THE AMERICAN FAMILY SURVEY

2018 Summary Report: Identities, Opportunities and Challenges

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In July of 2018, the Deseret News and The Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy at Brigham Young University fielded a survey on the family in America. This survey was administered by YouGov[2] to a sample of 3,000 adult respondents whose characteristics mirror those of the general population. This report details the raw results of that survey and some of the key demographic breakdowns. Download the survey report at http://deseretnews.com/american-family-survey. The overall margin of error for the survey is ± 1.9 %.

Deseret News

[1]We are deeply grateful for the efforts and advice of our advisory committee, Karlyn Bowman (American Enterprise Institute), Marcy Carlson (University of Wisconsin), Sara McLanahan (Princeton University), Richard Reeves (The Brookings Institution), and Brad Wilcox (The University of Virginia). They provided substantial advice and comment that dramatically improved the survey and the report. Errors, of course, are our own.

[2]Please see section 9 on methodology (below) for a statement about the specific protocols for this survey.

YouGov

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1 Project Overview & Summary

The American Family Survey, now in its fourth year, is designed to understand the experiences of Americans in their relationships, marriages, and families and how those experiences relate to a variety of different political and social issues. In addition to examining trends in responses to core questions that have been asked repeatedly, the 2018 survey expands to include new areas of inquiry, including how Americans think about family formation, attitudes about fertility and children, concerns of parents of teenagers, and views about sexual harassment, consent, and the #MeToo movement.

One of the key new questions explores how a person's identity relates to their family life. We find that people place much more importance on their identity as a parent or partner than other identities, such as their religion, political party, or career. This identity does not seem to have a large direct effect on family practices or activities. But those who are more committed to an identity as a parent or as a spouse are definitely more optimistic about their families.

Another theme emerging from the 2018 findings is anxiety about the cost of raising a family. These costs stand out as one of the top issues facing families today, and half of Americans say the cost of raising a family is not affordable for most people. Those without children rate the cost of raising a child as a significant factor in their decision about whether or not to have children. Most people with children at home say they worry about their ability to pay at least one bill, and nearly half have faced some kind of economic crisis during the past 12 months.

We also used the 2018 American Family Survey as an opportunity to examine attitudes about sexual harassment and consent, and found that men and women think differently about these topics, with men less likely to describe behaviors such as asking for sexual favors or persisting in unwanted attention as "always" harassment. Men are also less likely to define certain behaviors as harassment when asked about a woman doing it to a man rather than a man doing it to a woman. Women are also more insistent on the importance of verbal consent in intimate relationships than are men.

With regard to core questions about the state of marriage and family in America, we find substantial continuity with the previous iterations of the American Family Survey. On many core items we find little to no change at all. Survey respondents continue to have positive views of their own relationships and families, though they are far less optimistic about the state of marriage and families generally.

In the past, we have found that families across many demographic and ideological groups participate in family activities at similar rates, though attitudes about marriage and family may differ by demographic group. This year's survey also finds that groups of Americans differ in what they describe as the ideal sequence to have sex, cohabit, marry, and have children, but the actual sequence in which people live out in their own lives is more similar across groups. It also builds on previous findings about the impact of screens on families, with overuse of technology surfacing as one of the top issues facing teens today.

Families face many opportunities at this time, and in some ways we see more optimism about people's personal relationships alongside continued pessimism about the state of marriage more generally. But it is also a time of significant challenges, whether they be economic or otherwise.

Below are some highlights from this year's survey.

Views on Marriage & Family

The institution of marriage is supported by a majority of Americans—especially the notion that marriage is good for families and children: 64 percent believe it makes them better off financially

and 59 percent believe the institution is necessary to create strong families. Few people believe that marriage is a burden or out of date. Attitudes about whether or not being legally married is as important as personal commitment to a partner are mixed, but 44 percent believe that being legally married is not as important as personal commitment.

People who approve of Donald Trump are more likely than other Americans to be married, but Trump supporters can be found across all relationship types. A surprising finding is that Donald Trump's support is driven not simply by education, but fairly strongly by marital status. Fifty percent of married men with a college degree and 59 percent of married men without a college degree held a favorable view of Trump, much higher than the unmarried men with a college degree (36 percent) or the unmarried men without a college degree (40 percent).

Americans say being a parent and being a spouse or partner are the most important identities to them—more important than religion, race, political party, career, or community. About seven in ten of parents or married persons claim the identity is very or extremely important, compared with only 43 percent for religion and 37 percent for career. Black and Hispanic Americans place an even higher premium on their parental and spousal identities than do white Americans. People with a strong parental identity are more likely to undertake key family activities like eating dinner together or doing household chores together.

Overall, Americans appear to be growing less concerned about cultural issues, such as substance abuse and sexual permissiveness. The percentage of respondents saying these types of issues are among the biggest problems facing families has dropped fifteen percentage points since 2015. However, Republicans are still concerned about cultural issues far more than are Democrats or independents. At the same time, concern about financial stresses has increased, and is concentrated among people with children still at home.

When it comes to the prerequisites for having a child, most Americans believe that three things matter: being financially stable, being in a committed relationship (but not necessarily being married), and having good health insurance. For young people who do not currently have children, the single largest consideration is the cost of raising a child, although relationship status also matters.

There is a clear difference between the ideal ordering and the actual ordering of key relationship milestones including sex, cohabitation, getting married, and having children. Republicans and black Democrats favor a more traditional sequence (marriage before sex and cohabitation) than white Democrats, who prefer cohabitation and marriage after sex. But those who prefer a more traditional sequence as their ideal do not tend to realize this in their actual lives. The lived experience of these three groups is similar, with sex typically coming before cohabitation and marriage.

Americans believe that it is important for married couples to share similar beliefs about raising children and social values (such as honesty or hard work). They are less concerned about spouses having the same religious beliefs, education level, or political party.

Americans tend to emphasize financial milestones — being financially independent from parents, moving our of parents' home, and being capable of supporting a family — as the key markers of adulthood. These conclusions are gendered, however. More Americans see them as important to "becoming a man" than to "becoming a woman." In addition, generational differences also matter for these assessments. Compared to younger respondents, older Americans see much larger differences between what it means to become a man and what it means to become a woman.

Parents & Teenagers

According to parents of teenagers, overuse of technology is one of the most important issues facing teens today. Technology concerns are cited by a majority of parents (53 percent), and this is followed closely by bullying (chosen by 45 percent of parents), but most other issues like drugs, alcohol, pressure to get good grades, and navigating sexual identity (among others) are all of far less widespread concern.

Republican parents are most concerned about overuse of technology. In contrast, Democrats and independents are more concerned about bullying. Republicans are also dramatically more concerned about the role of family breakdown and divorce in the lives of teenagers than are other respondents.

Parents estimated that their teenage sons spent a little more than 24 hours a week playing video games, while parents of teenage girls estimated that their teenage girls spent a little less than 24 hours a week on social media.

A little over one-third of parents say that they are extremely concerned about their teenager's social life, school trouble and grades, while a quarter of parents are similarly concerned about anxiety and depression.

Sexual Harassment & Consent

Nearly six in ten women say they have experienced unwanted sexual advances. For men, the comparable number is far lower: less than three in ten.

There is also a distinct difference between the views of men and women on which behaviors count as sexual harassment in work settings. Women have higher standards; men have lower standards on average. For example, 7 in 10 women say that "asking for sexual favors" constitutes sexual harassment, compared to about half of men. Most men and women say that "persisting in unwanted attention" counts as sexual harassment, but even there, we find a gender gap (77 percent of women vs. 62 percent of men).

The specific nature of the action also matters for assessments of sexual harassment. In work settings, both men and women are less likely to view placing a hand on someone else's back, making sexual jokes, or commenting on appearance as forms of sexual harassment, but even with respect to those behaviors, there are gender differences in standards.

But there is another pattern of gender differences in whether conduct is perceived as harassment. We asked half of our sample about men taking certain actions towards women and the other half about women taking the same action towards men. Respondents are more likely to see many actions as sexual harassment when done by men. For example, about 6 in 10 men and nearly 8 in 10 women think that asking for sexual favors counts as sexual harassment when a man behaves this way toward a woman, but those numbers drop to 4 in 10 men and a little less than 7 in 10 women when we asked about women making the request of a man. Both men and women have this double standard, although men are a little more inconsistent in their standards than are women.

People believe strongly in the need for consent. In the cases of intimate touching or having sex, large majorities believe the consent must be verbal, while for kissing or hand-holding it can be nonverbal. Women, in particular, emphasize the need for consent.

Politics and Policy

Relationship and family experiences can be powerful predictors of people's attitudes about local policies, in contrast to some of the partisan distinctions that persist on national issues. For instance, single people and people without children are much more likely to favor spending local tax dollars on roads as opposed to schools. Similarly, single people and those without children favor public transportation over spending money on pensions.

On the topic of immigration, most Americans agree that citizens should be able to bring non-citizen children, spouses, and parents to this country, though there are predictable partisan differences, and Democrats favor giving the opportunity to siblings and grandparents as well. Majorities of both parties oppose extending the circle to other extended family members.

Americans' own family experiences shape these attitudes, too. For instance, married people with children are relatively more favorable to bringing children and spouses to the country, while single people are relatively more favorable to bringing extended family members.

Regarding migrant families that cross the border without a visa and request asylum, more than 8 in 10 Americans favor keeping parents and children together. Among those who feel this way, a plurality believe such families should be allowed into the country subject to an asylum hearing, although a little over a third believe they should be held together in detention facilities.

Sixty-eight percent of Americans think the recent tax cuts will help large corporations and 63 percent think they will help wealthy individuals. By contrast, 37 percent of Americans think that the tax cuts will help low-income individuals and only 35 percent believe they will help their own families. Women are the group that stands out as the least likely to favor the tax cuts: only three in ten women believe they will help their family.

2 The State of Marriage and Family

We begin with an overview of the state of marriage among the 3,000 respondents to the 2018 survey. Table 1 provides a summary of the current relationship status of the respondents.[3] A little less than half of the sample is currently married, and a little over one third is not currently in a relationship. The remaining respondents report being in a committed relationship, and among that group around two-thirds are cohabiting. While these findings are nearly identical to the results found in previous years, there are distinct differences between demographic groups that are important to explain.

Table 1: Current Relationship Status

	Married	**Cohabiting**	**In Relationship**	**No Relationship**
Overall	47	11	6	35
Democrat	42	13	8	37
Independent	38	14	6	41
Republican	59	7	5	29
18-29	19	16	12	52
30-44	47	14	6	33
45-54	56	11	6	27
55-64	57	9	5	29
65+	62	4	2	32
High School or Less	42	12	6	39
Some College	43	11	7	39
College Graduate or More	59	9	6	26
Low Income (under $40,000)	31	14	8	47
Middle Income ($40-79,999)	56	11	6	28
High Income (above $80,000)	58	8	5	29
White	52	10	6	33
Black	31	13	9	48
Hispanic	42	15	8	35
Asian	53	6	8	32

Republicans are more likely to be married than are Democrats, and both groups are more likely to be married than independents. Because discerning causality is difficult in these contexts, these patterns may be tied to other demographic characteristics, as Republicans tend to be slightly older than Democrats, who tend to be slightly older than independents (the average age of each group differs about five years from the next). Younger respondents are less likely to be in any relationship, while older respondents are consistently more likely to be in a relationship—more than six in ten respondents over age 65 are married. Education and income are also correlated with relationship status. Those who have a college degree (or even more education) are significantly more likely to be married than those with less than a college degree.

[3]Throughout, we provide numbers in both table and figure formats, but caution the reader that figures are meant to display the pattern of relative results rather than than any particular level. For ease of presentation we have omitted confidence intervals for these numbers, but they vary widely depending upon the sample discussed. Occasionally they are quite small (the overall sample is 3,000), but occasionally they are much larger when a very small sub-group is analyzed. We encourage the reader to contact the authors or download datasets to better understand the data patterns.

Similarly, those with a high income ($80,000 or above) are slightly more likely to be married than middle-income respondents. But the median member of both groups is married, while among those with an income of less than $40,000, only three in ten respondents are likely to be married. And it is not about the marriage contract: those who have a low income are not cohabiting at higher rates, but rather are not in any relationship at all. Except among the youngest respondents, this finding remains after controlling for age. Of course, those people who are cohabiting or married are likely to have a higher household income simply because there are two potential wage earners, but the economic differences are still important to note.

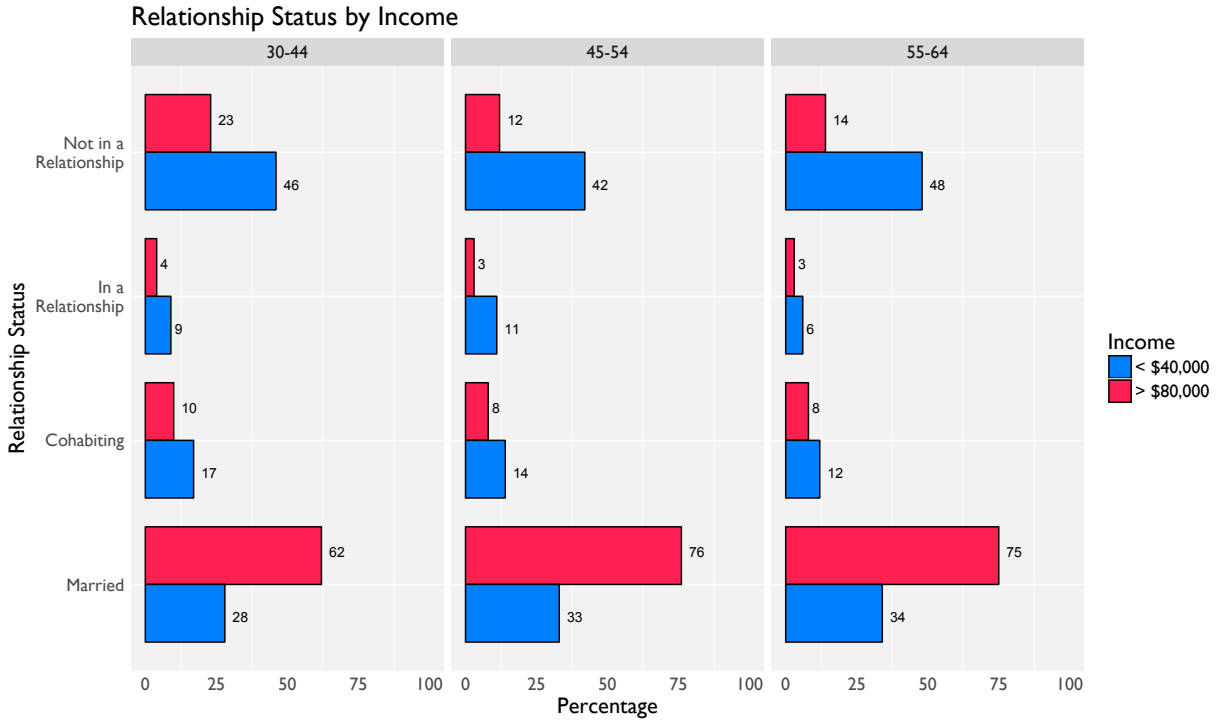

Figure 1: Relationship status by age and income

While we have made special mention of the correlation between income and marital status, a lot of other patterns are similar to results from previous years. Among the respondents who had been married at least once, the average age at first marriage was a little over 24 (women typically marry at 23, men typically marry at 26). Cohabitation patterns remain similar. About 43 percent of all respondents (and 40 percent of married respondents) reported that they had cohabited at least once prior to marriage, but this is strongly related to age. Of respondents between the ages of 18 and 29, 33 percent reported cohabiting prior to marriage; a little over half of respondents between age 30 and 64 report cohabiting, and for those aged 65 or older this number drops back down to 30 percent. On average, respondents were 23 when they first lived with a romantic partner, and this also differs by age. Of those between the ages of 18 and 29, the average age when they first lived with a romantic partner is 20. This number steadily increases, with those age 65 and older first reporting cohabitation at 26.

