Chapter 8. Disputed Ideals: Ideologies of Domesticity and Feminist Rebellion

For at least the past 150 years the popular belief that women and men should have distinctive lives and identities has strained against the also popular belief that all people should be treated equally. Always paying heed to the prevailing moral climate, shifting ideals of feminine domesticity have steadfastly defended women's dependence on men. Using a simple extension of the republican ideals of equality embraced by the American Revolution, the ideals of sexual equality (feminism) have recurringly challenged the justice of women's dependence. Other values and beliefs also have affected people's understanding of gender and the differential treatment of women and men. But these two contending ideals stand out because they directly concerned people's most fundamental assessment of women's roles.

The uneven history of these two competing ideals has exhibited the complex linkages between sex inequality and the ideology of women's place. To a large degree, the prominent ideas have simply reflected women's contemporary status and the social conditions that produced it. Still, these ideas have also played a role in the decline and in the persistence of gender inequality. Historical comparison shows that the ideology of female domesticity has routinely changed to fit the conditions of women's subordination. Once accepted, however, the ideal of female domesticity has increased women's collaboration in the maintainance of inequality. These ideas made each woman willing to support the conditions that kept all women disadvantaged. Because women's role has seemed to include some advantages that mask the impact of its much greater disadvantages, people have often perceived women's social status as complex and ambiguous. This ostensible ambiguity of women's circumstances has magnified the influence of ideology on people's assessment of the sexual division of labor. Moreover, ideology also helped to sustain women's inferiority by consistently defining socially legitimate household responsibilities for women. Countervailing these beliefs, the meritocratic ideals promoted by the bureaucratic economy and state, as discussed in Chapter ?, have progressively reduced the credibility of ideas legitimating gender inequality. Furthermore, as women's status has risen, the support for each successive egalitarian or feminist ideology increased while acceptance of domestic ideologies declined. These egalitarian ideas have propelled and directed women's efforts to improve their status.

Two unremitting and fundamental conflicts in American society have propelled the histories of these competing ideologies. Women and men have

battled endlessly over their relationships and their relative social standing. Simultaneously, the economic and political processes that relentlessly pulled this society toward growth, change and adaptation have fought a constant tug of war with the institutions and vested interests that mulishly dragged their feet. The resources and opportunities derived from economic and political organization largely governed the outcomes of the direct exchanges between the sexes, linking the histories of these two enduring conflicts.

By comparing the histories of these competing ideologies, we will see that beliefs deserve neither simple blame for the persistence of inequality nor simple praise for its decline. Not quite cause and not quite effect, each ideology has served as a medium through which people have identified interests and decided how to act. Thus, although ideology did not cause inequality's persistence or its decline, neither of these opposing processes would have looked the same without the mediating role of ideology.

The Problem of Ideology

In his allegory describing the prisoners confined forever in a cave, knowing objects of the outside world only through the shadows they cast on the wall, Plato painted one of the most enduring and powerful images in Western culture. Deprived of a chance to see things directly, the prisoners created a false knowledge of the world in which only shadows existed. The shadows were their truth. If someone from the outside world were to describe three dimensional reality with colors and depth, they would meet with derision and disbelief from the prisoners.

Plato's images have found a new canvas in modern social analysis's concern with ideology. Plato devised his allegory to illustrate the ambiguous position of the accomplished philosopher. Philosophy could give him (no women would reach these heights) a new dimension of insight. But a philosopher could not expect ordinary people to easily accept these insights. Modern social analysts often find themselves in a similar position. Social structures, particularly inequality, continually produce ideas about social life that distort and disguise reality. Some of the foremost contributions of social analysis have been successful efforts to discover and uncover these ideas.

Much of the literature on women and sex inequality has pursued this tradition by focussing on popular beliefs. Authors have tried to lay bare the popular ideas that disguise and justify women's subordination to men. This effort to reveal the social construction of ideas about gender has implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) granted great weight to these ideas' influence. The popular works that launched modern feminist analysis such as Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* (1963),

Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970), Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Janeway's *Man's World, Woman's Place* (1971), and Mitchell's *Woman's Estate* (1971)--all emulating de Beauvoir's earlier classic, *The Second Sex* (1949)--argued that the ideology of male dominance and female subordination supports gender inequality, and may be a primary cause of it. Similar perspectives have appeared in much of the scholarly literature on gender inequality, including work on attitudes,[161] sex role socialization,[162] economic and labor history,[163] women in professions,[164] language,[165] political theory,[166] the history of the family,[167] contraception and abortion,[168] deviance,[169] masculinity,[170] culture, and science. In short, the literature on women's status has shown widespread agreement that ideology plays a crucial role in gender inequality.

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[161]Bullough, Vern L.; *The Subordinate Sex: A History of Attitudes Toward Women*; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973. Lipman-Blumen, Jean; *Gender Roles and Power*; Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984. Rothman, Sheila M.; *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present*; New York: Basic Books, 1978

[162]Weitzman, Lenore J. "Sex-role Socialization: A focus on Women." In *Women: A Feminist Perspective*, ed. Jo Freeman (3rd edition), pp. 157-237. Palo Alto: Mayfield, 1984.

[163]Kessler-Harris, Alice; "Stratifying by Sex: Understanding the History of Working Women;" Pp. 217-242 in *Labor Market Segmentation*, eds. Richard C. Edwards, Michael Reich, and David M. Gordon; Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1975. Matthaei, Julie A.; *An Economic History of Women in America*; New York: Schocken Books, 1982.

[164]Epstein, Cynthia Fuchs; *Woman's Place: Options and Limits in Professional Careers*; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970.

[165]Lakoff, Robin; *Language and Woman's Place*; New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

[166]Okin, Susan Moller; *Women in Western Political Thought*; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

[167]Degler, Carl N.; *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present*; New York: Oxford University Press, 1980. Goode, William J.; *World Revolution and Family Patterns*; New York: Free Press, 1963.

[168]Gordon, Linda; *Women's Body, Women's Right*; New York: Grossman, 1976. Luker, Kristin; *Abortion & the Politics of Motherhood*; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

[169]Schur, Edwin M.; *Labeling Women Deviant*; New York: Random House, 1984.

[170]Pleck, Elizabeth H., and Pleck, Joseph H., eds.; *The American Man*; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980. Rotundo, E. Anthony; "Body and Soul: Changing Ideals of American Middle-Class Manhood, 1770-1920;" *Journal of Social History* 16 (no. 4, 1983):23-38.

When trying to make sense of sex roles and statuses, most ordinary women and men also will give *beliefs* great weight. Consider some replies to the question, "Why do women have a different status and role than men?" "People believe that men are better leaders." "Everyone believes that women should take care of babies." "My parents always thought my brother should have a career and I should have a husband." "Well, people are just doing what they think they're supposed to." "Things are different now because people no longer believe women should just stay at home with the kids." We are all familiar with statements like these, indeed most of us can recall making them. But do statements like these expose insight or confusion about the processes that determine the relations between the sexes?

Beliefs appeal to common sense efforts to explain social behavior, because we feel that people's actions normally reflect their beliefs. And we know that many of the beliefs that seem to rule behavior, such as the idea that men should provide an income for their families, have a life of their own within the culture. They confront us already formed, possessing an aura of validity and legitimacy guaranteed by their widespread acceptance and by our inability to invent or adopt new or different ideas about which we can feel the same confidence.

By tacitly rejecting moral or biological arguments, the widespread reliance on beliefs to explain social arrangements expresses a modern mentality. In pre-modern cultures people would be much more likely to explain the relations between the sexes by referring to their biological natures or mentioning the will of the gods. Such ideas have not, of course, died out, but they have lost ground to explanations emphasizing beliefs. When people attribute social patterns to beliefs, they adopt a secular attitude, one that implicitly assumes things could be different. Beliefs, unlike biology or the gods' will, are understood to be changeable. By using beliefs to explain social patterns, people accept a modern insight about society advocated by the early sociologist Emile Durkheim. In his work he introduced and emphasized the idea of the "collective consciousness," contending that "the set of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a single society . . . forms a determinate system that has its own life."[171] A strong scholarly tradition therefore supports the importance of belief systems in the explanation of social structures.

