. Available at: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/135764/Americans-Acceptance-Gay-Relations-Crosses-Threshold.aspx>

Motherhood: A Remedy for Female Crime?

The conventional view among Americans is that early pregnancy derails teenage girls and takes them down a difficult and rocky road. In some circles, the teenage mother has become a popular symbol of delinquency and irresponsibility, the classic cautionary tale of a life gone wrong. In the face of these dire warnings of a life in ruin, it's worth asking the radical, counterintuitive question: Is there any evidence that early pregnancy can in fact serve as a catalyst for positive behaviors?

Indeed it can. According to a recent study by Derek Kreager, Ross Matsueda, and Elena Erosheva, motherhood in fact *reduces* criminal and delinquent activities among young women who were predisposed to criminal behavior. By following a unique sample of low-income women in Denver over an eleven-year period, Kreager and his colleagues find that women at risk of delinquency and drug use experienced significant declines in these behaviors following the transition to motherhood. How might such a life change occur? There's a wealth of ethnographic evidence suggesting that new mothers experience a shift in priorities, an increased wariness of taking risks, and a new commitment to refraining from nightlife.

It is no doubt an overly radical view to turn conventional sensibilities on their head and advocate for more teenage pregnancy. Benefit may nonetheless be had by letting teenagers who are already mothers in on a bit of a secret: Namely, that the new road upon which they've embarked, while inevitably rocky, can also be a positive one.

Derek Kreager, Ross Matsueda, and Elena Erosheva. 2010. "Motherhood and Criminal Desistance in Disadvantaged Neighborhoods." *Criminology*, 48(1), 221–258.

Temporary Work as a Temporary Fix

For less-skilled workers trying to get a foothold in the labor market, temporary work is sometimes sold as a means of establishing connections with employers, building social networks, and gaining skills that will ultimately lead to permanent employment. But does temporary work actually fulfill this promise in practice?

According to new research by economists David Autor and Susan Houseman, the long-term effect of temporary jobs is not all that it's advertised to be. Their research, which was based on Detroit's Work First program, exploited a design feature within that program in which some low-income clients were assigned to contractors who relied on temporary

work assignments, while others were assigned to contractors who relied on long-term jobs. The key finding was that temporary jobs failed to improve, and sometimes even hurt, earnings and employment outcomes in the two years following placements. The clients assigned to long-term placements, on the other hand, experienced better employment outcomes in the following years and also higher earnings, approximately \$500 more per quarter.

Why do temporary jobs fail to deliver? The main problem appears to be that temporary work leads to unproductive job churning; it leads workers into a short-term market, and it's difficult for them to then transition into the long-

term market. The temporary job is in this sense just a temporary fix.

David H. Autor and Susan N. Houseman (forthcoming). "Do Temporary-Help Jobs Improve Labor Market Outcomes for Low-Skilled Workers? Evidence from 'Work First'." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*.



The \$100 Safety Net

Is it really a “mancession”? Although the popular press has focused on especially deep job losses among men, there is good reason to be concerned about the effects of the recession on women too, especially Black and Hispanic women. The difficulties that women face become apparent when one goes beyond the usual job and income data and examines wealth data.

According to a new report by Mariko Chang, women of color are too often left holding the short end of the stick when it comes to wealth. If one excludes the value of motor vehicles (which are an illiquid form of wealth), Chang finds that single non-Hispanic White men had a median net worth in 2007 of \$43,800, a respectable showing. What about the median net worth of Black and Hispanic women? \$100 and \$120, respectively. Worse yet, a full 45 percent of women of color held either no wealth or negative wealth in 2007. Although Black and Hispanic men are also deeply disadvantaged (relative to their White male counterparts), their median wealth hovered around \$8,000–\$9,000 in 2007. And thus they are at least better positioned than Black and Hispanic women to cope with the shocks meted out by the recession.

If deeper job losses among men suggest a “mancession” moniker, Chang’s research provides a useful corrective. Men are better positioned to cope with the adverse consequences of unemployment and income shocks. Women, on the other hand, and especially women of color, occupy a more fragile economic position.

Mariko Chang. 2010. “Lifting as We Climb: Women of Color, Wealth, and America’s Future.” Oakland, CA: Insight Center for Community Economic Development.

Communities on the Move

In policy circles, there is a growing philosophical divide between (1) practitioners who favor *family-level interventions* oriented toward improving the situation of families in poverty and (2) practitioners who favor *community-level interventions* oriented toward improving conditions within high-poverty communities. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which supplements the earnings of low-wage workers, may be understood as a classic example of a family-level intervention. By contrast, the Harlem Children’s Zone is the signature community-level intervention, proceeding as it does by blanketing a high-poverty community with resources intended to assist its residents.

In evaluating the community-level approach, one naturally cares whether residents of the targeted communities frequently move out of those communities because such high-frequency movers may not fully profit from place-based investments. But just how prevalent is residential mobility in low-income communities? With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, researchers at the Urban Institute sought to take on this question by following residents over three years as they moved in and out of ten communities across the country. The striking finding: Nearly half the residents in the ten poverty-stricken communities moved out of the target neighborhoods within three years. The study also showed that when a neighborhood did improve or decline, this was often the result of mobility processes that simply changed the mix of poor and nonpoor residents. The communities that showed improvement, for example, often secured such gains not by furthering the fortunes of their stable residents but by successfully retaining or bringing in more well-off families.

These results suggest that place-based initiatives should be attentive not just to the stayers but also to the movers. The increasingly popular place-based initiatives may prove to be yet more successful if they can find ways to hold onto residents or, failing that, find ways to assist the many out-migrants before they leave.

Claudia Coulton, Brett Theodos, and Margery A. Turner. 2009. *Family Mobility and Neighborhood Change: New Evidence and Implications for Community Initiatives*. Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute.

Should We Shoot for the Stars?

It’s no easy task for youth to succeed these days. If a high school student wants to get into college, let alone a prestigious college, lore has it that she or he must now demonstrate leadership potential, participate intensively in extracurricular activities, become involved in the community, take a rigorous course load, and deliver excellent grades to boot. The expectations that youth now face are arguably at an all-time high. What happens, then, to the vast swaths of youth being told to “reach for the stars” but who then fall short? Does falling short lead to stress, despair, and related mental health problems?

John R. Reynolds and Chardie L. Baird provide fresh evidence on this question. Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, they show that unmet expectations are indeed associated with stress and a higher risk of depression in adults. But they further find that such stress is not caused by the *gap* between expectations and achievement. The stressor is instead the actual low attainment. That is, most students show a tendency toward “adaptive resilience,” whereby they drop unrealistic goals in favor of more attainable ones.

The story is accordingly simple: We’re stressed when we don’t do well. Although pushing all kids to “shoot for the stars” may be unrealistic, the good news is that at least it doesn’t cause any extra mental health problems by virtue of generating unmet expectations.

John R. Reynolds and Chardie L. Baird. 2010. “Is There a Downside to Shooting for the Stars? Unrealized Educational Expectations and Symptoms of Depression.” *American Sociological Review*, 75(1), 151–172.