Just over a quarter of the sample has experienced divorce at some point in their life. Of the respondents that had been married for at least two years, 24 percent reported that at some point in the last two years they thought their relationship was "in trouble." Among cohabiters who had been together for at least two years, nearly half indicated that they thought their relationship was in trouble at some point in the last two years.

Table 2: Relationship Troubles by Demographics

	Percent that thought their relationship was in trouble
All	32
Women	35
Men	28
Mother continuously married	30
Mother ever divorced	36
Mother never married	38
Liberal	34
Moderate	35
Conservative	25
High School or less	32
Some College	34
College or more	29
Low income	39
Middle Income	31
High Income	27
18-29	44
30-44	43
45-54	33
55-64	25
65+	14
Less than 10 years together	44
10-29 years together	32
30-49 years together	13
50+ years together	9

Women were more likely to believe that their relationship was in trouble than were men. The other traditional demographic category that saw a substantial difference was income, where the low-income respondents were about 12 percent more likely to see their relationship this way. A variable we have previously found important was a mother's marital status, and that remains true this year.

Finally, we note that the length of time a respondent had been married or in a relationship with their current partner was highly correlated with whether they thought their relationship was in trouble—those with longer relationships were much less likely to believe that their relationship was in trouble. This latter point is also strongly conflated by age, and younger respondents are definitely more anxious about their relationships. For those under age 45, more than four in ten had recently worried about their relationship. Among older groups the numbers are much lower.

Many aspects of American family life have remained consistent over the last four years. Around half of the sample is married, and the average age of marriage is 24, as it was in past surveys. Americans generally have only one cohabitation before marriage. Americans tend to first become a parent at age 25. The one

exception to this pattern of continuity is the number of children. In the 2015 American Family Survey, the average number of kids was 1.8. This has steadily decreased to 1.6. Admittedly, this may not seem like a large difference, but in the area of fertility it is noticeable. If the pattern continues, the results will be quite substantial and will reflect a major change in American family life.

2.1 *The General State of Marriages and Attitudes about Marriage*

Respondents to the American Family Survey express largely positive views of their own marriage. For the first time in the survey, over half of the sample felt that their marriage was stronger than two years ago, and another 40 percent said that they were generally the same. These numbers represent the hint of an upward trend in evaluations, but are probably best interpreted as stability (see Figure 2). A very small percentage said that their marriage was weaker. This is the same pattern we saw in the previous three years of the survey.

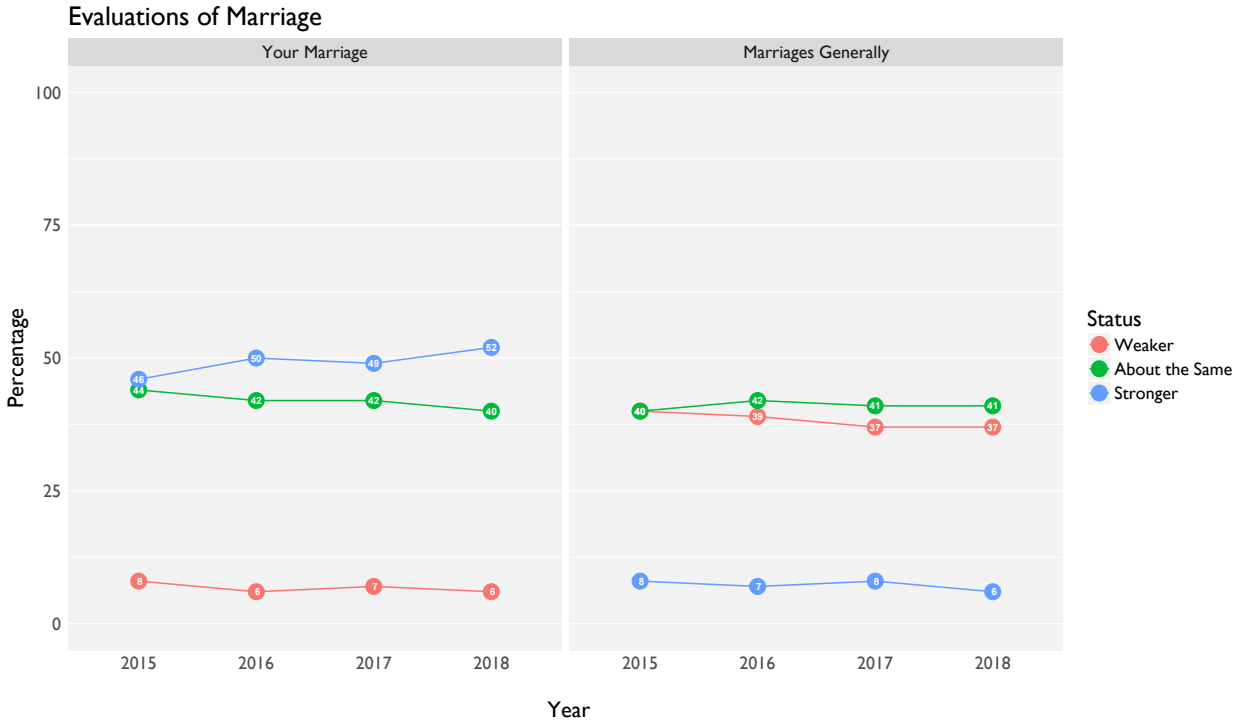

Figure 2: Respondent views of marriages, both their own and of others.

This pattern is almost exactly reversed when asked about marriages generally in the United States. When respondents turned their attention to marriages generally, only six percent believed that marriages had gotten stronger in the last two years. Thus, Americans appear to be fairly optimistic about the health of their own romantic relationships, but dramatically more pessimistic about the health of marriages generally. This pattern has held essentially constant over all four years of the American Family Survey. This pattern has no relationship to partisan identity, as around half of respondents in all partisan categories feel this way about their own marriages. The pattern for seeing weakness in other marriages is also broadly similar, though there is a small partisan gap here: 32 percent of Democrat affiliates claim that marriages generally are weaker, while 43 percent of Republicans claim the same.

Finally, we turn to a battery of questions we have consistently studied on people's beliefs about the importance of marriage. In each iteration of the American Family Survey, we have asked respondents to consider a number of statements about the institution of marriage, questions about how it strengthens families, provides financially, or is a burden, and so forth. Each of the questions is in reference to marriages generally and not an individual's personal marriage. The trend is displayed in Figure 3.

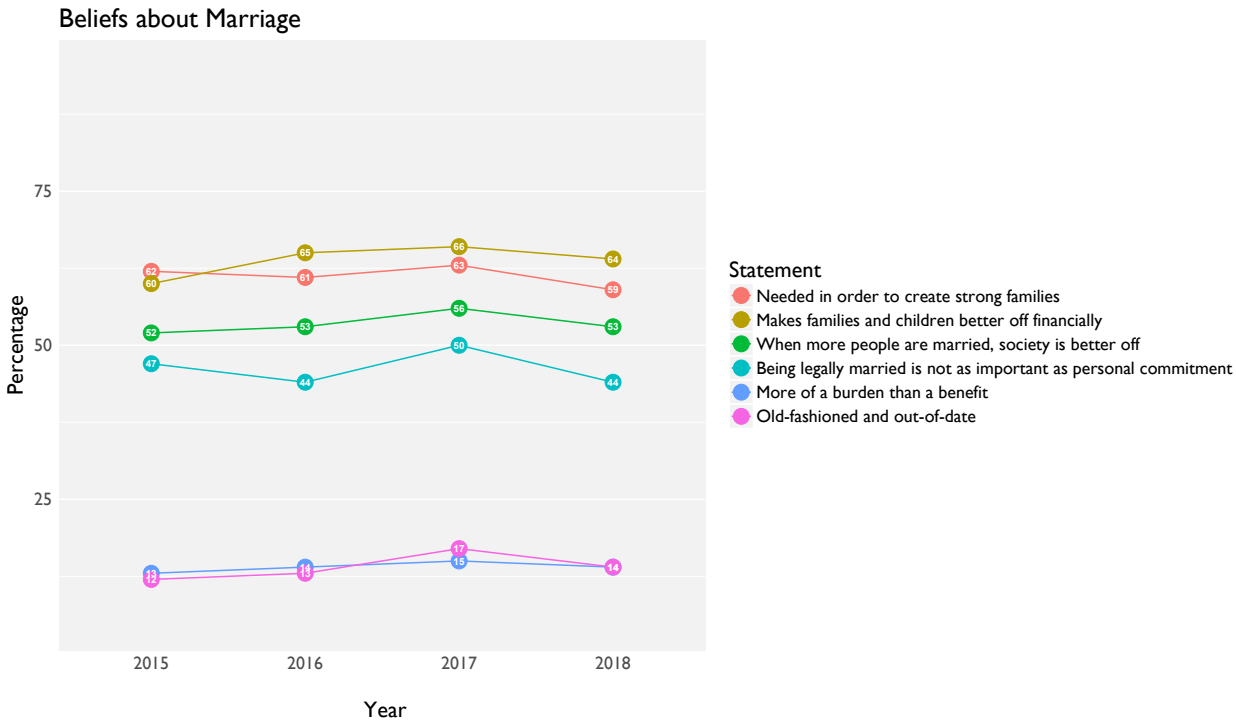

Figure 3: Respondent beliefs about the importance of marriage.

Two statements stand out as being agreed to by large majorities: that marriages make families and children better off financially and that it is needed to create strong families. Though a majority still agrees with the idea that when more people are married society is better off, it is not a large majority. The more controversial idea is that personal commitment is more important than being legally married. This is the number that has moved around the most in the series, but, generally, a little less than half of the sample agrees with this idea, suggesting that personal commitment is a very powerful value for a large number of people. The notions that marriage is more of a burden than a benefit or that it is old-fashioned and out-of-date are consistently not popular. Only about one in seven respondents agrees with these ideas.

On balance, we take these results to suggest that the public tends to feel quite positively toward marriage, even those who are not married. They suggest a pattern where, while people are reluctant to judge people's life choices, they do agree that marriage is a positive institution and that, in general, it makes families and society better off. These results strengthen if we look only at the married. For instance, while 35 percent of the married respondents believe that being legally married is not as important as personal commitment, the number rises to 46 percent when looking at those in no relationship. Those cohabiting (a relatively small slice of the sample) are the group most likely to agree with this statement: 69 percent agree. There are some ideological differences, at least as far as self-labelled ideology goes. Conservatives tend to like marriage more. Liberals are less convinced that it is necessary. Only 35 percent of liberals believe it is needed to create strong families, and only 32 percent believe that it benefits society. But, even among this group less positively disposed toward marriage, only 15 percent believe that marriage is more

of a burden than a benefit and only 23 percent believe that the institution is old-fashioned and out-of-date.

It is fashionable in some quarters to argue that marriage is under assault. And while we agree that it is an institution that is in some respects weaker than it once was, that is not because people dislike the institution. On the whole they like it, though the meaning of that institution varies across the population.

2.2 *Relationship Status and Trump Approval*

In the last AFS we examined the relationship between family status and Trump support and found indications of a relationship between marriage and reported vote.[4] This year remains broadly similar. Table 3 displays Trump approval by relationship status.

Table 3: Percentage approving of President Trump by category

Relationship Status	**All Respondents**		**Republican Respondents**	
	Trump Approvers	**Non-Trump Approvers**	**Trump Approvers**	**Non-Trump Approvers**
Married	48	52	86	14
Cohabiting	29	71	71	29
In a Relationship	36	64	84	16
Not in a Relationship	35	65	86	14

It is obvious that Trump's core group are those that are married. This is the only group that approaches approval of Trump (though even this group is best described as "split"). Those in other relationship statuses all disapprove of Trump at super-majority levels. The final two columns look at Trump approval among Republicans.[5] Among Republicans, Trump's status is so high that only the cohabiting Republicans (not a large group) approve of Trump less than eight times out of ten. And even the cohabiters approve of Trump 71 percent of the time. It seems generally true that Republicans of all stripes—regardless of family status—have broadly made their peace with Trump.

While many outlets have highlighted the importance of gender and education to Trump support, relatively few note how important marriage is, especially among men. Table 4 shows the importance of this relationship. The only group that approves of President Trump at 50 percent or greater is married men—regardless of education level. All other groups are at least under 50 percent in their level of approval (some quite a bit). While education is obviously important for predicting Trump approval, marriage should not be understated.

Table 4: Trump Approval by Gender, Marital Status and Education

	Men		**Women**	
	Married	**Unmarried**	**Married**	**Unmarried**
College Degree	50	36	35	25
No College Degree	59	40	46	31

[4] In 2017, 59 percent of the Trump voters reported being married, while only 48 percent of Clinton voters reported being married.
[5] There were not enough Trump approving Democrats to examine the split in that group.

2.3 *Identity*

This year's report includes a series of identity questions. The specific wording used was, "How important are the following things to your personal identity?" Figure 4 shows the popularity of each item we asked about. The first thing to notice is that relationships and parenting are very important (though it should be noted that we only asked this question of people who were in a relationship or had children). Other identities are simply less popular. Religion and career are also somewhat popular, with race, political party, and community less so.