Yet, another influential perspective in sociology claims that causality really works in the opposite direction. Beliefs, it stresses, do not spring forth into the world as Athena emerged from the head of Zeus. The popular reasoning that readily attributes sex roles and statuses to beliefs falls short because the beliefs

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[171]Lukes, Steven, *Émile Durkheim: His Life and Work*, New York: Harper & Row, 1973, p. 4 (quotation from Durkheim's *Division of Labor*).

too must be explained. Usually tracing its lineage to Karl Marx's theoretical exposes of capitalist society, this strong theoretical tradition maintained that beliefs reflect social arrangements but do not cause them. While beliefs about society are produced by prevailing practices and social relations, this tradition stresses, popular beliefs do not represent social circumstances accurately. Distortion enters belief systems because social organization is difficult to understand, yet people must create mutually understood assumptions and interetations to conduct their interactions and relationships. A complex social process builds popular beliefs from incomplete perceptions and the biases of varied self-interests. The distortions in popular beliefs emphasize the interests and experiential limits of higher status groups. According to this approach, popular beliefs about differences between women and men mirror rather than cause their inequality, although the distortions that legitimate inequality may help preserve it.[172]

These two key perspectives have shaped the principal issues addressed in the literature on ideology's role in social change. They also guide the major questions about ideology's role in the history of gender inequality. Have beliefs about differences between the sexes produced inequality? Did new beliefs about women's rights lead to inequality's decline? Or has causality worked in the opposite direction? Could common beliefs about differences between women and men merely reflect women's social inferiority? And did changes in those ideas merely reflect changes in women's status?

In his allegory of the cave, Plato did not concern himself with the effects of the cave dwellers' misbegotten image of the world. To address our issues, we must do just that. Did the interests of men control the shapes of the shadows, so that false ideas led both sexes to pursue and accept inequality? Or could some of the cave dwellers guess the real shapes of life from the interplay of shadows and lead the others out of the cave? The history of the opposing ideals of female domesticity and gender equality shows that the answers to these questions defy any simplistic assumptions.

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[172]A good treatment of the ideals of female domesticity following this logic appears in Margolis, Maxine L.; *Mothers and Such: Views of American Women and Why They Changed*; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Reconstructions of the Ideology of Female Domesticity

Since the rise of the market economy in the United States, the ideology of women's place in society has focused on domesticity. The principal division between the roles of women and men has concerned women's association with children and the home and men's association with paid work and public activity.[173] The market economy made employment (rather than property ownership or lineqge) the primary determinant of status differences among ordinary people. Thereafter, men's economic opportunities and freedom from domestic responsibility made them socially superior to women. Women's domesticity reinforced this advantage. The ideals of female domesticity fit this division of labor. But standards of living and family organization have changed dramatically over the past 150 years. The reality and the idealization of women's domesticity have had to change equally.

Because middle class culture reigned over American society, the middle class ideals of women's place were most influential. Over the past 150 years the composition of the middle class changed. Once it mainly included small businessmen and autonomous professionals. Increasingly, managers, bureaucrats, and employed professionals became more common. While its composition changed, the middle class's cultural preeminence remained intact. The upper classes could ignore middle class morality. The lower classes often found middle class ideals unattainable. But middle class ideology was the common standard against which people in all groups judged their attainments. Therefore, we will focus on the middle class's ideology of women's place.

While middle class ideals remained preeminent, the content of those ideals changed with circumstances. Economic development dramatically changed the work people had to do both within the home and in the economy.[174] The lives of modern women, chauffeuring children and husbands about the suburbs, for example, contrast sharply with those of affluent women a century earlier, supervising servants making clothes and food. Only by repeated reformulation did the ideology of woman's role continue to fit the practical realities of people's lives.

The idealization of women's domesticity went through three transformations during the past two centuries. The ideal of true womanhood arose in the first half of the nineteenth century. The ideal of a *professionalized* housewife became

[173]Zaretsky 1976; Tilly and Scott 1978; Degler 1980.

[174]Chafe 1972; Kessler-Harris 1982; Cowan 1983.

prominent at the beginning of the twentieth century. And the ideal of a *feminine mystique* combining domestic joy and duty emerged after World War II.[175]

THE IDEAL OF VIRTUOUS DOMESTICITY

Between 1820 and 1860, a *cult of true womanhood* (as Barbara Welter [1966] termed it in her classic article) arose among the middle classes.[176] Before this, patriarchal ideology had idealized the absolute authority vested in fathers as the heads of communal household enterprises. But, the thriving young capitalist economy created ever more industrial and commercial firms which were separated from private households. This broke the old pattern in which men and women worked together in family enterprises attached to their homes. Middle class men worked in these new firms as owners, professionals, and managers (although this last occupation was just beginning) while their wives stayed home. With the *separation of spheres,* women and men began to spend long periods of time away from the observation and influence of each other. As women's former status as members of a common enterprise disappeared, a new cultural ideal arose, the *true woman,* consistent with women's distinctive new identity.

The ideals of true womanhood gave women special tasks and credited them with special virtues. A *true woman* spent her time raising her children and managing a household. At first, this meant taking over all the tasks left in the household after the rise of the market economy. Over time, the middle class household evolved into a sanctuary of private life,[177] in which women created and preserved a haven from the public world.

The ideal true woman displayed religious piety, sexual purity, wifely submissiveness, and content with her domestic seclusion. These ideals gave a moral justification for securing wifely subordination in the husband's absence. Only women could realize these virtues. Only women with these virtues could claim the esteem of the community. These standards idealized and justified women's restriction to the home. They won acceptance in the midst of economic development which forced anyone seeking income to find employment outside the household.

While these ideas served middle class men's interests in controlling their wives and keeping them at home, religious institutions and the popular press also

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[175]Like most periodizations, the categorization of these transformations is a bit arbitrary. While it is historically accurate and useful for the purposes of this analysis, other divisions might be preferable for other problems.

[176]See also Cott 1977; Zaretsky 1976; Hall 1979; Degler 1980; Margolis 1984; Cowan 1983; Strasser 1982.

[177]Sennett 1978; Zaretsky 1976.

promoted them. Ministers preached the virtues of true womanhood from the pulpit, clerics wrote endless popular religious tracts about them, and women's magazines filled their pages with a stream of articles advising ladies of their proper goals. In this period religion dominated moral life. The churches' adoption of this ideology enhanced its moral authority.

The ideals of virtuous domesticity appealed to women's support by offering them a compensatory moral status. This made it seem as if the ideals served their interests. The ideology promised the *true woman* a moral ascendancy over her husband. This gave her a resource to use against his economic and political superiority.[178] It also obscured women's exclusion from public life by redefining it. The ideology argued that women really benefited by escaping the arduous obligations imposed on men.

Thus, the *cult of true womanhood* idealized virtuous domesticity in a way that reconciled women's continued subordination with the new economic conditions. It arose because changes in the economy forced a reorganization of middle class gender roles. The old patriarchal ideology could not adapt to these changes.

The use of the phrase *true woman* to label the new ideal in the 19th century reflects the contemporary importance of distinguishing and restricting women's role. What whould a false or untrue woman be? She would be a woman who acted like a man, expecting rather than giving deference, turning her back on domesticity to seek her fortune outside it. Ideas about differences between women and men have occurred in all cultures. Yet, the self-conscious concern with defining a new standard for unacceptable femalie behavior was a departure from the past. No matter how much the advocates of true womanhood referred to god and nature, the effort to create and instill this new ideal revealed to the observant the social construction of women's identity.

THE IDEAL OF PROFESSIONAL DOMESTICITY

By the end of the nineteenth century, industrial development and middle class prosperity had eased women's domestic obligations. Industry now fabricated many of the products formerly made at home and made them readily available to

[178]This promise of moral superiority persisted to arise as a claim in the feminist movement late in the nineteenth century. Some feminists suggested, for example, that women's suffrage would benefit the political order because women would bring a higher moral perspective to bear (Flexner 1959; Evans 1977). Temperance movements also drew on women's sense of moral superiority in their ideology.

the affluent. A still growing servant class did much of the domestic work that remained.[179]

While reduced domestic obligations gave middle class women more free time, greater education gave them higher aspirations. By 1900, more than one-half million young women had high school degrees. This was considerably higher than the number of men with degrees. Exclusion from good jobs and public life made it difficult to fill these women's longings.[180] Simultaneously, the rise of secular ideals and the eclipse of religious influence made the ideology of true womanhood, which was steeped in pieties, less compelling. Science, the handmaiden of industry, increasingly supplanted religion as the arbiter of truth. People spent many years in school and saw the world around them changing. Appeals to religion and tradition lost their effectiveness in this atmosphere. Thus, owing to economic and political changes, middle class women had decreasing domestic responsibilities, increasing non-domestic aspirations, and a declining belief in the old *true womanhood* ideology. Woman's place in society was again a problem. New ideas, which reached their fullest expression in the domestic science movement, redefined women's domesticity in a way that seemed to overcome all these problems.

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[179]Between 1870 and 1910 the servant class in the United States increased from about one million to about two million. Immigration fed this growth: in the 1870s about 10,000 servants immigrated per year, in the 1880s and 1890s the numbers fluctuated between 20,000 and 40,000, from 1900 to the beginning of World War I immigrating servants varied annually between 40,000 and 150,000, thereafter the numbers declined. The number of households increased even faster, causing a decline in the ratio of domestic labor to households (about 15%). While the proportion of households with servants declined, it is more important that the total number of households using servants rose, thereby increasing the number of women released from household tasks. (*Historical Statistics* 1975: 110-111, 138, 139.)