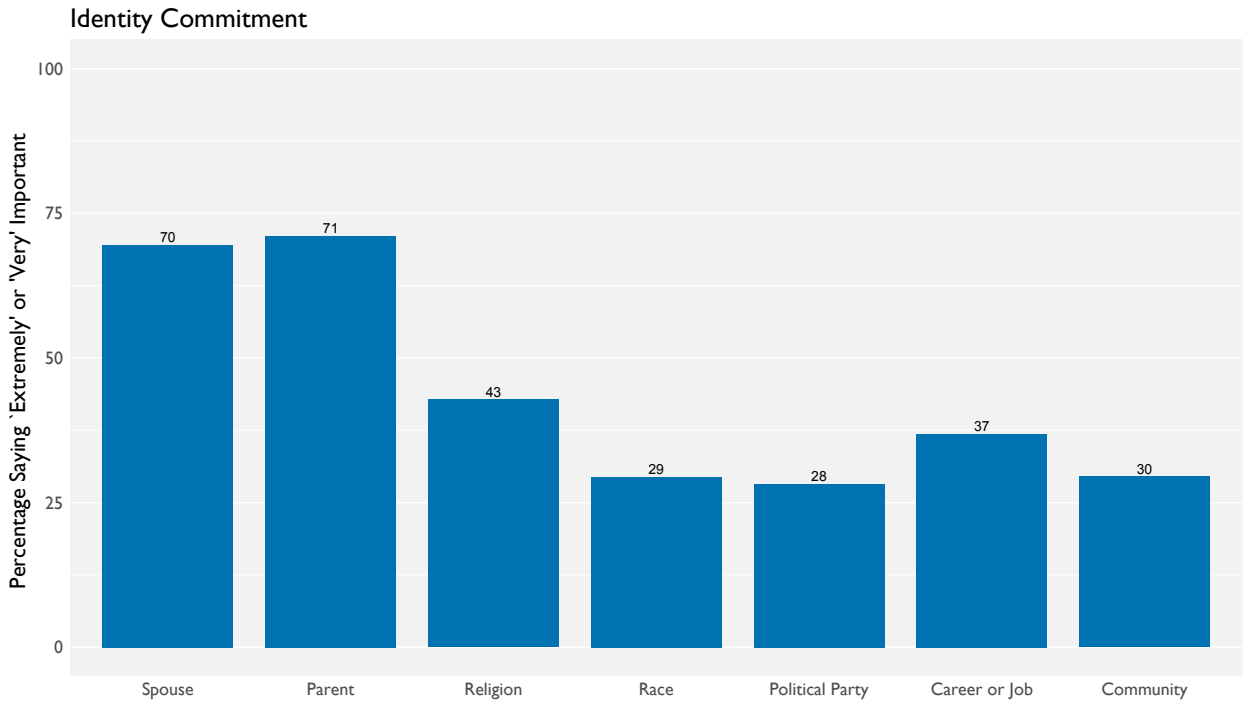

Figure 4: Respondent identities

We introduce it here to both explain the variable (we will mostly be focusing on the spouse and parent identities below), but also to note that one surprising finding (at least to us) was the racial difference by identity. Figure 5 displays the percentage who selected the topmost category for parent, spouse, and then (for purposes of comparison) race. The clear result is that both blacks and Hispanics respond that their parental and spousal identities are "extremely" important to them, and at higher rates than whites. It is important to remember that white respondents are still choosing spousal and parental identities as their most important identities, it is just that blacks and Hispanics see those identities as somewhat more important. In the case of black respondents, the importance of spousal and parental identities are equal to or *more* important than their racial identity.

We offer no strong theoretical reason for that here, although it could be due to the importance of passing along a cultural heritage, the need to protect children or family relationships, or some other factor we cannot guess.

So, the proportion of people who value an identity clearly shows that parental and spousal identities are quite important, and that these latter identities appear to be more important to blacks and Hispanics than they are to whites. Another way of showing this is displayed in Table 5, which provides further analysis of

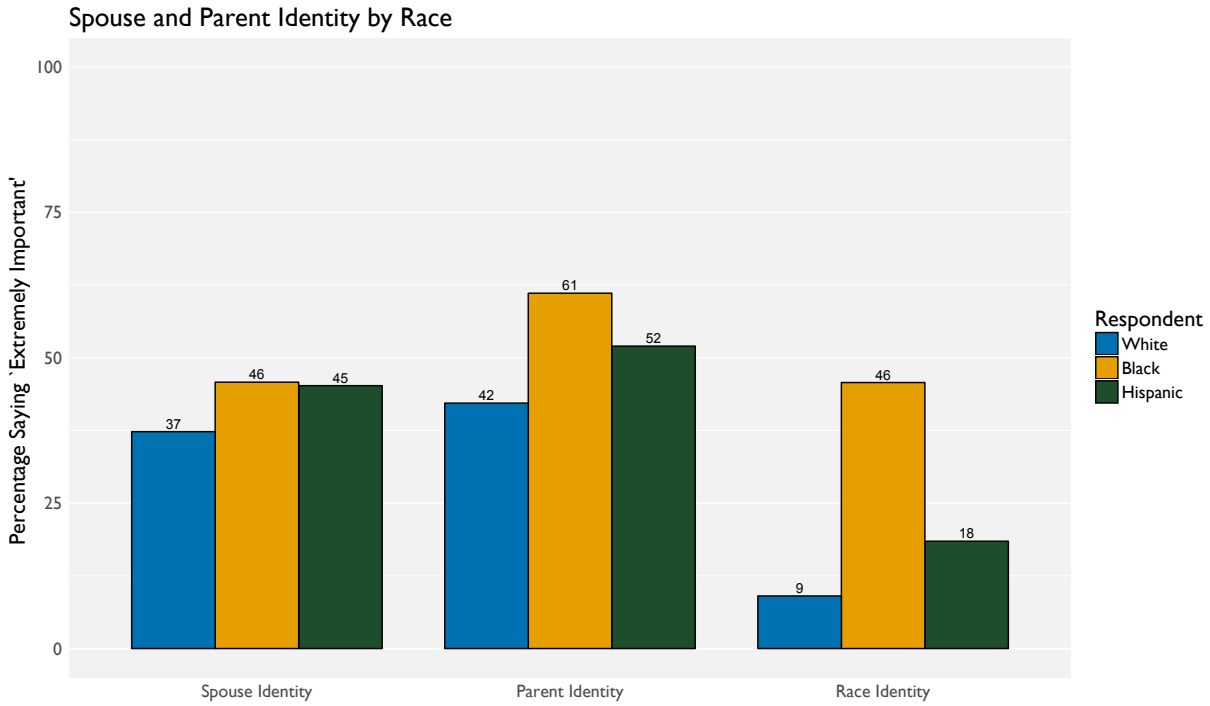

Figure 5: Respondent identities by race

people's identities in this survey. There, the raw number of identities claimed by respondents are shown, and the differences are instructive.

White respondents are consistently below average in the number of identities that they claim relative to the other racial groups. This is true whether or not we examine the global average or simply look at the claimed identities without race included (it seems plausible, and, indeed, the data bear out the claim that whites tend not to see their race as an important identity while members of minority groups do see their race as an important identity). Another group that stands out are atheists. They have more than a half point fewer identities than do the other religious groups, and this is true even when we omit religion from that category.

All of this analysis should come with a significant caveat. Though we asked about several different identities, we make no claim that this list is exhaustive or complete. People take their identities from many different sources, so this information should not be read to mean that atheists or whites lack an identity, merely that the identities that we chose to ask about did not appeal to them.

Table 5: The raw number of identities people believed were important to them

	Overall Average	Average Dropping Race	Average Dropping Religion
Overall	3.9	3.5	3.3
Group			
White	3.7	3.4	3.1
Black	4.8	4.0	4.0
Hispanic	4.2	3.6	3.5
Religion			
Protestant	4.2	3.9	3.4
Roman-Catholic	3.9	3.5	3.4
Atheist	2.9	2.7	2.8

2.4 *Family Relationships and Parenting*

Around 60 percent of the sample reported having at least one child.[6] Among the respondents who are married, 85 percent have at least one child. Among cohabiters, 54 percent report having a child. The average number of children in this year's sample is 1.6. However, when limiting the sample to those who have at least one child, this number jumps to 2.6. While there is a large group of Americans who do not have any children (around 40 percent of 2018 American Family Survey respondents), those who do have children tend to have two or three. Among married respondents to the survey, two-thirds have two or more children (see Table 6).[7] Among cohabiters, more than half have at least one child. By contrast, two-thirds of respondents who are single or who are in a committed relationship but not yet living together have no children. Of respondents who have children, the average age when they became parents was 25: 24 for women and 26 for men.

Table 6: Number of Children

	All	Married	Cohabiting	In Relationship	No Relationship
0	40	15	46	67	67
1	14	18	15	9	9
2	21	30	18	10	12
3	14	20	13	8	7
4+	12	17	8	6	5

Though most people who are married also have kids, the experience of raising children outside of marriage is common: approximately one-quarter of the sample reported having a child out of wedlock, and 40 percent of the women in the sample who have children are not currently married. When we restrict the findings to women who currently have a child living with them at home, less than 60 percent are married, and of those unmarried women, just over one quarter are cohabiting with their partners. The experience of raising children outside of marriage is especially common among younger women. Of women between the ages of 18 and 29 with a child at home, less than half are married and more than one quarter are cohabiting, compared to women between 30 and 44, where nearly two-thirds are married and about 15 percent are cohabiting.

[6]These numbers include biological, step-children, or adopted children. They do not include foster children or other unique situations, such as grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.

[7]In this table, the "In Relationship" category includes those who are in a committed relationship but are not cohabiting or married.

The relationship between marital status and parenting also differs across income categories. As shown in Figure 6, respondents in the lowest income category (respondents with household incomes of less than $40,000) were dramatically less likely to be married and substantially more likely to be cohabiting or in no relationship at all than middle- ($40,000-$80,000) or high-income (above $80,000) participants in the survey. Put differently, the experience of raising children outside of marriage — sometimes with a cohabiting partner, but much more often with no partner at all — is much more common among the poorest Americans. Wealthier Americans, by contrast, tend to raise their children within the context of marriage. This pattern can be seen among fathers and mothers, though among fathers, we see a difference between middle- and high-income respondents that is not as pronounced among mothers. For low-income mothers, raising a child on their own is almost as prevalent as raising a child with the help of a married spouse.

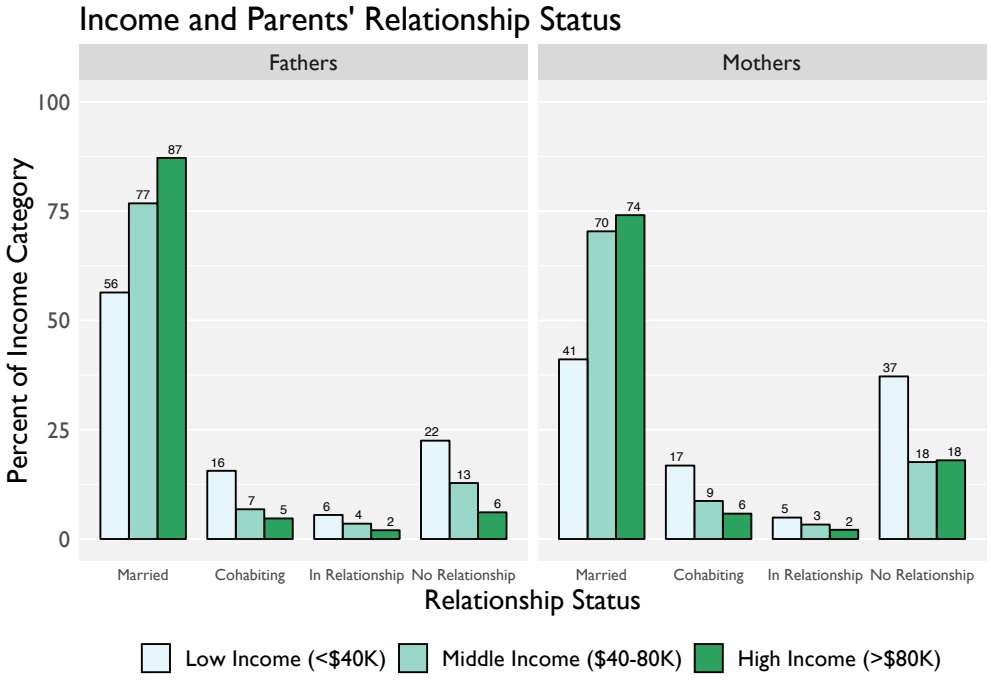

Figure 6: Parents' Relationship Status by Income

Of course, as we pointed out above, people in relationships are likely to have higher household incomes because there are two partners who can be wage earners, but the patterns in Figure 6 are noteworthy for precisely that reason. Raising children in the context of a stable relationship also increases the likelihood that those children will be in a home with a higher income, one where parents can meet the costs associated with raising a child. In addition, among the set of parents that reported being married or cohabiting, high-income respondents were more likely than low-income respondents to choose marriage over cohabitation, though marriage was the preferred choice for all income groups.

This year, we also looked more closely at those who had foster children or other children living in their home, and we found that these family arrangements are less common. Around one in ten respondents reported having children living in their home that were not biological, adopted, or step-children. Two percent of the respondents indicated that they had a grandchild living with them. Only one percent (29 total) respondents reported foster children currently living in their home.

2.4.1 Evaluations of American Families

Just as we did with marital relationships, we also asked respondents to evaluate the strength of both their own family and families in the United States more generally compared to two years ago. Similar to the results for marriage, respondents of the 2018 American Family Survey were much more optimistic about their own family compared to families generally. When speaking about their own marriage, around 85 percent said that their family relationships were about the same or stronger than they were two years ago, with one-third saying they were stronger. Turning to families generally, one-third said that they were weaker than two years ago, and around half believed they were about the same. When we compare this year's results to those from previous years, the clear pattern is stability (Figure 7). Over the past four years, respondents' views of their own families and of American families generally have not changed.

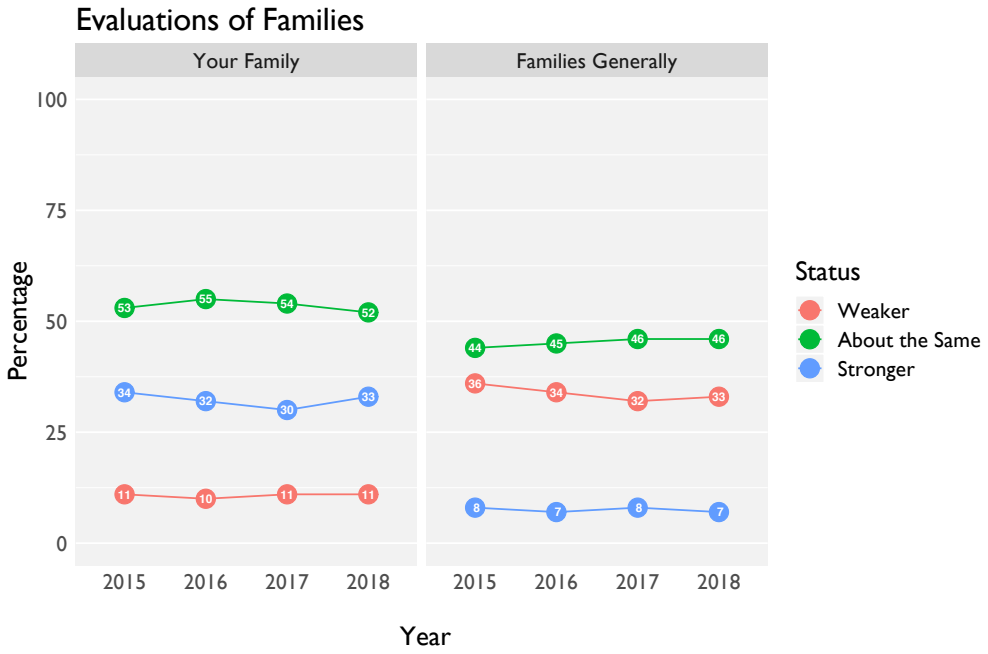

Figure 7: Respondent views of families, both their own and of others.