[180]The proportion of women achieving bachelor's degrees rose from about 0.5% in 1880 to about 0.75% in 1900 and 3.4% in 1920, going from about one-fourth the rate for men in 1880 to about one-half in 1920 (*Historical Statistics* 1975: 386). This suggests that there were over 50,000 women in their 20s and 30s with college degrees in 1900 and over 150,000 in 1920. While small by contemporary standards, these numbers suggest a significant number of women with degrees they were not allowed to use in the same way as men. High school degrees, considerably more significant then than now, suggest even more room for frustration, since by 1900 women achieved three high school degrees for every two gained by men and continued to retain this large advantage for over two decades (*Historical Statistics* 1975: 379). Therefore, by 1900 about 600,000 women aged 20-40 possessed high school degrees (compared to about 430,000 men); this is 5% of women in this age range. A significant proportion of these women were employed as teachers; about 300,000 women were teachers in 1900 (*Historical Statistics* 1975:376).

Beginning in the last few years of the 19th century, the domestic science movement argued that women could and should apply the lessons of science and industry to housework.[181] The advocates of domestic science wanted to transform the domestic responsibilities of cleaning, cooking, child rearing, and budgeting consumption. Medical science and chemistry would show women how to clean properly to prevent ill health. Nutrition science would guide the choice and preparation of food. Psychology and medicine would guide mothers rearing their children. And by applying lessons from economics, women could use their husband's income effectively. Home economics classes rapidly became standard in secondary schools during the first two decades of the 20th century. Thus, the educational system took direct responsibility for teaching young women the skills of domestic science, and in the process guided them to the ideals of domestic ideology.

This new ideology accommodated the changes that had undermined the effectiveness of the ideal of virtuous womanhood. In response to the decline of religious values, it created a new moral justification for a woman's domesticity. Domestic science linked a woman's obligations to her family to scientific knowledge. In response to the decrease in women's domestic obligations, this new ideology promoted a significant increase in domestic labor by imposing new standards and tasks. In response to the increase in women's education and aspirations, it also gave women a new source of status as educated, professional housewives.[182]

College-educated, career-oriented women popularized this new ideology. Domestic science created a new field and new positions in education monopolized by women. It allowed some women to become experts, with status and influence. This gave them an outlet for their talents and their education, offsetting their exclusion from male professions.

The ideals of the new domestic science proclaimed a radical reversal from the ideals of virtuous domesticity. Yet it still legitimated women's confinement to the home. The earlier ideology had repelled the industrial economy, suggesting women should anchor their families in the traditions of the past. The new ideology wholeheartedly rejected this perspective, advocating instead that women

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[181]Ehrenreich and English 1978; Rothman 1978; Cowan 1983; Margolis 1984.

[182]The success of this movement is show by the increase in the number of college students studying home economics from about 200 in 1905 to over 17,000 by 1916 (Ehrenreich and English 1978: 164) and the increase in the number of secondary students taking courses in the subject from almost none in 1900 to an average of one course taken annually per enrolled female student by the 1920s (*Historical Statistics* 1975: 377).

abandon tradition to embrace the lessons of science and industry. But women, it suggested, should make this transition within the confines of their homes.

THE IDEAL OF SELF-FULFILLING DOMESTICITY

Another reconstruction of women's identity in our culture occurred following World War II. Betty Friedan called it *the feminine mystique* in her famous book (1963) which helped launch modern feminism in the United States. Friedan argued that a new conception of womanhood had risen that promoted the absolute dedication of women to domesticity and femininity.[183]

The accumulation of long term changes and the upheaval of World War II had dimmed the vision of domestic science. The social transformation of women's lives that had led to the domestic science movement had continued to change the conditions of women's lives. More goods and services combined with still fewer children made it harder and harder for household responsibilities to take up all of women's time. Widespread college education gave women higher aspirations. And many women had some experience at a job. By the 1950s, large numbers of middle class women would find the application of home economics an unconvincing competitor against the world of careers. They had too much knowledge and too much free time.

World War II had accelerated the movement of women out of homes into employment. These women discovered that reducing their domestic labor had not caused noticeable damage to their families' well-being. They also found that women could successfully fill a wide range of jobs. Logically, these changes pointed toward the further employment of women. But after the war, women discovered it had not been a great turning point for their opportunities. The men who had served in the military in World War II returned with the expectation of regaining their jobs. These men also harbored fantasies of wifely submission as payment for their soldiering sacrifices.[184] Employers still rarely hired women for jobs with status or authority. Moreover, as Friedan and others have argued, the purveyors of commodities were wary of an increase in female employment. They believed that women's appetites for goods and services were the mainstay of increased sales.[185]

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[183]See also Slater 1971; Lopata 1971; Oakley 1974; Vanek 1974; Glazer-Malbin 1976; Margolis 1984.

[184]D'Ann Campbell (1984) argues that most women voluntarily rejected the possibility of further employment after World War II. But there is good reason to believe that many of these women still saw their future experience through different eyes in the 1950s as a result of the war.

[185]Ferguson 1983.

Following World War II, a new image of women appeared in the mass media, in women's magazines, on television, and in advertisements.[186] This image portrayed femininity as a fundamental, irradicable characteristic.[187] Women displayed their femininity through the joys of motherhood, wifely devotion, and obsessive shopping. The quest of home economics for expertise, health, and modernity did not disappear, but it faded into the background. The new ideology proclaimed that women should create an emotional haven for their husbands and children. Middle class women also should create a material haven by pursuing ever higher standards of living. Women should be the emotional and consumptive managers of the household. This gave women a new set of obligations to fill their time.[188]

Compared with the ideals of true womanhood and domestic science, the feminine mystique seems superficial. Unlike the earlier ideas, the feminine mystique did not effectively contend that women's compliance provided husbands and children critical services. Except, perhaps, that it advocated that women further their husband's careers.

Like 19th century true womanhood, the feminine mystique tried to define an ideal virtuous woman. But it relied on psychological arguments about normality rather than religious or moral arguments concerning virtue. Women who did not comply were abnormal or sick. Women who suffered under the demands of this ideology sought remedy through tranquilizers rather than prayer.

Like the ideal of domestic science, the feminine mystique embraced modernism, but it emphasized consumption, not production. The household *professionalization* sought by domestic science disappeared in a new emphasis on the naturalness of women's domestic role. Instead of seeking to turn her home into a microcosm of scientific industry, the feminine mystique expected a woman to pursue self fulfillment by elevating the living standards of her husband and children. If any time were left over, she could help the community through volunteer work.

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[186]But compare also the changing ideology of manhood as described in Whyte (1956), Slater (1971), and Ehrenreich (1983).

[187]Millum 1975; Courtney and Whipple 1983; Goffman 1979.

[188]Cowan 1983; Berk 1985. As Cherlin (1981) forcefully argues, the demographic character of the 1950s, with its high rate of childbearing, was a movement against long term trends that reasserted themselves in the 1960s. As such it requires a historically specific explanation, rather than one based on the general direction of structural development. The work of Easterlin (1980) and of Glen Elder (1981) suggest the answer depends on the experience of a depression era childhood contrasting with their adult affluence by the parents of the 1950s.

Justifying the Subordination of Women

These three transformations of the middle class ideals of female domesticity illustrate the role of ideals in the persistence of gender inequality. Comparing these three ideologies gives insights into both the causes and the consequences of the legitimation of gender inequality.

WHAT CAUSED THE IDEOLOGY OF FEMALE DOMESTICITY TO CHANGE?

Like the phoenix, the ideals of female domesticity have repeatedly arisen, refreshed, just as they seemed about to expire. Unlike the bird of the Egyptian myth, however, the ideals themselves did not ignite the fire that threatened to consume them. Each new ideology arose after social changes made the old ideal of women's role ill fitting or ineffective. Repeatedly, industrialization so altered domestic work that it clashed with the old ideology of woman's place. Repeatedly, women faced changing opportunities outside the household that the old ideology could not fit. This failure of an existing ideology stimulated efforts to discover new ideals.

Legitimating Changing Roles. In each of the three transitional periods, changing circumstances induced a redefinition of middle class women's roles that the old ideology could not accommodate. These ideologies had to legitimate women's domesticity successfully to survive. As women's activities changed and life histories changed, the old ideals lost the capacity to compel belief and guide behavior.

The first growth of urban capitalism started the cycles of ideological obsolescence. During the early nineteenth century, middle class men were leaving their homes to work in shops, factories, and offices. Women became solely responsible for most household tasks. The earlier patriarchal ideology of wifely help and deference in the family enterprise no longer fit experience.[189]

The subsequent ideology of true womanhood, like the horse and buggy, became a symbol of backwardness in the age of the automobile. By the end of the nineteenth century, urbanization, secularization of ideology, increased affluence, increased education of women, and reduced domestic labor obligation had greatly changed middle class life. Women had fewer children, more education, and a greater capacity to buy commodities that were formerly fabricated at home. No longer could the moral prescriptions and the standards of living defined by the ideals of *true womanhood* keep women at home. Women simply could not be

[189]Welter 1966; Zaretsky 1976; Cott 1977; Hall 1979; Degler 1980; Strasser 1982; Cowan 1983; Margolis 1984.

kept busy trying to achieve the ideal of true womanhood.[190] The domestic science ideal of an enlightened, professional wife and mother filled the ideological gap.

Yet, by the 1950s, these social changes had progressed even further, so that ever larger numbers of women forsook domesticity for employment, no matter what the ideology endorsed. Domestic science proved inadequte. By this time, female domesticity strained any ideological effort. Indeed, with the advantages of hindsight, the response of the *feminine mystique* seems to have been a foredoomed, last ditch effort. It tried to preserve a form of female domesticity that had already become overwhelmingly inconsistent with the conditions of both private and public life.[191]

Adapting to Changing Values. The ideologies legitimating women's domestic seclusion also became vulnerable to transformation when shifts in social values demoted the symbols they had used to compel deference. The ideas of domestic womanhood sought legitimacy through respected social values. The general progress of economic, political, and cultural institutions weakened some symbols and values while strengthening others. Throughout the nineteenth century economic growth, the emergence of science, and the expansion of education boosted secular culture. People no longer gave so much deference to religious symbols and values.[192] Without this deference, the ideals of women's place that relied on religious symbols lost their potency. Throughout the twentieth century, merit increasingly edged out other criteria as the accepted way of deciding who among those competing should get jobs, degrees, or offices.[193] Materialist self-interest also gained acceptance at the expense of duty.[194] These shifts in values dulled the moral impact of the ideas associated with domestic science--women's duty to their households and unquestioned acceptance of their exclusion from worldly success. To win people's allegiance, the ideologies of women's place had to evolve in step with society's dominant values.

As best they could, people in each period tried to apply the old ideals of women's place associated with the waning sexual division of labor. This effort increasingly failed as new conditions robbed those ideas of both practicability and persuasiveness. People then had to piece together a new ideology.

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[190]Hartmann 1974; Ehrenreich and English 1978; Rothman 1978; Strasser 1982; Cowan 1983; Margolis 1984.

[191]Friedan 1963; Slater 1971; Vanek 1971; Oakley 1981; Cowan 1983; Campbell 1984; E. Klein 1984; Margolis 1984.

[192]Wiebe 1967.

[193]Bendix 1974.

[194]Slater 1971; Lasch 1978; Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka 1981.

THE RISE OF NEW IDEALS

When one ideal of woman's place degenerated, people did not effortlessly replace it with a new ideal. Discord and contention were more characteristic Nor did men impose the new ideologies as part of a conscious strategy to defend their sex's interest in retaining advantages. The decline of an old ideology did not clearly point in some direction toward new ideas to fill the same purpose. When social changes made it difficult to apply old conceptions of womanhood, or exposed the deceptions of the old ideals, people began again to debate women's identity. Competing ideas provoked increasing discussion and experimentation. Out of these experiments, some of the new ideas found advocates and ultimately won acceptance.

When, in the nineteenth century, men departed from their households for employment, controversy over women's place exploded. In 1808, the French social thinker Charles Fourier[195] set a bench mark that would measure the progress of this debate for two centuries. He claimed that "Social progress and historic changes occur by virtue of the progress of women toward liberty, and decadence of the social order occurs as the result of a decrease in the liberty of women." By the time John Stuart Mill published his classic and internationally influential work, *The Subjection of Women*, in 1869, many prominent thinkers, both male and female, had contributed to this controversy. In one form or another, the *woman question* has remained prominent in social debates ever since.[196]

The controversies over women's role were not restricted to high-toned intellectual exchanges. They stimulated unending argument in popular culture and everyday life. During each of the three periods discussed above, the United States experienced an outpouring of literature and debate on the proper identity of women.[197] Countless articles, stories, and books have described, decried, and devised anew women's role since the early nineteenth century.

In these debates, the most prominent advocates of the new ideals of domesticity were not men trying to defend their gender's collective interests. Instead, groups with more narrowly focused interests promoted ideals of women's place that served their special interests.

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[195]Bell and Offen 1983, p. 41.

[196]Bell and Offen 1983.

[197]Smuts 1959; Welter 1966; Chafe 1972; Bullough 1973; Shover 1975; Cott 1977; Evans 1977; Ehrenreich and English 1978; Hartmann 1978; Rothman 1978; Degler 1980; Kessler-Harris 1982; Matthaei 1982.

In each of the three historical periods, a distinctive group found special advantages by advocating the adoption of a new ideology of women's domesticity. Clergymen seeking women members for their churches (and financial support from their husbands) became principal advocates of the *cult of true womanhood.* These ideals attached women to the church[198] and by accommodating men's interests won their economic support. Educated women pursuing a market for their services and an outlet for their aspirations became principal advocates for the domestic science movement.[199] Whether its ideas gave most women a higher status as professional housewives or served to bind them anew to a domesticity that ensured their subordination to men, the women who led the movement personally achieved enhanced status. The corporations and the mass media that relentlessly promoted the *feminine mystique* after World War II sought sales and circulations, not the direct preservation of male prerogatives.[200]

Of course, the advocates of these new ideas would never have adopted these beliefs were it not for the overwhelming reality of women's subordination. But they supported a specific interpretation of gender inequality because it advanced their group's peculiar social interests. They did not invest their time and energy in the new ideology because it protected the general interests of men.

Moreover, women showed strong support for each of these three ideologies of female domesticity. Studies of women in two of these three periods show this. In her history of nineteenth century France, *Ladies of the Leisure Class*, Bonnie Smith (1981) argues persuasively that bourgeois women created and actively promoted the culture of female domesticity. She argues that such women had real power over their households. Their cult of domesticity protected their position and expressed the world view that grew out of their household reign. Moreover, she suggests that bourgeois men really resented this female culture of domesticity. Men found it circumscribed their domestic authority and that it attached itself firmly to reactionary and anti-intellectual viewpoints. These women fought a prolonged battle *against* the efforts of men and the state to provide a secular education for girls. The women preferred Catholic schools that emphasized religion, innocence, and women's domestic duties. Nancy Cott's work on the

[198]Cf. Cott 1977; Douglas 1977; Welter 1974.

[199]Ehrenreich and English 1978; Cowan 1983; Margolis 1984.

[200]Friedan 1963; Ferguson 1983.

emergence of a *women's sphere* in the United States shows similar support for the new ideas of true womanhood among affluent women.[201]

In a study of American women's response to World War II, D'Ann Campbell[202] has suggested that women generally clung tightly to a belief in their domestic role. They did not leap to grab at new opportunities. She argues that many women even "felt patriotic when they resisted the intense propaganda for women to take war jobs." Among the employed, married women whose families did not need their earnings "eagerly looked forward to the day when they could become housewives again." When polled in 1943 about their ideal future, young women chose a housewife role almost four times as often as combining marriage and career. The war was a boon to the minority of women frustrated by their domestic role. For the majority, however, it interrupted the career of motherhood and domesticity they preferred.

The reasons that women have accepted and supported the ideas that idealized and legitimated their confinement to domesticity are too complex and difficult to be resolved here. Janeway has suggested that women accepted male power outside the household in return for "rule in their own place."[203] Epstein has suggested that middle class women have had "a substantial interest in the status quo," because they received "secondary gains" of social status, leisure, freedom from responsibility to earn an income, and the freedom "to devote a major portion of her time to personal adornment and attention to herself" through marriage.[204] And a vast literature has emphasized the construction of women's identity through socialization.[205] In short, we can conclude that, until recently, many middle class women believed it in their interest to support ideals of female domesticity, although we do not yet know the relative importance of the various causes for this attitude.[206]

Men, therefore, did not simply impose the ideologies of female domesticity. Each period produced many competing ideas. Men's gender interests did not

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[201]Cott (in *The Bonds of Womanhood*), however, interprets the new domesticity in the United States as much more progressive, because of its contributions to the emergence of feminism. Smith suggests the French female domesticity of the nineteenth century was much more reactionary.

[202]*Women at War with America*. The quotations below are from pp. 216, 223, 225.

[203]*Man's World, Woman's Place*, p. 56.

[204]*Woman's Place*, pp. 129, 132.

[205]e.g. Weitzman 1984.

[206]See also Collins 1971; Degler 1980:328-361; Luker 1984: 192-215; S. Marshall 1984.

necessarily prompt the chief advocates of the dominant ideas. Specialized group interests motivated them. And women generally supported the ideologies of female domesticity, at times perhaps even more so than men.

THE CONTENT AND EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC IDEOLOGIES

How did gender inequality influence these ideas? No conspiracy of dominant men created or imposed the ideologies of female domesticity. No group or institution seemed consistently reponsible for creating or promoting these ideas. In each period, the new ideals that caught hold arose from a different sector of society than those of the previous period. These ideas diffused through society and caught hold without one guiding force. What then determined the content of these ideologies? If these ideologies really all existed in aid of gender inequality, then their similarities should reveal some answers.