2.4.2 Important Issues Facing American Families

What challenges and issues are American families currently facing? As we have done in previous iterations of the survey, we asked 2018 respondents to indicate the "most important issues" facing families today from a curated list of 12 items. They were asked to select up to three items, which were randomly displayed and were not grouped by topics as they are here. The answers for 2018, along with the percentage change since our first American Family Survey in 2015, are displayed in Table 7.

In previous years of the American Family Survey, the most common issue chosen by respondents has been "parents not teaching or disciplining their children sufficiently," and this pattern continued in 2018 (though the overall percentage choosing this item declined slightly compared to 2015). Apparently, Americans worry a great deal about other parents' ability to discipline their children. However, meaningful percentages also express concern about economic challenges, such as the costs associated with raising a family or high work demands and stress on parents. Similarly, a little less than one-third of respon-

Table 7: The Most Important Issues Facing Families

	% Selecting	Change from 2015
Economics	**59**	**+8**
The costs associated with raising a family	35	+9
High work demands and stress on parents	29	+7
The lack of good jobs	17	-2
Lack of government programs to support families	13	+5
Culture	**53**	**-15**
Decline in religious faith and church attendance	24	+1
The widespread availability and use of drugs and alcohol	18	-9
Sexual permissiveness in our society	17	-8
Crime and other threats to personal safety	10	-9
Family Structure and Stability	**79**	**-1**
Parents not teaching or disciplining their children sufficiently	49	-4
More children growing up in single-parent homes	31	+6
Difficulty finding quality time with family in the digital age	23	+2
Change in the definition of marriage and family	16	0

Percentage choosing each item as one of their top three issues. Bolded numbers show percentage choosing at least one item from the relevant category as one of their top three issues.

dents worry about children growing up in single-parent homes and just under one-quarter of respondents express concerns about finding quality family time amid digital distractions.

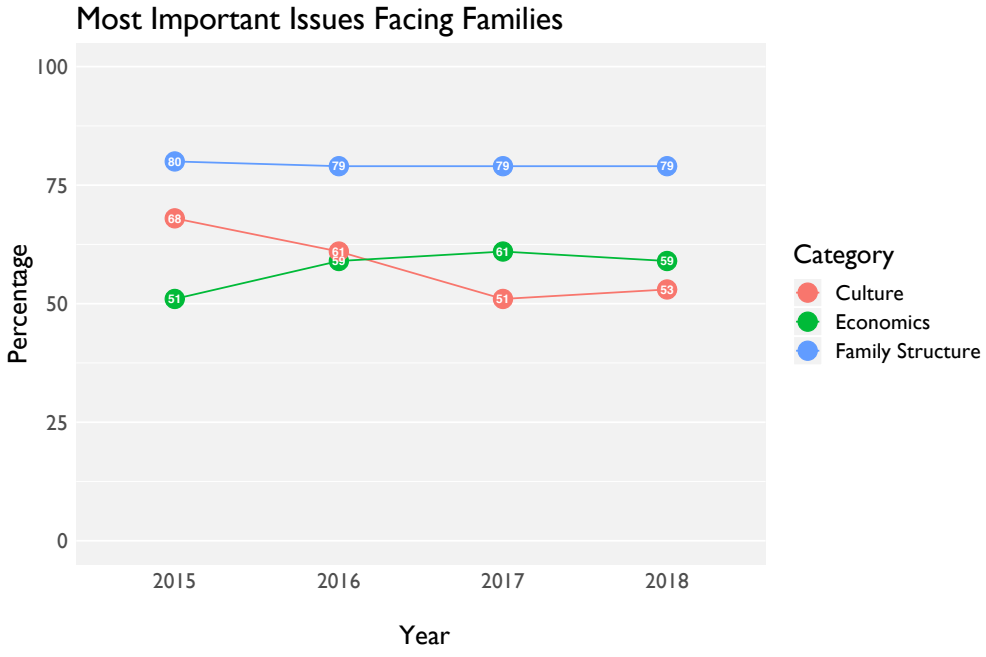

Figure 8: Changing concerns about the issues facing American families.

When we examine patterns across time, we find stability in the "Family Structure and Stability" category,

though this is driven in part by the responses to the discipline item (Figure 8). Within this category, we do see some signs of increased concern about children being raised in single-parent homes (a six-point increase since 2015). More substantial changes have occurred in the other two categories. Over time, respondents have become less concerned with the issues listed in the "Culture" category: compared to 2015, the percentage of respondents choosing at least one item from this category has dropped by 15 percentage points. There are significant declines in the percentage of respondents expressing concern about societal sexual permissiveness (an eight-point drop since 2015), the availability of drugs and alcohol (a nine-point drop), and crime (a nine-point decline).

Conversely, there has been an eight-point increase since 2015 in the percentage of respondents choosing the "Economics" category. These differences have been driven by increasing concern about high work demands and stress on parents (a seven-point increase since 2015), lack of government programs to support families (five-point increase), and especially the costs associated with raising a family (nine-point change), which is now the second-most commonly chosen item on our curated list. Notably, given the economic recovery over the last several years, there has been a slight *decline* since 2015 in the percentage of respondents expressing concern about the lack of good jobs. The increasing concern Americans feel about economics is not that parents cannot find good jobs; it is, instead, the demands in both time and money associated with raising children and supporting a family. Consistent with this result, we asked elsewhere in the survey whether the cost of raising children is affordable for most people, and more than half of respondents told us that it was not, regardless of their own income status.

Similar to previous years, we find meaningful age and partisan differences in perceptions of the most important problems. Younger respondents were more likely to identify economic concerns as being the most important issue (65 percent of those under 30 selected at least one economic item, while only 45 percent of those 65 or older selected at least one economic concern). For the cultural items, this pattern was reversed. Only 45 percent of respondents under 30 selected a cultural issue compared to 70 percent of respondents 65 or older. Older respondents are also more likely to choose items in the "Family Structure and Stability" category (86 percent of those 65 or older), though younger respondents are also most likely to choose an item in this category (73 percent of those under 30).

These patterns are even more striking when we look at results by self-reported partisan identity (Figure 9). Democrats were the most likely to select an economic issue, with nearly 80 percent of them selecting at least one. In contrast, only about one-third of Republicans chose one or more economic issues, with independents between the partisans.[8] Republicans were much more likely to choose a cultural item compared to other partisans (72 percent of Republicans vs. 39 percent of Democrats and 49 percent of independents). Similarly, while nine out of ten Republicans and eight out of ten independents selected at least one family structure or stability issue, two-thirds of Democrats did.

2.4.3 The Financial Stresses Facing American Families

Given the increasing concern we have seen among Americans about the high cost of raising children, this year we also asked respondents to tell us a little more about their financial worries. Specifically, we asked whether respondents were worried about paying any potential financial bills from a list we provided. This question asked respondents to report their worries about whether they can meet each of these monthly obligations, not whether the absolute cost of each item was high or low. Table 8 shows that respondents with children at home expressed substantially more concern about meeting their financial obligations than those who are not raising children. With respect to every bill on the list, larger percentages of respondents with children at home said they worried about being able to pay their bills, compared to respondents with

[8] Democrats were also more likely than Republicans to tell us that the cost of raising children was not affordable for most people – nearly two-thirds of Democrats expressed that sentiment, compared to about 40 percent of Republicans.

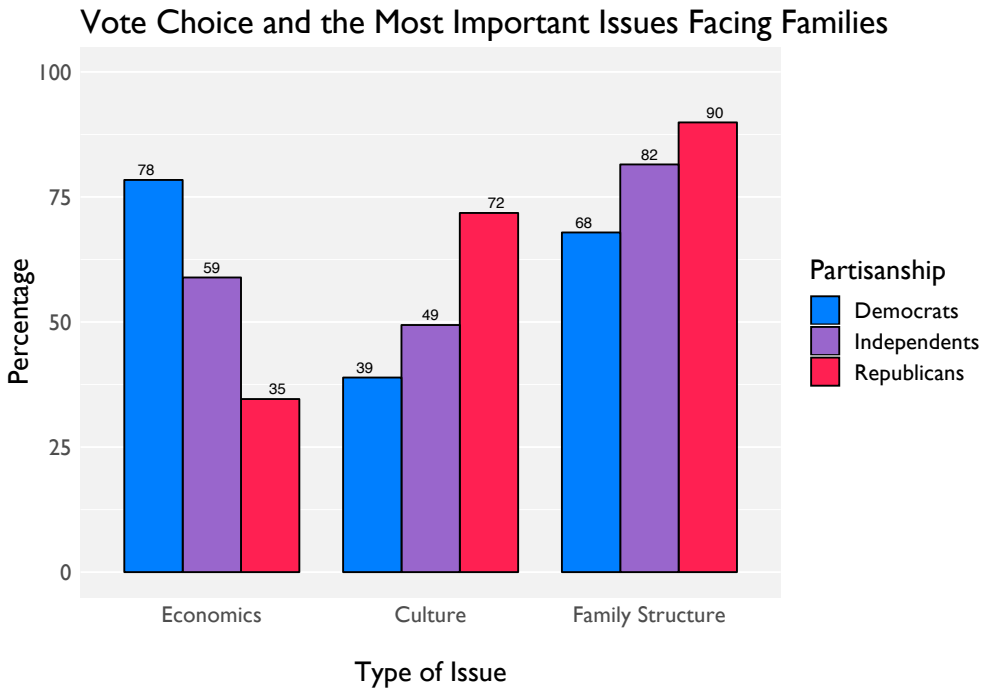

Figure 9: Differences in concerns about issues facing American families by party.

no children. Overall, nearly three-quarters of respondents with children at home said they worried about paying at least one of the monthly bills on the list, compared to just over half of those without children in the home. Clearly, the concern that Americans expressed about the costs of raising children can be seen in the everyday financial stresses of our respondents.

Table 8: Concerns about Paying Bills

	Children At Home	**No Children At Home**
Utilities	34	23
Rent/Mortgage	33	25
Paying Credit Card Bills	33	26
Food	32	25
Health Insurance or Medical Bills	23	20
Transportation Expenses	20	15
Paying Back Loans	20	14
Clothes	17	11
Tuition or Educational Expenses	12	8
Childcare	7	1
Other	3	1
At Least One	73	56

Beyond self-reported stress about paying bills, we also asked respondents whether they had actually experienced several potential economic crises over the past 12 months. Again, we find that respondents with children at home faced greater economic difficulty than those without children (Table 9). Though

fewer respondents told us they had actually experienced these difficulties in the past year, as compared to the percentage of those who worried about paying monthly bills, these findings, too, show the financial challenges many American families face. More than one-quarter of respondents with children at home said they had failed to pay an important bill in the past year, twice as many as respondents who were not raising children. More than one in five respondents with children at home said they had borrowed money to pay bills, compared to 16 percent of those without children in the home. Overall, 44 percent of families with children said they had experienced a significant economic crisis in the past year, compared to 30 percent of those without children.

Table 9: Economic Crises

	Children At Home	**No Children At Home**
Did not pay the full amount of an important bill	26	13
Borrowed money to help pay the bills	22	16
Needed to go to the doctor but could not because of cost	15	12
Hungry but did not eat because couldn't afford food	14	10
Moved in with others because of financial problems	6	4
Were homeless, even for one night	4	2
At Least One	44	30

We included these same questions in every American Family Survey since 2016, and despite the improving economy, reports of economic challenge have changed little over the past three years. Across all survey respondents, regardless of the survey year, about four in ten told us they had experienced an economic crisis in the previous 12 months.

Given the financial stresses reported by respondents to the American Family Survey, this year we also asked all respondents currently in a relationship if they expect their spouse or partner to work for pay. Because such expectations may differ by age, the analysis below is restricted to married or cohabiting respondents who are 60 years old or younger. Figure 10 presents the results. In every case, both men and women were more likely to expect their spouse to work for pay if they reported having children at home. More than eight in ten cohabiting women with children at home told us they expect their partners to work for pay, and among married women, the number increased to nearly nine in ten. These percentages are six to seven percentage points higher than the results among women without children at home.

Nearly eight in ten cohabiting men with children at home reported that they expect their partner to work for pay, compared to just over six in ten married men with children at home. These numbers fall by eight to nine percentage points among male respondents without children at home. In other words, married men were significantly less likely than cohabiting men to expect their spouse to work for pay — though nearly two-thirds of married men still expected that their spouse would work. Overall, the results indicate that most men and women today expect that their partners will work for pay, and within each gender and relationship status category, those numbers are highest among respondents with children at home.