A comparison of the three ideals of female domesticity uncovers three essential similarities. Each ideal specified work in the household that could keep women busy. Each supplied a moral justification for women bearing the responsibility for this work. And each promised women special advantages that they would lose if they entered men's world of employment. Lets look closer at each of these parallels.

Above all else, these ideologies promoted household tasks. Each established a range of domestic duties for women. As economic development or demographic changes reduced women's labor, ideology prescribed new tasks to keep them busy.[207] Mid-nineteenth century middle-class women were assigned the duties of household and child caretakers. Turn of the century women had these (by then reduced) tasks expanded by the heightened expectations of domestic science. Mid-twentieth century women discovered that they were supposed to intensify their child rearing duties and dedicate themselves to consumption. In each ideal, these duties conformed to current social conditions. They also defined enough responsibilities to give women a full time job in the home.

Each ideology also supplied a moral justification for women's domesticity. These justifications reflected the current moral values of society. At various times these ideals included appeals to religion, science, nature, parental obligation, and self-indulgence. The ideals told women that only through their domesticity could they meet their religious duty, or assure their families' health, or fulfill their own potential. By linking women's domesticity to potent symbols and values, the ideologies could draw strength from the surrounding culture that promoted these values.

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[207]Cf. Strasser 1982; Cowan 1983.

Moreover, each ideology of women's place promised them special status, virtues, or rewards in return for embracing their domesticity. Mid-nineteenth century middle class women hoped for moral superiority. Early twentieth century women sought *professional* status. And mid-twentieth century women pursued personal fulfillment. Instead of lamenting their disadvantages, women could focus on the compensatory advantages their domesticity won them.[208] This motivated women to actively support and pursue their domesticity.

FIGURE 1: IDEOLOGIES OF FEMALE DOMESTICITY

	Virtuous Domesticity	**Professional Domesticity**	**Self-fulfilling Domesticity**
Household Responsibilities	Caretaker of household and children	*Scientific* pursuit of quality household	Consumption, intensive child rearing, entertainer for husband
Moral Justification	Religious requirement for *true women*; protection from market; moral duty to family	Health and welfare of family; demanded by science	Natural route to fulfillment; parental obligation; normality
Compensatory Rewards	Superior virtue	Pseudo-professional status	Special pleasures and satisfaction

Thus the three ideological transformations produced parallel strategies to promote women's confinement to domestic life (see Figure 1). Each ideology defined enough household responsibilities to keep women busy. These duties had

[208]For a distinction between legitimating and compensatory functions of ideology see Weber (1978, I:490-492).

to harmonize with current knowledge, technological development, and existing material conditions. Each ideology used popular values (e.g., religion or science) to justify women's responsibility for these tasks. To win their consent and support, each ideology promised women some compensatory advantages only obtainable through domesticity. In short, successful ideologies of female domesticity gave women work to do around their homes, promoted the value and justice of these duties, and sustained a practical, moral, and intellectual compatibility with general social conditions.

In his authoritative study of the logic of social theories, Arthur Stinchcombe stated, "Whenever we find *uniformity of the consequences* of action but *great variety of the behavior causing those consequences*, a functional explanation in which the consequence serves as a cause is suggested."[209] Although ideology is not action, Stinchcombe's logic can be applied to the ideologies of female domesticity. These ideologies have assigned different specific tasks to women and offered different justifications for the sexual division of labor. But all had the same consequence of legitimating women's continued responsibility to work in their households and to serve their families while avoiding commitments to paid occupations. Therefore, we may reasonably infer that these ends caused the ideologies.

THE ADOPTION OF DOMESTIC IDEALS FOR WOMEN

To succeed, therefore, an idealization of women's place had to both accommodate the prevailing state of economic development and support men's ascendancy. Men's interests in remaining ascendant over women did not solely or exclusively determine ideology. Ideas also had to fit societal conditions; if not, they either failed to compel belief or failed to specify a workable division of labor. Also, many, perhaps most, women supported these ideals of domesticity. Still, domestic ideals did legitimate and help implement male authority.

Presumably, these ideas gained general cultural acceptance because men's interests carried more weight. Men controlled the institutions that sustained ideology, including schools, churches, government, and the media. Men also generally had the upper hand in families. Men's power meant that the ideas they supported became dominant. As they were in a position of power, men's experience and interests controlled the selection of ideas they supported. Women (and men) who tried to follow contradictory ideas found them ineffective.

Gender inequality therefore limited what ideas could gain popularity. But it did not directly or strictly determine beliefs.

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[209] 1968, p. 80.

Once it succeeded, each ideology hindered the rise of alternatives. Adoption of a potent new ideology temporarily quieted debate over women's role. Generally, if ideas fit circumstances and interests enough to gain ascendancy, no important challenge to those ideas was likely until circumstance or interests changed. Accordingly, each ideal of female domesticity enjoyed a period of dominance without any serious challenges. This lasted until further changes in social conditions weakened its hold.

This depiction of the rise and fall of ideologies meshes with some major social theories about ideology. These social theories use different expressions to talk about the causal patterns described here. Marxists refer to *determination within limits.*[210] Disciples of the great historical sociologist Max Weber use the idea of *elective affinity.*[211] Followers of the contemporary theorist Robert Merton discuss *functional alternatives.*[212] Each of these ideas tried to model a contingent causal process that depends on both structural conditions and historical events.

Applied to the ideals of female domesticity, these approaches lead to complementary conclusions. It is possible to think of varied ideas that could justify inequality. Theoretically, all the ideas that might succeed in a given set of circumstances are *functional alternatives.* Presumably, men would support any reasonable ideology that justifies their power over any beliefs that challenge it. This means they will show an *elective affinity* to beliefs that better serve their interests. *By itself*, however, inequality leaves men, as a generic group, indifferent about the choice among competing beliefs that defend their position. They would have an elective affinity with *any* of the functional alternatives. Specific historical and social conditions decide which of the legitimating beliefs emerge and finally gain acceptance. Thus, the conditions of inequality *determine limits* within which beliefs must fit, but these conditions do not decide exactly which beliefs will prevail. Essentially, the *functional alternatives* that meet the requirments of *elective affinity* define the range of possibilities that fit the *within the limits* of the conditions of inequality. The explanation of domestic ideologies presented here is therefore consistent with all three theoretical approaches.

We should not exaggerate the hold that these ideologies of female domesticity had over people. The structural supports for men's continued dominance declined with each successive period. These social changes eroded the strength of beliefs in women's domesticity. Simultaneously, they increased the credibility and

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[210]e.g. Wright 1978.

[211]Gerth and Mills 1946; pp. 62-63.

[212]Merton 1949.

acceptance of feminist ideologies. These critical ideologies argued that women's domestic harness and blinders were neither necessary nor desirable.

Ideas That Challenged Gender Inequality

How did ideologies championing women's equality come into existence? As we have seen, women's subordination produced ideas promoting women's domesticity and deference to men. How then did contradictory ideas arise and gain adherents?

Two processes seem responsible. As they evolved, economic and political institutions generated ideas and ideals that ran counter to the beliefs supporting female subordination. These institutions also directly supported a progressive decline in gender inequality. Women's improved status shifted both the issues surrounding gender relations and the relative influence of each sex on the outcomes.

CHALLENGES TO THE IDEALS OF FEMALE DOMESTICITY

Over the past 150 years women repeatedly complained, resisted, agitated, and fought to improve their position. During the same three periods in which successive formulations of women's domesticity became prominent, opposing ideologies associated with women's rebellion also arose.[213] These include the early feminism of the mid-nineteenth century, the suffrage movement at the turn of the century, and the modern women's movement.[214] These popular feminist ideologies grew in reaction to the fundamental changes in social life, the *same changes* that motivated the transformations of the domestic ideal for women. But feminism advocated a completely different response. Rather than adapting women's domesticity to the new social conditions, they proposed ideas that put women's place outside the home.

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[213]We shall return to the causes and consequences of feminist movements in a later chapter. Here I focus on their ideology alone.

[214]Useful studies of feminist thought include: Banks, O.; *Faces of Feminism*; Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1981. O'Neill, W. L.; *The Woman Movement: Feminism in the United States and England*; London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969. Rosenberg, Rosalind; *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982. Hole, Judith, and Levine, Ellen; *Rebirth of Feminism*; New York: Quadrangle, 1971. Evans, Richard J.; *The Feminists: Women's Emancipation Movements in Europe, America and Australasia 1840-1920*; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1977. Flexner, Eleanor; *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States*; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959.