We also asked our respondents how many hours they typically work for pay each week. Figure 11 presents the average number of hours worked, with results again restricted to respondents who are 60 years old or younger and who are either married or cohabiting. In interpreting the results, we caution that there is a great deal of variation across individuals. For example, the median number of hours worked for married or cohabiting men with children at home is 40, so we are wary of reading too much into the differences between cohabiting and married men. In addition (and unsurprisingly, given that working for pay increases income), respondents with higher incomes generally reported working more hours. This is true regardless of gender or whether the respondent had children at home. For example, low-income

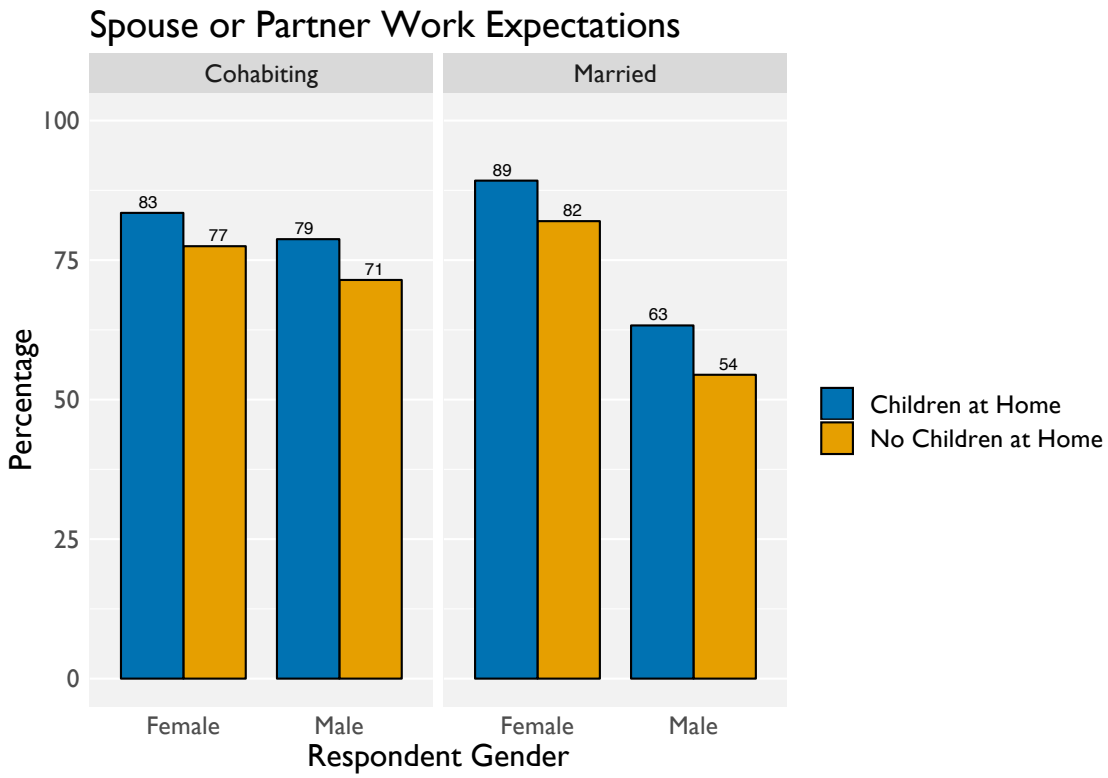

Figure 10: Percentage of married or cohabiting Americans (age 60 or less) expecting their spouse to work for pay.

women with children at home reported working on average about 13 hours per week, compared to 16 hours for middle-income women and 26 hours for women with high incomes.

Despite these differences, the basic patterns in Figure 11 are instructive. Women with children at home tend to work somewhat less than men, but both married and cohabiting women with children at home worked a little under 20 hours a week, on average. A different way of expressing these patterns is that about 47 percent of married women and 42 percent of cohabiting women with children at home worked at least 20 hours a week for pay. By contrast, about eight in ten married men and a little less than two-thirds of cohabiting men with children at home told us they work at least 20 hours a week.

Among married and cohabiting respondents under 60 with children at home, a little less than 15 percent said that neither they nor their spouse works for pay at least 20 hours a week; about 38 percent reported that one spouse or partner works 20 hours a week or more and the other works less than 20 hours per week; additionally, nearly half told us that both partners work at least 20 hours per week. In other words, most men and women raising children with a spouse or partner are also shouldering significant work responsibilities.

In addition, hours spent working for pay should also be contrasted with hours spent with sole responsibility for the care of their children. Married men (again under 60 and with a child at home) told us that on average, they are solely responsible for their children for about six hours per day. By contrast, women reported having sole responsibility for childcare for an average of about 12 hours per day. The numbers are slightly higher for cohabiting men — about eight hours per day — but this is, again, much lower than the 16 hours per day reported by women. Thus, among both married and cohabiting respondents, women

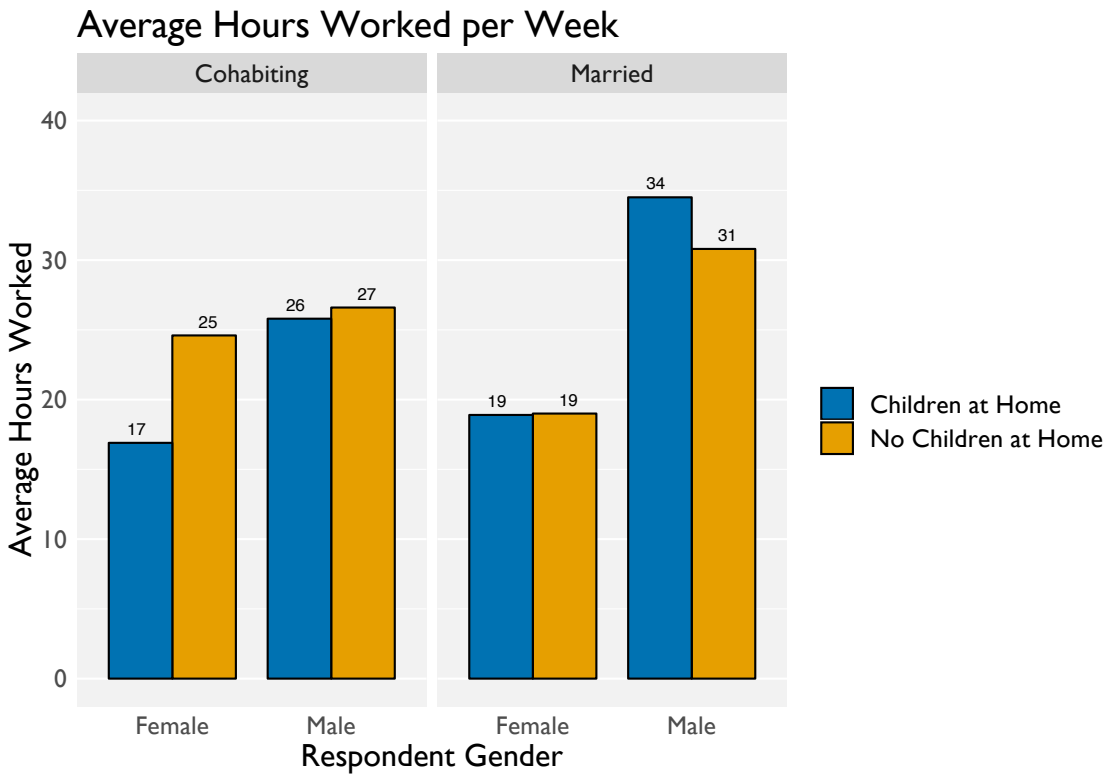

Figure 11: Average self-reported hours worked per week (Americans age 60 or less).

reported spending about twice as much time with sole responsibility for childcare than men. Even if we restrict the findings to men and women in relationships where both spouses work more than 20 hours per week, men report less than seven hours of sole responsibility for the children, compared to nearly 11 hours for women.

Of course, these are self-reports, and are thus vulnerable to the possibility of over- and under-reporting, but even so, the results indicate clearly that women with children at home tend to feel a much greater childcare burden than do men, while still working about 20 hours per week (on average). Men tend to spend more time working for pay, but self-report considerably fewer hours with sole responsibility in caring for their children.

2.4.4 Money and the Decision to Have Children

Financial concerns matter for decisions about having children. We asked all respondents to the survey to consider a list of potential "prerequisites" for having children and to indicate how important it is to complete each item before a person has children. Respondents could indicate whether each factor was "extremely important," "somewhat important," or "not important at all." Figure 12 presents the percentage of respondents choosing "extremely important." The upper panel shows the results by respondent gender, and the lower panel shows the results by partisanship.

Across all respondents, "being financially stable" is the prerequisite chosen most frequently as "extremely important." As seen in Figure 12, financial stability ranks third among Republicans (behind being in

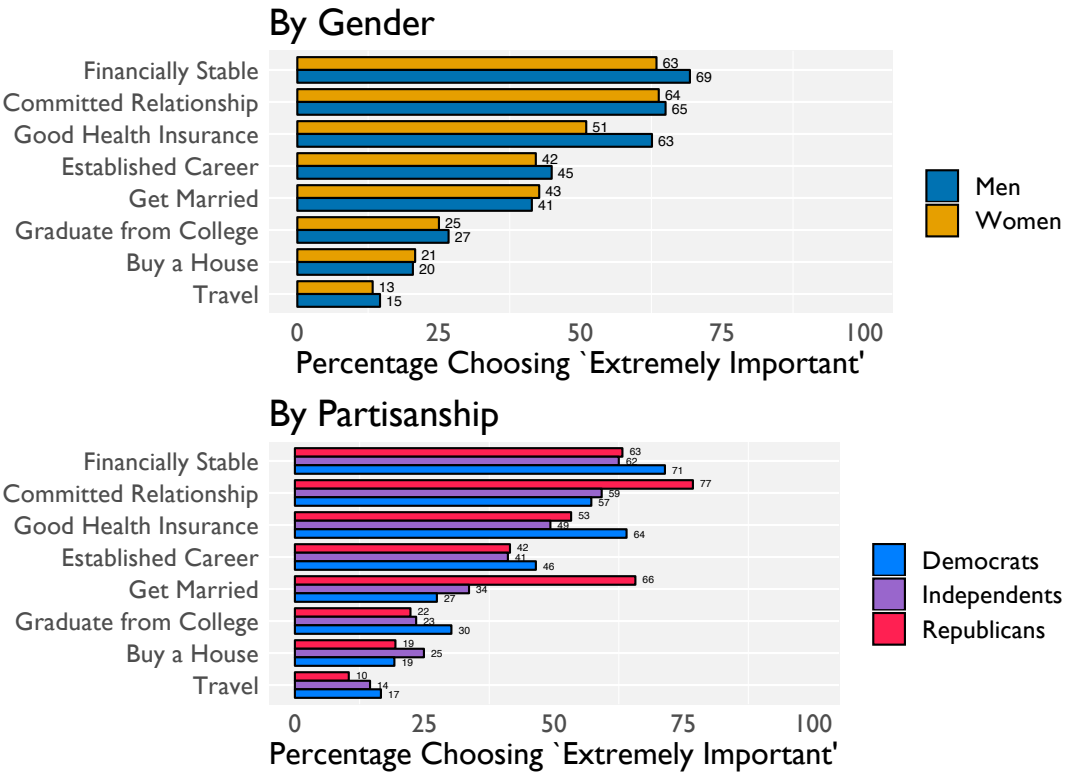

Figure 12: Prerequisites for having children by gender and partisanship.

a committed relationship and getting married) and second among men (behind being in a committed relationship), but for all other sub-groups, financial stability is the most important consideration. When we analyze by household income, there are few differences between the poorest and richest respondents: financial stability is valued highly, no matter how much money the respondent makes. It is especially important for young respondents who are most likely to be in their childbearing years. Three quarters of people aged 18 to 29 and two-thirds of respondents between 30 and 44 told us that being financially stable is extremely important, compared to a little more than half of the oldest age cohort. It is clear that Americans count economic concerns as critical to the decision to become parents.

In addition, we also asked men and women between the ages of 18 and 29 who do not currently have children (N = 871) what factors, apart from the physical ability to conceive, would be most important to them personally as they make decisions about having children in the future. We gave respondents a list of seven possible factors, and as with the previous question, they could indicate whether each factor was "extremely important," "somewhat important," or "not important at all." Table 10 shows the percentage of respondents answering "extremely important" to each item.

The reason most likely to be ranked as "extremely important" by both men and woman was "the cost of raising a child," which was a consideration named by a majority of women and just under half of men. In the aggregate, respondents placed the greater weight on the cost of child-rearing than their current relationship status or even the desire to raise children. In addition, about one-third of respondents expressed significant worries about the difficulties of balancing family and career. Ranking comparatively lower in the decision to have children were age, family expectations, and religious beliefs.

Table 10: Important Considerations in the Decision to Have Children

	All	Men	Women
The cost of raising a child	50	48	53
My current relationship status	47	47	47
The desire to raise a child of my own	43	40	48
The difficulty of balancing family and career	34	33	35
The need to have a baby before I'm too old to parent	26	27	25
The expectations of my family	18	20	15
My religious or philosophical beliefs	18	18	18

Despite the financial stresses that families face and that prospective parents worry about, these data should not be interpreted to mean that parents with children at home generally dislike their choice to have children or find their lives unsatisfying. Elsewhere in the survey, we asked respondents to tell us how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "Raising children is one of life's greatest joys." Nearly 85 percent of respondents with children at home expressed agreement with the statement, compared to 65 percent of respondents who are not currently raising children. More than four in ten respondents with children expressed the strongest possible agreement with the statement, compared to only about one quarter of respondents without children. In response to a question we will discuss in greater detail below, approximately half of respondents with a child at home told us that having kids is "essential" to living a fulfilling life. And when asked how satisfied they are with their families, about 55 percent of respondents with children at home told us they were "completely satisfied," compared to 43 percent of respondents with no children at home.[9] Finally, among childless respondents between the ages of 18 and 49, about one quarter (22 percent of men and 32 percent of women) told us they did not want to have children, compared to four in ten (among both men and women) who said they definitely want to become parents.[10]

2.4.5 Family Crises

In addition to financial concerns, many Americans experience family crises and other life-changing experiences. One of the new elements of the 2018 American Family Survey is an exploration of the family stressors people tend to face. We presented respondents with a list of major family experiences and asked if they had experienced any of them in the past year, displayed in Table 11. We found that a little less than one-third indicated that they had experienced some sort of family crisis. By far the most common experience was having an immediate family member die, with 18 percent of respondents saying this had happened within the last 12 months. Around one in ten said that they or their spouse had been laid off, and seven percent said they had an immediate family member arrested. Five percent or less indicated they had experienced fertility problems, been divorced or separated from their spouse or partner, or been deployed (or had an immediate family member deployed) for military service. Overall, these family stressors are somewhat less common than the economic stresses we discussed above (though, of course, being laid off certainly counts as an economic challenge).

There are, however, some meaningful racial and ethnic differences in the experience of family stressors. Black and Hispanic respondents were more likely in this sample to report that an immediate family

[9]When we asked how satisfied Americans are with their lives generally, the differences between respondents with children at home and those without were more muted: 32 percent of respondents with children indicated they were "completely satisfied," compared to 30 percent of respondents without children.

[10]The remaining one-third said they didn't know or weren't certain.

Table 11: Family Stressors

	All	White	Black	Hispanic
Had an immediate family member die	18	16	25	20
Was laid off or spouse/partner laid off	9	8	12	11
Had an immediate family member arrested	7	6	12	9
Had fertility problems	5	5	5	6
Self or immediate family member deployed for military service	4	3	4	7
Divorced or separated	4	4	4	7
At Least One	31	28	38	35

member had died, and they were also more likely to report that they or their partner was laid off or that an immediate family member had been arrested in the past year. Hispanic respondents were also slightly more likely than white or black respondents to say that they or an immediate family member had been deployed for military service or that they had been divorced or separated recently. Overall, black respondents were about ten points more likely and Hispanic respondents about seven points more likely than whites to indicate a significant family stress in the past year.