By *feminist ideology* I refer to the influential feminist ideals of each period that *gained the greatest acceptance* among sympathizers. This emphasis contrasts with many histories of feminist thought, which catalogue the shrewdest ideas of celebrated feminist thinkers.[215] Popular feminist ideology should not be confused with enlightened feminist theory. My concern here is not those ideas that, in retrospect, proved most insightful, but those ideas that gained the most public support. Thus, the common ideas both advocated by prominent theorists and echoed by their supporters form what I will call the popular feminist ideology characteristic of a period. Because feminist ideology has received less attention than the history of feminist thought or the history of domestic ideologies, its assessment must be cruder and more speculative.

Popular feminist arguments repeatedly reflected the social circumstances of middle class women and the issues raised by these conditions. Writers defending feminist claims took diverse positions. Disagreements on goals and strategies often divided feminists into competing factions. But when we step back from the divisive issues in each period, we can discover common themes that won general support. In the mid-nineteenth century, arguments arose claiming that women deserved the same legal status as men. Around the turn of the century, the belief that women should have political equality gained great support. Then, by the mid-twentieth century women's economic equality became an accepted ideal. Figure 2 summarizes the competing ideals of domesticity and feminist challenges over the past 150 years.[216]

[215]E.g., Eisenstein, Zillah; *Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*; 1981.

[216]Neither domestic ideology nor feminist ideology had a history neatly divided into the three periods used here. This comparison, however, does not aim to provide a precise description of these histories. I want, instead, to characterize the most influential transformations of the ideas on both sides, showing clearly their relation to general historical condition.

FIGURE 2: OPPOSING IDEALS OF WOMEN'S PLACE

	Domestic Ideology	**Feminist Ideology**
Mid-Nineteenth Century	The ideal of virtuous domesticity (*true womanhood*)	Seneca Falls: legal rights over property, earnings, children, divorce
Late Nineteenth to Early Twentieth Century	The ideal of professional domesticity (*home economics*)	Suffrage: the right to vote; public duty
Post World War II	The ideal of self-fulfilling domesticity (*feminine mystique*)	Modern feminism: economic and social equality (including reproductive control)

FEMINIST IDEOLOGY

The First Wave: Legal Equality. The early feminists of the mid-nineteenth century emphasized claims against the legal system. They also sought greater education for women.[217] The Seneca Falls meeting of 1848 began the history of organized feminism in America. This gathering grew out of the abolitionist movement. It coincided with a turbulent year of widespread political revolt in Europe. At this time most women spent most of their lives as legal dependents of men: first their fathers, then their husbands. Women had severely restricted rights to own property, to control their earnings, to divorce or to gain control over children if divorced, to sue others, or even to appear as witnesses.[218] (Because state laws controlled most of these rights, they varied widely.) Similar conditions prevailed in other countries. Not surprisingly, the most influential critique of women's inferiority in the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869), concentrated on those legal barriers to equality. Mill opened

[217]Barbara Berg, *The Remembered Gate*.

[218]Norma Basch, *In the Eyes of the Law: Women, Marriage, and Property in Nineteenth-Century New York.*

his essay by asserting: "the legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement."

Popular early feminist thought focused on the belief that legal disabilities, not inherent deficiencies, restricted women. Women's legal incapacities figured large in the debates of the Seneca Falls convention. Indeed, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of its organizers, had agitated for years in New York to get laws that would better married women's status.[219] The state legislature passed the Married Women's Property Act just three months before the gathering at Seneca Falls. From the beginning, some early feminists also raised the issues of women's suffrage and economic opportunity.[220] But these concerns did not capture immediate popular interest like that accorded the claims for legal equality and greater education.[221] Modern scholarship has sometimes underestimated how central the claims for legal equality were in the nineteenth century[222], probably because of the continuity between early feminists' demand for the vote and the later suffrage movement. But in their history of the suffrage movement written at the beginning of the twentieth century, activists Susan B. Anthony and Ida H. Harper caught the spirit aptly. After they carefully itemized the changes in state laws regarding married women, they claimed these changes heralded a "complete legal revolution during the past half century."[223]

The Second Wave: Political Equality. By the turn of the century, women's right to vote--once important only to a radical clique--became the focal popular feminist claim. A half century elapsed between the first state suffrage referendum held in Kansas in 1867 and the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. During this period tremendous social change greatly altered the position of middle class women. By the end of World War I, the nation had taken many long strides from its conditions in the period of the Civil War. Large scale corporate industrialism replaced early laissez faire small firm capitalism; national government dwarfed the states and localities; automobiles and railroads had transformed transportation; communication equipment, periodicals, and education

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[219]Rabkin, Peggy A.; *Fathers to Daughters: The Legal Foundations of Female Emancipation*; Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980; pp. 106-124.

[220]See, e.g., Dubois, Ellen.; *Feminism and Suffrage, The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869*; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978. Different forms of nineteenth century feminism are compared in Banks, O.; *Faces of Feminism*; Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1981.

[221]Cf. Flexner 1959: 82; Evans 1977:46.

[222]But see Rabkin 1980; Basch 1982.

[223]*The History of Woman Suffrage*, 1902, IV: 458.

facilities had all multiplied many times over. Meanwhile, women's legal status had improved significantly during the nineteenth century, meeting (at least partially) many of the earlier feminist hopes. Women also had made their first, begrudged appearances as professionals.[224]

In this hothouse of social change, many ideas germinated.[225] But none took root more firmly among feminist critics of women's status than the demand for women's suffrage. For a while (in the 1870s), the temperance movement bound many women's frustrations to a backward looking moralism. Despite its limits, the temperance movement did push women into reform activity.[226] Later reform activities in the Progressive period included middle class women's efforts in settlement houses and in campaigns for protective labor legislation. In the midst of these currents, women's suffrage drew ever more supporters and greater social acceptance. Feminist theory focusing on women's political participation became the shared language of affluent women who resisted their social inferiority. Both those promoting greater equality and those opposing it focused their concerns on the issue of women's voting rights.

The Third Wave: Economic and Social Equality. The post World War II era brought popularity to the modern feminist ideals of economic and social equality.[227] Because we are still in the midst of this movement, its divisions appear stark and vivid. Its claims include equal pay, equal access to jobs, sexual freedom, reproductive rights, freedom from fears of male violence, and a drive for political power. From its beginnings in the 1960s, the National Organization of Women has been associated with moderate goals and the Women's Liberation Movement with more radical ones. But ideological divisions and competing theories have been much more varied than these two groups. Moderate feminists, conservative feminists, lesbian feminists, radical feminists, Marxist feminists--the list goes on and on.

Claims for economic and educational equality have drawn the most interest and won the greatest support. Even women (and most men) who oppose other feminist claims and disavow feminism generally believe that women should get

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[224]Degler 1980; Kessler-Harris 1982; Matthaei 1982; Margolis 1984.

[225]Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place*.

[226]Blocker, Jack S.; "Separate Paths: Suffragists and the Women's Temperance Crusade;" *Signs* 10 (1985): 460-476.

[227]Freeman, Jo; *The Politics of Women's Liberation*; New York: Longman, 1975. For a discussion of moderation in the movement see Bouchier, David; "The Deradicalisation of Feminism: Ideology and Utopia in Action;" *Sociology* 13 (1979): .

a fair shake in the economy.[228] As college degrees and careers have become part of the middle class woman's burden, equal economic and social treatment of the sexes has won general acceptance. The ideals of equal opportunity and allocation of rewards by merit have become the leading ideas of popular feminism.

Women's sexual freedom and their right to control child bearing also have achieved great support. Women's employment has made unprotected vulnerability to pregnancy costly, women's increased freedom has made restrictions on their sexuality insufferable, and better methods of contraception and abortion have made birth control more manageable. An important minority has continued to oppose abortion and a few even have continued to resist contraception. But almost everyone uses contraception and the majority of women (and men) believe that women should have access to abortion. The right to an abortion remains a controversial political issue, but women's right to reproductive control has been a fundamental claim of popular feminist ideology since the 1960s.

STRATEGIC IDEALS

A pragmatic impulse has directed the popularization of feminist ideologies. The feasibility of success seems to have swayed adherents as much as did abstract ideals.[229] Women's inferiority provoked many complaints, and critics suggested many explanations and remedies. In each period some feminist claims articulated women's resentments and also proved to have some chance of gaining ground. These claims resonated with broader fights over citizenship rights while reflecting prevailing conditions of inequality.

The history of conflict promoted the beliefs that promised to turn ideals into practical reality. In the mid-nineteenth century, activists found more responsiveness to the issue of legal equality than to demands for the vote. By the end of the century they found much less resistance to the vote than to claims for economic or familial equality.[230] By the 1970s, the majority of both women and men believed equal treatment for women was both practicable and desirable. While other goals attracted some activists, most middle class sympathizers committed themselves to ideas they found to have practical value.

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[228]Cherlin and Walters, "Trends in U.S. Men's and Women's Sex Role Attitudes: 1972-1978."

[229]Cf. Jackson, *Craft Labor Market Formation*.

[230]Degler, *At Odds*, pp. 328-361; Eisenstein, *Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*, pp. 145-173.

While discussing the fate of nineteenth and early twentieth century feminism, Viola Klein[231] remarked that "in spite of all their failings feminists saw almost all their demands gradually realized . . . simply by force of practical necessity, and because their claims were in accordance with the general trend of social development." Klein may have exaggerated the ineffectiveness of early feminists ("nowhere were feminists more than a small, much-despised, and even more ridiculed minority"). While feminist agitation alone cannot explain the progress toward greater gender equality (because we also must explain why the agitation occurred and why it gained some success), it was a necessary and important part of the process. Nonetheless, Klein's argument that feminists succeeded only so far as their goals fit the direction of social progress rates attention. Some feminists in each period raised many demands for marital, political, and economic equality that failed. But in each period only certain claims of feminists proved to have a chance for success. Those claims became the salient ideas challenging women's domesticity.

How Do Interests Influence Ideologies?

But why were ideas that served the interests of men prevalent for so long? Why didn't women, who equaled or exceeded men in number, reject the ideas that justified their lower status in favor of ideas that praised women and favored equality? These questions loom even larger if we assume that childhood socialization plays an important role in implanting beliefs. Women have had most of the responsibility for raising children. Why didn't they turn that responsibility into a power by teaching children that women deserved equality?

These questions range beyond the scope of this study and I can only speculate on their answer. Unfortunately, although social scientists have written an enormous amount about ideology, we have too little research on the processes by which ideologies arise, gain popularity, and sustain themselves. Gender studies have not escapted this deficiency. The writings in this area generally assume it is self-evident that men have controlled ideology. Knowing that men have been socially dominant, they often adopt the erroneous assumption that all ideas that seem to serve men's interests *must* be imposed by men. They do so without even explaining how men could effectively choose and impose these ideas. I, too, cannot really provide adequate answers to these questions. But rather than simply ignoring them, I will briefly describe what I believe to be the proper starting points for answering them.

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[231] *Feminine Character: History of an Ideology*.

ORGANIZED POWER OVER IDEAS

While men and women had similar impulses and motives to mold ideas, men were more successful in doing so. Nothing we know about women (and men) suggests that women were less motivated to impose a self-serving interpretation on the beliefs of others. But women have had to defer to men's ideas just as they deferred to men. Men controlled the institutions that communicate and sustain ideas in culture, such as churches, government, schools, mass media and families. Men also controlled the formal social sanctions used to punish deviance--incarceration, denial of jobs, denial of inheritance, and the like. Because the men making decisions generally believed and preferred the ideas that justified their superiority to women, social institutions promoted those ideas.

Sometimes men consciously recognized their gender interests when opposing ideas favorable to women. More often, they did not realize they could do differently. They advocated ideas promoting male interests in blissful ignorance, themselves victims of ideology. Most of the time men did not concern themselves with gender inequality; they accepted it unquestioningly as part of the natural order. As far as they were concerned, they sustained ideas compatible with inequality for the same reason they based their actions on the rule of gravity: it was folly to do otherwise.

When circumstances called women's subordination into question, however, men with institutional power often examined their interests and took a considered stand against equality. In discussions of laws affecting women in the nineteenth century, for example, legislators and judges openly worried that women would begin to act independently and to compete with men if laws and social policies did not keep them in their place. Similarly, men often vilified feminists in news commentaries and public debate. As long as they could, men, like other groups and individuals enjoying social advantages, clung to the belief that their ascendancy was unavoidable and virtuous. Not all men tried to stop the flow of progress, of course. As we have seen, as early as the middle of the 19th century, a minority of male politicians strongly supported feminist ideals. Their numbers grew with time. Still, when rebellious women or uncontrolled events cast doubt on the beliefs legitimating inequality, men did not all spring forward to give up their advantages. Instead, most men who controlled churches, schools, colleges, and the popular press purposely advocated ideas that reinforced women's continued subordination whenever gender inequality became a salient issue.

Men's control of social institutions therefore shaped the public assessment of ideas. But, to a large degree, people adopted and used beliefs outside the formal confines of these institutions. Even within these institutions, much of the process of defining ideology operated informally. To understand why the ideas

legitimating male advantages held sway, we must consider why these informal processes had the same outcomes as the formal ones.

IDEAS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The informal production of ideas occurs through normal interactions within which people continuously negotiate their actions and relations with others. We constantly dispute what is just, valuable, and necessary. But, the fabric of human interaction hides most of this discourse within its complex design. Without our realization, we endlessly examine, question, and legitimate the pattern of ideas that gives meaning to our lives and relations with each other.

As an unavoidable part of everyday life, we repeatedly try to influence the actions of others, we defend ourselves against similar efforts by others to influence us, and we must make joint decisions about joint actions. Sometimes these discussions ring with controversy and passion; usually they seem casual and unproblematic. Who should make the coffee? When will you be coming home? How soon must this job be finished? Can I borrow that? Should we agree to her offer? These questions pervade conversation.

In these discussions we repeatedly offer and exchange judgments about the justice, the value, and the necessity of the actions in question. We make statements about what is more or less fair and we try to defend those claims. We say, for example, that it is your turn to care for the child or that interviewing the job candidates is your responsibility. We also assess the consequences of the actions in dispute so that we can argue their relative value or merits. For example, we suggest that it will be easier to make the trip in the next month or that another company can do a job better. And we judge what is possible and what is necessary. For example, we might claim that it is worthless to recruit some person because she will never come to work for us or we might argue that it is pointless to try to keep our daughter in college because her failure is inevitable. These examples can be multiplied endlessly with issues both small and large.

The discourse through which women and men disputed their relations generally followed this pattern and had the effect of sustaining ideas consistent with inequality. The ideological disputes surrounding everyday interactions did not challenge the foundations of this inequality. Instead, people negotiated the limits of inequality and the content of their personal relations and lives given the unequal circumstances of the sexes. But in negotiating the precise boundaries of inequality, they affirmed and reinforced its general outlines. Thus, inequality determined the range of issues open to dispute, and negotiation over these biased

issues sustained beliefs in the justice, value and necessity of women's subordination.[232]

Consider some examples. Rather than debating the possibility of equal responsibility for child rearing, couples commonly disputed the special circumstances when men would accept responsibility. This debate repeatedly affirmed women's general responsibility. Rather than arguing whether all income should be split equally, they negotiated how much discretionary allowance the wife should receive from her husband's income. This confirmed the husbands' rights over the bulk of the family's money. Instead of disputing the desirability of placing equal emphasis on the two spouses's employment, they argued if the wife should work or how many hours she could work if employed. This reinforced the belief that the husband's employment was much more important.

These examples illustrate how people continuously sustained the conditions of inequality by using them as their unquestioned assumptions while negotiating about the boundaries. Behind all these informal negotiations lies the influence of men's greater opportunitities and resources. Women's personal disadvantages limited most of their challenges to marginal negotiations.

AMBIGUOUS INTERESTS

People have rarely experienced the clearly defined interests theories sometimes impute to them. Instead, ambiguity and inconsistency have plagued the interests of both men and women. This indeterminacy made women more likely to accept ideas that we might think were against their interests. For example, women's reaction to domestic ideals depended, in part, on the ideology of male economic rights and responsibilities, especially in the working classes, where male jobs were often unattractive.

Let us consider a paradox. Two curiously inconsistent accounts of the ideology concerning men's employment appear in the literature on class and in the literature on gender. The literature on class suggests that employers and the capitalist system (aided by institutions like the church and state) imposed an ideology exalting a male work ethic. They did this to legitimate class inequality by getting men to accept their dependence on jobs. This ideology prescribed and idealized men's responsibility to gain employment and be disciplined workers.

In contrast, gender theory argues that men as a group have purposely devised and sustained the ideas supporting their employment. Supposedly, men supported these ideas because they protected men's privileged access to jobs and perpetuated their ascendancy over women.

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[232]This process does not really prevent questioning of inequality, but it places the question outside normal discourse.

Thus, from one vantage point, the ideology of male employment was *imposed* on men to legitimate their *subordination*. From another vantage point, it appears that employed men *imposed* the ideas on women to legitimate their *dominance*. This contradiction troubles not only the explanation of men's behavior, but also that of women.

To resolve this apparent paradox, we must recall (see Chapter VIII?) how men's employment has had objectively ambiguous implications for men's status. In many ways, a man's social role as workers and family provider in industrial society has been a burden. The worker role forced men to accept and endure a constant obligation to hold a job, poor working conditions, competition and insecurity in labor markets, and subjugation to employers' authority. Men suffered these burdens because they could not avoid them. But employment also gave men income, freedom from domestic chores, a commanding position within families, and general ascendancy over women. Men protected these benefits because they valued them. Thus men's employment commitments have simultaneously been obligations and rights. This objective ambiguity inherent in men's roles has produced the contradictory interpretations of their employment commitments in ideology.