2.4.6 Family Activities

On a more positive note, we asked everyone who was married, cohabiting, or who had children to report how often they took part in various activities families might do together. As shown in Table 12, which presents the percentage of respondents reporting doing each of these activities weekly or more, the frequency of the activities varies widely and is difficult to capture in a single descriptive sentence. More than three-quarters of families report having dinner together weekly or more, with around half of them saying they do so daily. We also found that around three-quarters of families participate in activities together at home weekly or more, doing things such as watching a movie or playing games together. More than half do chores together regularly. More than half of the sample said they go out to movies, museums, or other such events at least a few times a year, and about the same percentage say they take time to attend the activities of another family member. Around one-third of families worship together weekly, but more than half said they do so yearly or less. While families do report having arguments, around 65 percent do so a few times a year or less.

We found that family activities vary little by general demographics such as ideology, partisanship, vote choice, and whether or not you thought your marriage was in trouble.[11] There are also no significant differences between those who experienced an economic crisis or a family crisis and those who did not. We found some mild racial and ethnic differences, with whites being more likely than blacks and Hispanics to say that they eat dinner together as a family at least weekly (81 percent vs. 66 percent for blacks and 74 percent for Hispanics). Hispanics were the most likely (21 percent, compared to 16 percent for whites and 9 percent for blacks) to say that they attend the activities of family members together weekly. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given different levels of religiosity, blacks and Hispanics were more likely to say that they workshop together as a family. But on several other dimensions, including having arguments, going out together, and doing household chores together, racial and ethnic differences tended to be relatively small.

One thing, however, that mattered a great deal to family activities was the strength of the respondent's

[11] The exception is family worship, which is much more common among Republicans (42 percent say they do it weekly or more) than among Democrats (only 21 percent say they do it weekly or more).

Table 12: Family Activities

	All	Strong Parental Identity	Weak Parental Identity
Eat dinner together	78	87	72
Participate in activities together at home	72	81	69
Do household chores together	57	65	44
Worship together	31	38	8
Have an argument	18	19	9
Go out together (movies, parks, etc.)	17	20	12
Attend the activities of a family member	15	18	9

parental and spousal identity. With respect to every activity about which we asked, those with strong parental identities (respondents who said that being a parent was "very" or "extremely" important to them) were more likely to participate at least weekly, compared to those with weaker parental identities. For example, more than 80 percent of those who were classified as having a strong parental identity report eating dinner together and participating in activities at home weekly or more. Around 65 percent of this group does household chores as a family at least weekly. However, when we turn our attention to those with weak parental identity, those rates drop significantly — in the case of household chores, by more than 20 percentage points. Most parents with a weak parental identity still report eating dinner together or participating in activities at home on a regular basis, but again much less frequently than those with stronger parental identities. Respondents in this group also worship at much lower rates. Notably, they have arguments less frequently than those with strong parental identities.

2.4.7 Parental Activities

Beyond the family activities described above, we also tried to get a better sense of family life by asking parents how they spend their time after their children go to bed. We gave respondents a list of potential activities and asked them to indicate how often each activity occurs after their children's bedtime. Table 13 presents the percentage of mothers and fathers who reported doing each activity at least once a week or more. Responses are limited to those who currently have children in the home.

Table 13: Parental Activities After Children Go to Bed

	Fathers	Mothers
Watch television or movie	76	81
Use social media	60	71
Have sex	56	53
Talk on the phone or text	53	66
Read a book	49	52
Do work or homework	37	38
Play video games	35	35

The most common activity for parents is watching television or movies. Three quarters of men and more than eight in ten women report participating in this activity at least once a week or more. Both men and women say that they connect with others through social media, phone, or text on a regular basis, though percentages are about ten points higher for women than for men. A little over half of respondents say that they have sex with their partners at least once a week or more, and about half say that they regularly

spend time reading books. A little more than one-third of respondents told us that they did work or played video games at least once a week after their children went to bed.

These patterns were roughly similar across demographic categories, with a few exceptions. Black and Hispanic parents were about ten percentage points more likely than whites to say that they had sex at least once a week, and they were comparatively less likely (again by about ten percentage points) to say they spend time on social media or reading books. But rates of the other activities we asked about were nearly identical across racial groups. Similarly, differences across income categories or partisan attachments tended to be small. The primary exception was reading books, which about 60 percent of high-income respondents reported doing at least weekly, compared to 50 percent of middle-income respondents and 40 percent of those with lower incomes. All other income or partisan differences were less than ten percentage points. All in all, the experience of parents after children go to bed seems very similar for parents regardless of racial or ethnic differences, income disparities, or partisan allegiances.

3 American Views on the Ideal Marriage and Family

In the 2018 American Family Survey, we asked respondents a variety of questions designed to understand how Americans view the ideal marriage and family and how that ideal compares with their lived experiences. For example, we randomly assigned half of the respondents in the sample to tell us about the actual order in which they experienced sex, cohabitation, marriage, and children in the current or most recent relationship.[12] The other half of survey respondents were asked to indicate the ideal order in which each of the relationship milestones would occur. Figure 13 presents the results, with the average ordering for each milestone shown in the label. Blue labels indicate respondents' actual order, and gold labels indicate the ideal ordering. Lower numbers in the labels indicate a preference for that milestone to come earlier in the sequence of events.

[12]Respondents could also indicate that any of those relationship milestones had not yet occurred in their relationships.

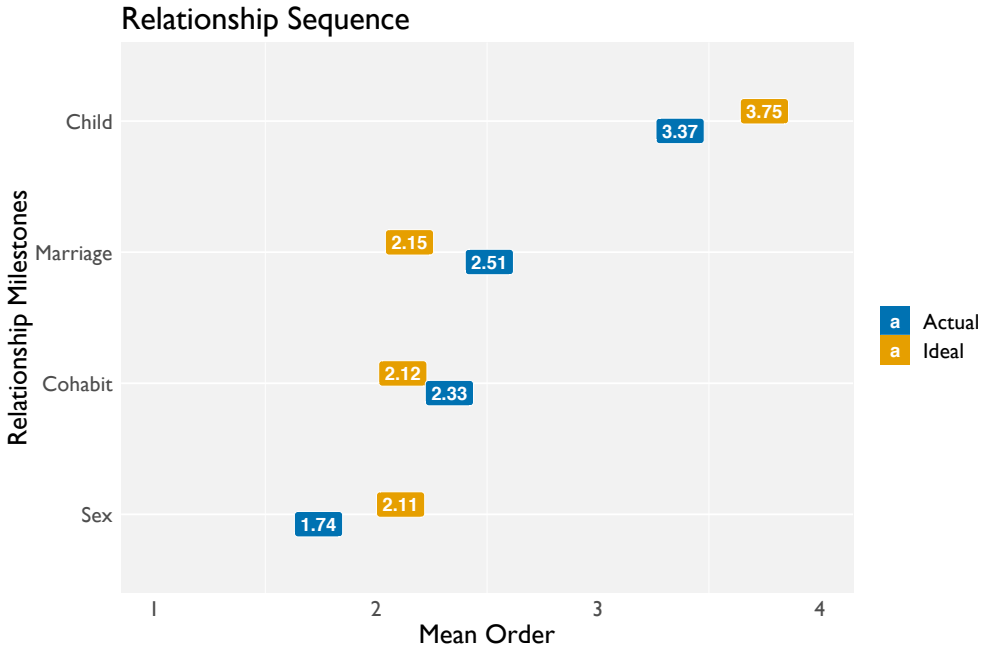

Figure 13: Respondent reports about their ideal and actual relationship sequences.

Respondents told us that the ideal sequence of relationship milestones would be sex, moving in together, and marriage occurring at roughly the same point in time, with children coming a distant fourth in the order. But respondents' actual experience differs from the ideal. On average, respondents had sex first, followed by cohabitation, then marriage, then children. Of course, these are merely averages: individuals may have experienced different orderings. Nonetheless, the central tendency is informative, as is the difference between actual and ideal.

We also find important differences in ideal preferences by party and race. These can be seen in Figure 14, which presents results for Republicans, white Democrats, and black Democrats.[13] Notably, all three groups reported similar actual relationship sequences: sex first, followed by cohabitation, marriage, and children. But the ideal orderings differ across the three groups. Republicans say that marriage should come first, followed by cohabitation and sex at roughly the same time, with children fourth. This is roughly similar to the ideal ordering for black Democrats, who also prefer marriage first, followed by cohabitation, sex, and then children. The group with a differing ideal ordering is white Democrats: their ideal preference is sex first, followed by cohabitation, marriage third, and children fourth. In other words, white Democrats are the only group for whom their ideal relationship sequence matches their actual behavior (at least at the group level). But this also means that black Democrats and Republicans share a similar, more traditional view of the proper order of relationship milestones, even if many do not fully live up to those self-professed ideals.

In addition to these racial and partisan differences, other demographic characteristics also shaped views about the ideal relationship sequence. Americans over age 65 were more likely to say that ideally, marriage should come before sex and cohabitation, for example, while those under 55 felt that the ideal ordering was sex and cohabitation before marriage. For all age groups, however, sex came, on average, first in their actual relationships. Religious differences also mattered. For Americans for who said that religion was an important part of their lives, the ideal was for marriage to come first, while respondents for whom religion

[13] We do not have enough black Republicans in the sample for reliable analysis.

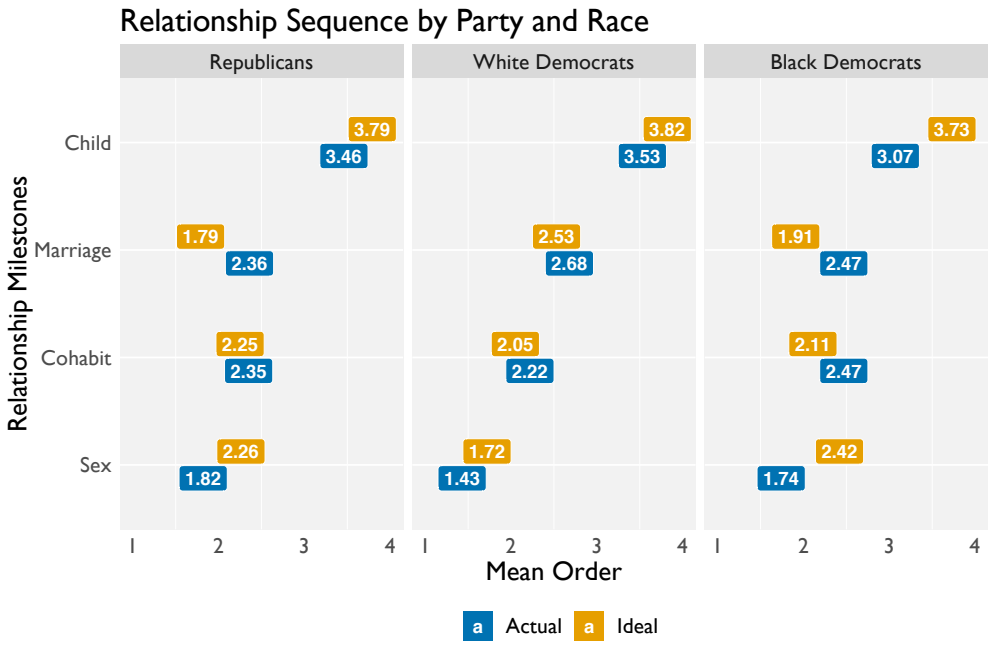

Figure 14: Ideal and actual relationship sequences by partisanship and race.

was less important told us that marriage should come after cohabitation. Non-religious respondents were also much more likely than religious respondents to say that sex did come first in their actual relationships, though the average religious Americans was still sex first, followed by marriage and cohabitation.

Overall, we conclude that while the average actual ordering of relationship milestones is similar across many different types of Americans, there are still important differences in how different groups see the ideal relationship sequence. Older, more religious Americans still hold to a more traditional view of marriage as coming before sex and cohabitation, while norms are different among younger, less religious Americans. Nearly every group feels that children should ideally come after marriage, however.

We also asked respondents about other ideals for relationships and family life. For example, Americans indicated that the ideal number of children for a family is about 2 — this was the median response for all sub-groups, including Republicans, Democrats, men, women, religious and non-religious, whites, blacks, and Hispanics. There are some differences in mean preferences across the groups: the average for Democrats, for example, was 2.3, compared to 2.5 for Republicans, though this difference was largely driven by white Democrats, for whom the group average was 2.1, compared to 2.8 for black Democrats. As with the relationship sequence variables, the preferences of black Democrats were actually closer to Republicans than to their white fellow partisans. Differences in the average preferences of men and women were small — 2.5 for men and 2.4 for women. The average for respondents who told us that religion was at least somewhat important in their lives was 2.6, compared to 2.1 for those who said religion was less important to them.

3.1 Shared Values

As part of our focus on ideal marriages and families, we asked respondents to consider how important it is for married couples to share different commitments or perspectives, such as the same political party, level of education, political affiliation, or even hobbies and interests. Table 14 presents the results, and entries in the table show the percentage of respondents who told us that each item was either "extremely important" or "very important."[14] Overall, Americans identified shared feelings about children and shared social values (such as honesty or hard work) as by far the most important considerations for couples. More than three-quarters of respondents agreed that couples should have those priorities in common. Religious affiliation and other hobbies and interests comprised the second tier of important commonalities for couples, with education and political party ranking last. Given all the talk about Democrats and Republicans separating into different tribes, it is notable that most Americans do not think it is especially important for married couples to share the same political affiliation. They care far more about broader values like honesty than about narrow political attachments.

We find little evidence of dramatic differences in the ordering of these priorities across different demographic characteristics. Republicans do care far more about shared religious affiliation than Democrats or independents, and black and Hispanic respondents care far more about religious affiliation than do whites, especially white Democrats, of whom only 20 percent said that shared religious affiliation was an important priority. Here is another indication that with respect to some elements of marriage and family, black Democrats take a more traditional view and express opinions that are more similar to Republicans than to white Democrats. But other demographic differences were more muted. Women place a greater priority on shared feelings about children and shared social values than do men, but the basic ordering of priorities is the same for both groups. In addition to the results shown in the table, we found few differences across income categories, parental status (whether the respondent had children at home), religiosity (except with respect to the importance of religion), and other demographic characteristics.

Table 14: How Important Is It for Married Couples to Share the Same ... ?

	Education	Political Party	Hobbies and Interests	Religious Affiliation	Social Values	Feelings about Children
Overall	14	21	28	36	76	81
Men	14	21	26	35	73	77
Women	15	21	31	36	80	85
White	11	21	26	33	78	83
Black	21	20	32	44	73	77
Hispanic	21	21	34	38	75	77
Democrats	17	23	29	27	77	83
Independents	12	10	27	28	66	70
Republicans	12	25	28	51	82	86

[14] Response options were a 5-point scale ranging from "extremely important" to "not important at all."