Similarly, women have also been in an objectively ambiguous situation. This has undoubtedly affected their response to the ideology of domesticity. This ideology denied them access to the status and liberty provided by good jobs, leaving them dependent on men. But the ideology of male obligations was not an appealing alternative. It would require women to submit to the authority and discipline of the labor market and the work place. In a sense, women--particularly those in the working class--faced the possibility of two kinds of subordination. They could submit to men in their private lives or they could submit to employers. It was hard to discern indisputable self-interests in these circumstances.

Over the long run, women's direct subordination to labor markets and employers has progressively displaced their subordination to individual men. Most of us believe that this is a great improvement. Nonetheless, women who have been subject to these conditions often accepted the ideology of female domesticity. One important reason for women's acceptance of domestic ideas was the ambiguous character of men's position, which did not seem obviously better.

IDEALS FROM INTERESTS

Both organized and unorganized processes sustaining popular beliefs caused ideology to reflect the interests of men more than those of women. Men controlled the institutions that had an impact on ideology. Women's subordinate status skewed the dispersed, continuous informal negotiations over what is true, necessary, or just. Men's favored social position allowed them to define the assumptions that guided negotiations and restricted the outcomes.

Anytime the conditions of inequality changed, the range of issues open to dispute shifted and the conventional ideology of sexual inequality was threatened. In American history the rise of capitalist enterprises, mass employment, bureaucratization, increased availability of commodities, and other effects of economic and political development have repeatedly shifted the terrain to be disputed by the sexes. By transforming the activities required within the household and within careers, these social changes have raised new issues, for example, deciding what value to accord the various tasks that can be pursued in the home. Moreover, by modifying the imbalance of status and resources between the sexes, these social changes have altered the outcomes of negotiations between the sexes. The objects of dispute have moved closer to equality, and this has shifted the discourse toward more egalitarian ideas.

Ideas in Conflict

History teaches us that those who ride with progress shape the ideas of the future while those passed by become followers. Consider, for example, the well-known example of Europe's transformation during and after the Reformation. The regions bordering the Mediterranean Sea once dominated Europe. On the eve of the Reformation, Italy and Spain were still powerful nations and the Catholic Church wielded control of religion if Europe. But then the Northern European countries, particularly England and the Low Countries developed capitalist institutions. As time passed, the weight of economic and ideological influence shifted from Southern Europe to Northern Europe. Once the northern nations had looked to the south for new doctrine and fashions. But now the capitalist nations produced new forms of government, scientific thought, and artistic initiatives. Because the formerly backwards northern regions allied themselves to progress, they became the contributors rather than the recipients of new ideas.

Similarly, because American economic and political development increasingly improved the position of women, feminist ideals won ever greater influence. Meanwhile, men (and women) attached to the declining order of male ascendancy lost ground. So did their ideas. Those who were riding the main stream of progress left behind the less fortunate who were caught in reactionary back waters.

As we have seen, each of the three periods discussed above produced two contradictory ideologies of women's place. An ideal of female domesticity defended inequality by fixing women's place in the home, serving their families. Popular feminist ideals claimed women's rights outside their homes. New ideas repeatedly displaced the old in *both* ideologies. Each perspective strained to accommodate changes in the social positions of the sexes and the surrounding economic, political, and cultural environment. New ideologies of women's domesticity arose every time the existing ideology could no longer convince middle class women that it was both good and necessary for them to avoid participation in economic or public life. New feminist ideologies challenging women's domesticity arose out of the same social conditions, but also in response to the current domestic ideals. Because the feminist ideals advocated progressive reform, they accommodated changes in the social environment much more easily and smoothly than did the idealization of domestic life. In each period, these opposing ideologies vied for support.

To successfully legitimate gender inequality, each ideology of female domesticity achieved three common goals while staying consistent with material and cultural conditions. It specified enough domestic responsibilities to keep women busy. It justified the allocation of these responsibilities to women. And it promised some compensatory advantages to women in return for accepting their domesticity. In short, it gave women work to do in their homes and allowed them to feel this work was virtuous and worthwhile.

Neither structural conditions nor the requirements of gender inequality strictly determined the content of the ideology of domesticity. Instead, the circumstances of gender inequality set limits within which the ideology had to fit. Each of these periods brought a flurry of ideological invention and conflict out of which one ideology that fit within the limits won acceptance. The major advocates of the competing ideologies were not men as a group, but other groups pursuing their special interests. Once a workable ideology of gender inequality became dominant, that ideology remained prevalent until changing social conditions rendered it unworkable.

Each new ideology of women's role helped keep women from using the new opportunities created by social progress and disguised the significance of gender inequality in determining women's continued domesticity. These ideologies of female domesticity varied considerably in their content and in their specific prescriptions, arose under divergent conditions, and were initially promoted by different groups. But they had in common the effects of justifying women's exclusion from employment and public life and sustaining women's subordination

to men. Therefore, following Stinchcombe's[233] assessment of the logical requirements for a functional theory, we can infer that gender inequality was the *cause* of the ideology of domesticity.

Over the long run, successive ideologies of female domesticity weakened while popular feminist ideologies grew stronger. Each new stage of social development not only required a new ideology justifying gender inequality, but made this ideology increasingly difficult to establish. The nineteenth century ideal of true womanhood won rapid, extensive acceptance among both sexes. In the early twentieth century, the ideal of professionalized domesticity became popular, but did not sweep society as had true womanhood. The ideal never became fully embedded in the general ideology of the period. It did not, for example, often appear as the unquestioned standard of womanhood in contemporary novels, as had the earlier ideal of true womanhood. The feminine mystique of the mid-twentieth century gave an even worse showing. Even during its peak in the 1950s, large numbers of women abandoned its dictates to take jobs. Many of those who did follow the requirements of the feminine mystique felt enormously unhappy about doing so. I do not want to exaggerate this comparison. Some people did reject the early ideal of virtuous domesticity and many did accept the modern ideal of self-fulfilling domesticity. But the recent domestic ideology did not compel the breath and depth of belief attached to earlier ideals.

Conversely, the central ideals of feminist challenges won greater acceptance in each period. The supporters of women's legal rights in the mid-nineteenth century were a small minority. The suffrage movement attained great influence. Finally, the modern feminist ideals of economic and social equality have swept the majority of the population.

The decline in gender inequality has been the driving force behind the changes in feminist ideals and it has allowed their ever wider acceptance. From the beginning of the first half of the nineteenth century, eminent feminist theorists articulated the ideas that became prominent in later periods. The issues of political and economic equality appeared in the declarations of Seneca Falls. But most middle class women (and men) challenging sex inequality only approved and adopted these ideas after social conditions progressed far enough to clarify their meaning and value.

The two ideological strains represent contrasting responses to women's improving social status. By the turn of the century, legislative action had greatly reduced the legal disabilities that concerned early feminists. Both the new domestic and the new feminist ideals assumed women's legal rights. The suffrage movement tried to extend them, however, while professional domesticity denied

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[233]1968, *Constructing Social Theories*.

their importance. Similarly, by the mid-twentieth century both domestic and feminist ideologies accepted women's civic equality. But the feminine mystique again tried to subordinate this to women's domestic activities while feminist ideals tried to use this as a lever to gain economic equality.

Thus, the popular feminist ideals at each stage have reflected the past improvements in women's status and the contemporary opportunities for further reductions in inequality. In contrast, each ideology of female domesticity reflected efforts to justify women's continued dependence on men by denying and defying the direction of social and economic development. Because women's social position has improved progressively, the feminist ideals have gained a wider following in each period, until the anti-rationalist and anti-egalitarian ideologies of female subordination could no longer subdue them.[234]

We began our investigation of ideology by considering two opposing interpretations. Many believe that inequality expresses the beliefs people possess about differences between the sexes. Others contend that beliefs about the sexes merely reflect the objective inequality between them. But the history of ideas about women's place in America does not coincide with either of these visions.

For the past 150 years, ideas legitimating gender inequality and ideas challenging it have both been widespread in this society. Both sets of ideas have changed repeatedly to adjust to the continual metamorphosis of the social environment. Two sources of tension ensured that people constantly disputed beliefs about the sexes. Women and men fought over their rights and obligations, their statuses and privileges. And the rhythm of social change pitted those allied with progress against those attached to preserving the past.

Ideology mattered. But its effects were complex and inconsistent. The ideals of female domesticity helped to stabilize men's dominance. They gave women activities and moral obligations that kept them in their households and dependent on men. And they motivated men to consistently act in favor of their sex interests (even when as individuals they might have been better off if their wives had jobs). But the popular feminist ideologies worked in the opposite direction. They motivated and guided women (and men) to reject belief in the justice and necessity of inequality. The general rise of rationality and meritocratic beliefs also favored the reduction of gender inequality.

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[234]Ehrenreich and English's argument (1978) contrasting rationalist and romanticist solutions to the *woman question* suggests a similar analysis.