3.2 Fulfilling Life

In keeping with our exploration of ideal family life, we asked respondents to consider what facets of life are most essential for fulfillment. Specifically, we asked respondents how much they agreed or disagreed with the notion that the following activities are essential to live a fulfilling life: being married, having kids, having a rewarding career or job, being part of a religious community, being engaged in the local community, gaining a good education, and making a good living. Table 15 presents the percentage of respondents who agreed that each item was essential.[15]

Respondents clearly prioritized career accomplishments as being essential: making a good living, gaining a good education, and having a rewarding job. Two-thirds or more of respondents said each of those milestones was essential. In the second tier, respondents identified engagement with their local or religious communities as being essential. In the lowest tier was being married and having kids, of which only three to four in ten respondents indicated they were essential. Put differently, many Americans believe that it is possible to live a fulfilling life without marriage or children.

Table 15: What Is Essential To Living a Fulfilling Life?

	Being Married	Having Kids	Religious Community	Community Engagement	Rewarding Job	Education	Make Good Living
Overall	31	36	40	47	65	71	77
Men	37	40	40	47	68	70	77
Women	24	33	39	46	61	72	77
White	29	33	37	46	64	71	76
Black	29	35	49	47	63	69	79
Hispanic	37	46	44	47	65	72	77
Democrats	22	31	30	49	67	74	78
Independents	28	33	31	37	55	64	69
Republicans	43	45	58	50	68	72	80
Children At Home	36	49	46	49	65	72	77
No Children At Home	28	30	37	46	64	71	76

Demographic differences in these patterns tended to be small to moderate. Men were more likely than women to say that marriage and children were essential, and consistent with other survey results, Republicans, blacks, and Hispanics valued participation in religious communities more than Democrats and whites. People with children at home were more convinced that marriage and children were a necessary part of a fulfilling life as well. But even with these differences, all groups ranked career, education, and income as the most essential aspects of a fulfilling life.

3.3 Becoming an Adult

What does it mean to become an adult in America today? This question focuses on the developmental milestones that mark the passage to adulthood and how those markers might differ for men and women. We told respondents that "people have different ideas about what it means to become a man or woman"

[15]Response options were a seven-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, and for purposes of analysis, we present the somewhat agree, agree, and strongly agree responses together.

and then asked them to indicate which of the following experiences are important to becoming an adult: completing formal schooling, being employed full-time, being capable of supporting a family financially, being financially independent of parents, no longer living in parents' house, getting married, and having a child. Respondents could indicate that each item was "extremely important," "somewhat important," or "not important at all." Half of our sample was randomly chosen to tell us which of these items were important to "becoming a man," and the other half offered opinions on the importance of the items for "becoming a woman."

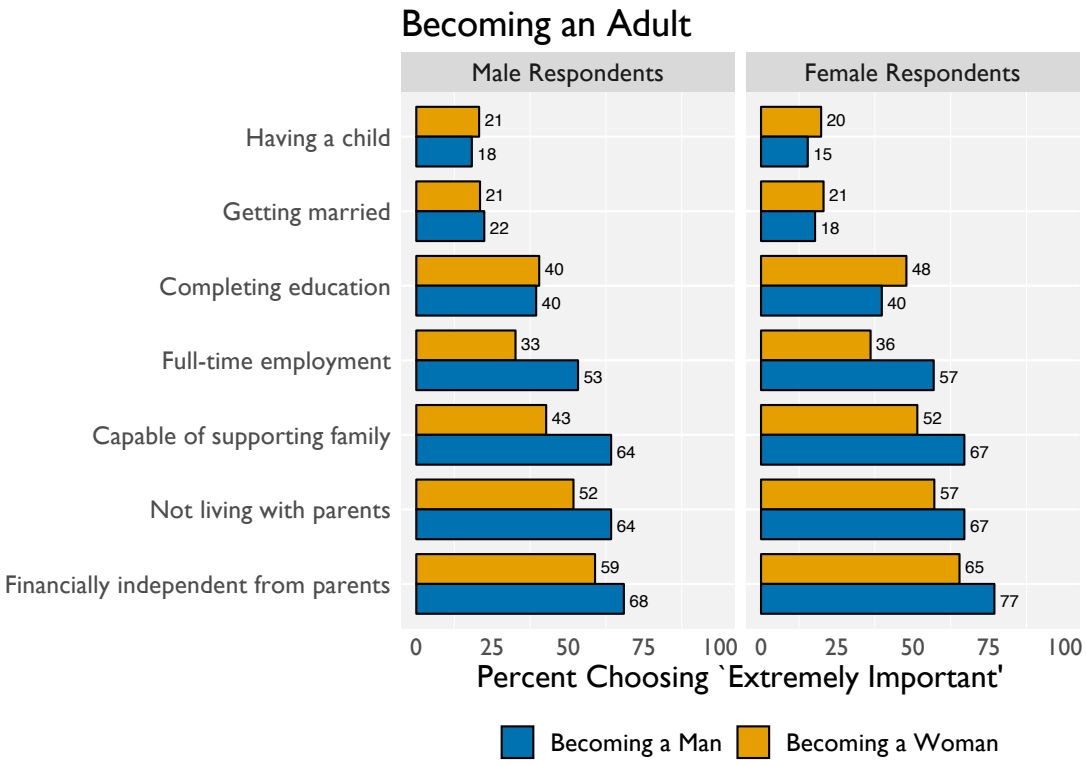

Figure 15: Milestones for becoming a man or woman.

Figure 15 presents the percentage of male and female respondents choosing "extremely important." Yellow bars indicate the result in the "becoming a woman" condition, and blue bars show the"becoming a man" condition.

Among both male and female respondents, markers of financial success — being financially independent, moving out of parents' home, being capable of supporting a family, and finding full-time employment — were the indicators most commonly chosen as signs of becoming an adult and especially of becoming a man. Respondents saw completing an education as being more important for becoming a woman than full-time employment, and women indicated that getting married and having a child were more important for becoming a woman than for becoming a man. For both men and women, getting married and starting a family were least likely to be seen as indicators of adulthood. In addition, both male and female respondents believe there is a large gender gap when considering the role full-time employment plays in becoming an adult. More than half of respondents thought it was extremely important for becoming a man, but only about one-third of respondents thought that having a full-time job was critical to becoming a woman.

Generational differences also matter for assessments about what it means to become an adult, and these sometimes have gendered implications. As can be seen in Figure 16, for example, about 40 percent of young people told us that full-time employment is needed to be a man, compared to about 34 percent who reported it necessary to become a woman — a difference of only six percentage points. Among respondents over 65 years of age, however, that difference grew to nearly 40 percentage points. Nearly three-quarters of older Americans thought having a full-time job was necessary to become a man, compared to the 35 percent who thought it was necessary to become an adult woman — about the same percentage as among the youngest age cohort. In other words, we find a much larger gap between what it means to become a man, as opposed to what it means to become a woman, among older Americans. Similar (though not quite as large) generational differences can be seen in assessments of the importance of being capable of supporting a family, moving out of parents' home, and financial independence from parents. Older respondents were also more likely than younger to say that completing education is a sign of adulthood, regardless of whether we asked about becoming a man or becoming a woman. At the same time, age mattered little for views about the importance of getting married or having a child as milestones of adulthood.

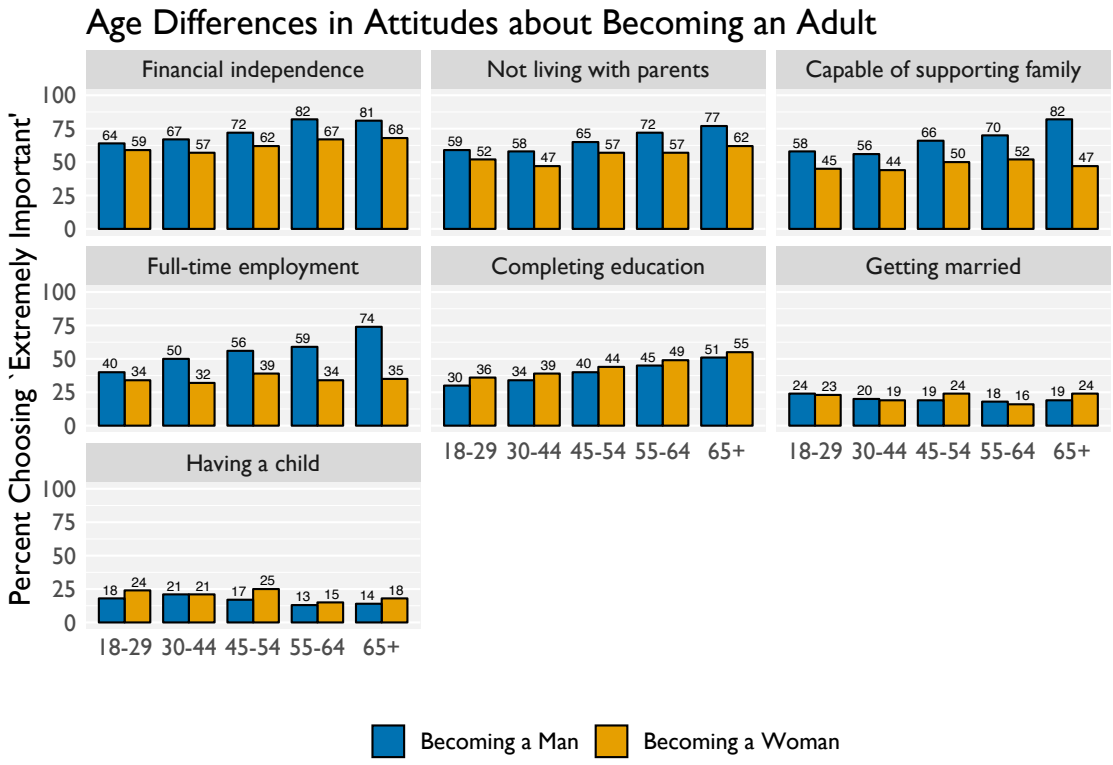

Figure 16: Differences in attitudes about becoming a man or woman by age cohort.

4 Parents and Teenagers

One focus of the 2018 American Family Survey is how parents of teenagers view their children. We asked all respondents with a child between the ages of 12 and 17 (N = 498) to tell us about their views of the most important issues facing teenagers. Respondents chose from a curated list we provided them, and each

respondent could choose up to four issues. Table 16 presents the results. The most common concern from these parents was overuse of technology, which was the only option chosen by a majority of respondents. In addition, 45 percent of respondents identified bullying as an important issue, and approximately one-third of respondents chose mental health issues, family breakdown and divorce, or pressure to use drugs or alcohol. All other items on the list were chosen by less than a quarter of respondents.

Table 16 also shows that mothers and fathers largely agreed on these priorities. The only major differences were that mothers reported substantially more concern about bullying than fathers, but fathers expressed more concern than mothers about teens facing family breakdown and divorce.

Table 16: Most Important Issues Facing Teens

	Overall	**Fathers**	**Mothers**
Overuse of technology	53	55	51
Bullying	45	38	51
Mental health issues	36	34	37
Family breakdown/divorce	35	43	29
Pressure to use drugs or alcohol	34	35	33
Poor quality schools	23	21	24
Making decisions about sexual activity	20	20	20
Difficult relationships with family members	15	15	15
Dating and relationships	14	15	14
Pressure to get good grades	14	14	14
Widespread availability of pornography	12	14	11
Safety in their communities	11	9	13
Not enough meaningful work opportunities	10	12	9
Navigating sexual identity	10	11	9
Sexual abuse	9	8	10
Other	2	2	2

Larger differences can be found between Republicans and Democrats, however. These differing assessments can be seen in Figure 17, where red bars indicate the percentage of Republicans choosing the issue, blue bars indicate Democrats, and purple bars show results for independents who do not lean toward either party. While overuse of technology was an important concern for respondents of both parties, Republicans expressed comparatively more concern about the issue (64 percent) than Democrats (48 percent). In addition, concern about the effects of divorce and family breakdown on teenagers was heavily concentrated among Republicans (54 percent), but of far less concern to both independents (33 percent) and Democrats (17 percent). Republicans were also somewhat more likely than Democrats to express concern about teens' decisions about sexual activity (23 percent vs. 15 percent) and the availability of pornography (17 percent vs. 10 percent).

Conversely, Democrats expressed more concern than Republicans about bullying (48 percent vs. 38 percent), mental health issues (44 percent vs. 30 percent), community safety for teenagers (15 percent vs. 9 percent), and work opportunities (14 percent vs. 7 percent). On other issues, such as pressure to use drugs or alcohol, dating and relationships, navigating sexual identity, pressure to get good grades, relationships with family members, and the quality of schools, we see rough agreement (defined here as partisan differences that are about five percentage points or less) between partisans. Notably, given that the survey was administered prior to the Kavanaugh hearings, the difference between partisans in concern about sexual abuse among teenagers was small (11 percent of Democrats, compared to nine percent of Republicans).

Other demographic characteristics also mattered, especially in patterns of concern about overuse of tech-

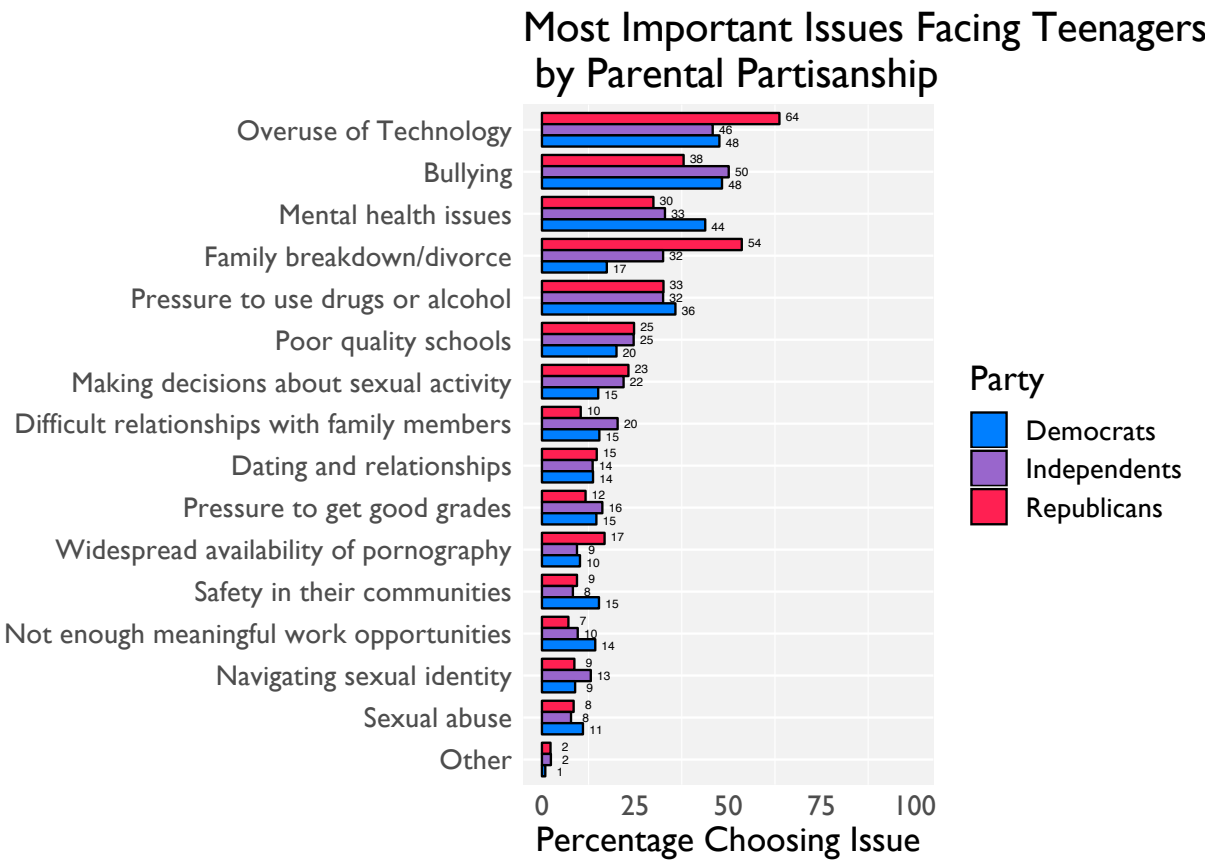

Figure 17: How partisans differ in their view of issues facing teens

nology. Though technology was the most chosen issue overall, it was far more likely to be chosen by white respondents (59 percent) than by black (35 percent) or Hispanic Americans (48 percent). It was also of greater concern to high-income (64 percent) than to middle-income (46 percent) or low-income people (47 percent).[16] Racial and income differences tended to be somewhat more muted on the other issues facing teens, though concern about family breakdown and divorce as an issue for teens was concentrated among high-income respondents, while lower-income Americans were comparatively more concerned about bullying and difficult relationships with family members.

4.1 Teens and Technology

We also asked respondents to report their own technology use and, for respondents with a teenager at home, their estimates how much those teenagers use video games and social media. For each parent of one or more teenagers, we randomly selected one of their teenage children and asked them to report their impressions of how much that child used social media and video games. It is important to remember that these are *parental* estimates of teens' media use, not actual reports from the teens themselves, which might be quite different. Our aim was to capture parents' views of the time their teenagers spent online. Parents

[16]When we test partisanship, race, and income together using multiple regression techniques, all three variables are statistically significant.

could report anything between 0 hours per day and 16 or more hours per day.[17]

Results can be found in Figure 18. As might be expected, adults report considerably more use of social media than video games. On average, men report using social media for about 2.7 hours on a typical day and women report about 30 minutes more at 3.2 hours. Averages for video games are substantially lower – 1.8 hours for men and 1.4 hours for women. Notably, if we restrict the results to only those who are parents of teenagers, use of both forms of technology is higher – 2.9 hours on social media for fathers and 3.9 hours for mothers and 2.0 hours for fathers on video games, compared to 1.8 hours among mothers.

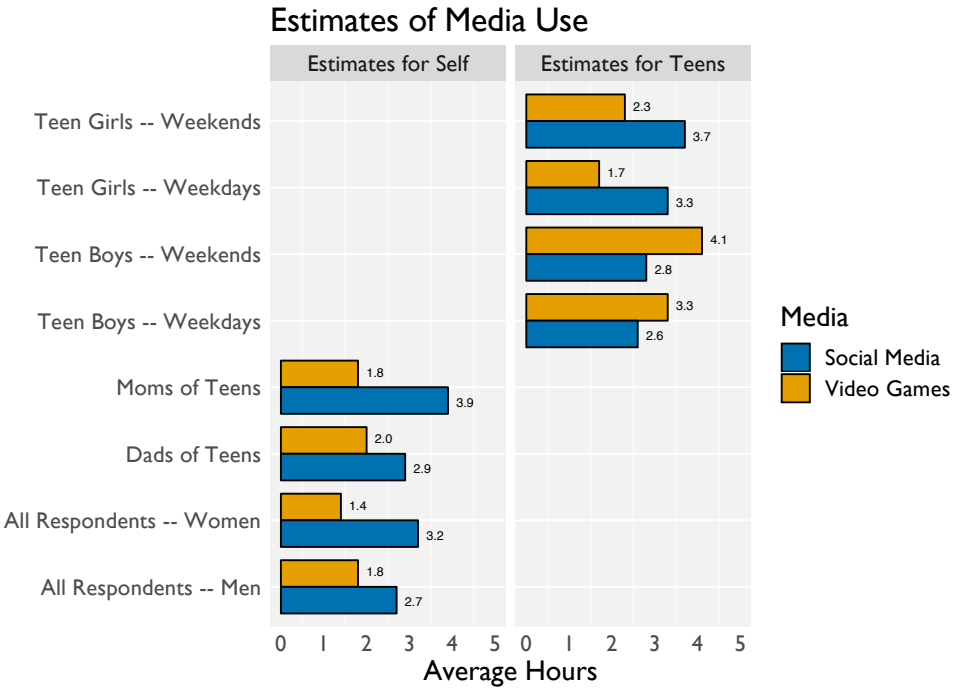

Figure 18: Adults, teens, and media use

Most parents offered estimates of their children's media usage. Only about 7.5 percent of parents said they didn't know how much their children used social media, and only 6.5 percent were unable to give an estimate about video games. Of those who could offer estimates, fathers tended to estimate higher numbers than mothers for time spent on social media, but fathers and mothers offered very similar estimates of how much time their children spent on video games, especially on weekdays. In addition, parental use of technology is correlated with reports of their children's use, though the correlation is far from perfect and larger for social media than for video games (r = 0.41 for social media and r = 0.23 for video games).

Parents of teenage boys estimated that their sons spent more time on video games than social media, but parents of teenage girls reported that their daughters spent far more time on social media than video games. In addition, and perhaps unsurprisingly, parents said that their children spent more time with technology on weekends than on weekdays, though the differences are not especially large. All told, parents estimated that their teenage sons spent a little more than 24 hours each week playing video games and a little less than 19 hours per week on social media. By contrast, parents of teenage girls said their daughters spent about 13 hours per week playing video games and slightly less than 24 hours a week on social media. Estimates for weekly social media use are not dramatically more than what

[17]Parents were able to self-report anything between 0-24 hours, so to make the reports comparable, we adjusted all parental reports above 16 hours to a category indicating 16 or more hours.

parents report for themselves – in fact, mothers of teenagers actually report more time per week on social media for themselves than for their daughters. However, parental estimates of boys' video game usage is significantly higher than fathers' self reports.

4.2 What Worries Parents

In addition to asking parents about one teenager's technology usage, we also asked parents to tell us their level of concern about that same child with respect to four aspects of the teen's life: grades and schoolwork, behavior at school (getting in trouble), the child's friends and social life, and feelings of anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues. Parents could report that they were "extremely concerned," "somewhat concerned," or "not concerned at all" about their child. Table 17 shows the percentage of parents expressing the highest level of concern about each category.

Table 17: Parental Concerns about Their Teens

	Grades	**School Trouble**	**Social Life/ Friends**	**Anxiety/ Depression**
Overall	36	36	37	27
White	29	34	33	22
Black	43	52	44	39
Hispanic	45	31	41	28
Low Income	40	40	45	32
Middle Income	39	39	36	27
High Income	30	30	31	21
Child Lives with Respondent	35	35	36	26
Child Does Not Live with Respondent	47	50	57	45
High Parental Identity	41	37	40	29
Low Parental Identity	30	35	34	23

As the table makes clear, a significant percentage of parents reported high levels of concern about their teenage children. More than one-third of respondents said they are "extremely concerned" about their teen's grades, behavior in school, and social life, and more than one-quarter responded that they worry about their teen suffering from anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues. At the same time, the results also show that there are large differences across various demographic categories. For example, black and Hispanic parents reported significantly higher levels of concern about every category than did white parents. In addition, high-income respondents expressed lower levels of concern than those in the middle and lower income categories. Parents whose teenage children do not live with them expressed exceptionally high levels of worry, and those with higher parental identities were also more likely to express concern, especially about their child's grades.

We also asked all those who reported at least some level of concern about anxiety, depression, or another mental health issue how those problems are affecting their teen's physical, social, and educational health. Specifically, we asked about schoolwork, friendships, family relationships, extracurricular activities, and physical health. Figure 19 presents the percentage of parents who said that their teens' anxiety or depression is affecting each category "a lot." We interpret this response as meaning that the parent believes that

mental health issues are having a large effect. In addition, yellow bars represent parents who told us they were "somewhat concerned" about anxiety and depression, while blue bars indicate that parents told us they were "extremely concerned."

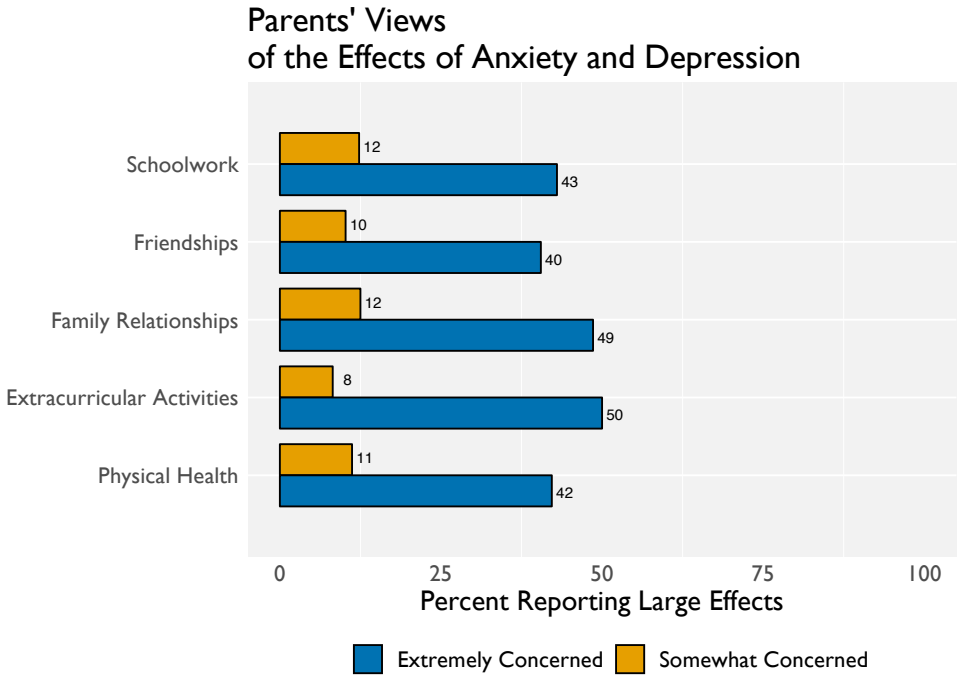

Figure 19: How parents see the effects of teen anxiety and depression.

The figure shows that when parents feel greater levels of concern, they are also more likely to believe that mental health issues are having meaningful effects on school, social and family life, and even the physical health of their child. Between 40 and 50 percent of parents who told us they were "extremely concerned" about their teen's anxiety and depression thought that these issues were also having a large effect on their teen's life experience. Among those who said they were only "somewhat concerned" about anxiety and depression, however, parents were much less likely to report large effects. In other words, greater concern about mental health issues is correlated with greater likelihood of parents noticing that other aspects of their teens' lives are suffering. Of course, in a cross-sectional survey such as this, we do not know whether concern about grades or social life, for example, preceded worries about mental health or whether the worries about mental health prompted parents to notice school or relationship concerns. But we do know that nearly half of parents who are most worried about mental health issues in their children believe that mental health challenges have substantial effects on many aspects of their teenager's life experience.

5 Sexual Harassment

On this year's survey we asked a number of questions about sexual harassment, ranging from respondent experiences with this to respondent beliefs about the practice and how often they talk about it with their children.

Table 18 displays the number of people who received unwanted sexual advances from someone in various

venues. The first column displays the simple number who have experienced sexual harassment in any venue, while the second and third columns display the number who have experienced sexual harassment at work or from a superior (at either work or school). Focusing first on the general experience, it is noteworthy that the gender difference is so large. Twenty-eight percent of men reported an inappropriate experience while nearly six out of ten women (58 percent) reported an experience, suggesting a rather stark difference between the sexes. It is not, however, the only such difference. Education clearly also plays a role. Only 35 percent of those with relatively less education (high school or less) reported the experience, while those with college experience had clearly experienced more. For college graduates (or more), a majority of the respondents felt they had experienced harassment.

Table 18: Experiences with Sexual Harassment

Group	Percentage Reporting an Inappropriate Experience	From Someone at the Same Company	From Someone in Authority At School or at Work
Total	43	30	19
Men	28	21	12
Women	58	39	26
High School Education (or less)	35	23	15
Some College	46	33	20
College Graduates (or more)	51	36	24
Democrat	47	33	23
Independent	40	28	19
Republican	40	28	15

These patterns tend to broadly hold up when the question becomes more restrictive. Only about two out of ten men felt they had experienced it at work, while the number for women was about twice that number. And when asked about receiving the sexual harassment from a superior, at either work or school, one-quarter of women reported this experience—with just 12 percent of men experiencing this. No matter how the data are sliced, the experience of sexual harassment is a problem that is felt particularly keenly by women, and, typically, by women with more education.

There are weak partisan patterns in the data. Regardless of the nature of the question asked, more Democrats report the experience than do Republicans, although the differences are not as stark as the differences by gender. Broadly, it appears that the experience of sexual harassment is one that afflicts many types of people that cut across society, but that it is particularly felt by women, especially those with more education.

A similar gendered pattern held up when we asked about whether or not respondents were familiar with "incidents where sexual harassment happened in the" places described in Table 19. In this case we consistently found that women were more likely to be familiar with incidents of sexual harassment regardless of the location. A majority of women were familiar with such experiences in at least one of those locations, while a majority of men were not familiar with such incidents. The differences between genders was never terribly large, typically around five percentage points, but the pattern is unmistakable.

It is obvious that people are broadly familiar with sexual harassment taking place around them (though this is more true for women than for men). But how do people define sexual harassment? In an effort to better understand people's standards we asked a series of questions about what counted as sexual harassment. The specific question wording was split into two groups. Half saw the following: "Would

Table 19: Percentage Familiar with Incidents of Sexual Harassment by Location

	Women	**Men**
Workplace	38	32
Religious Congregation	10	6
Neighborhood	16	11
School	19	14
Children's School	5	4
Family	18	10
None of the Above	43	54

you consider it sexual harassment if a **man** who was not a romantic partner did the following to a **woman** at work?" The other half saw exactly the reverse: a woman taking the action with respect to a man. For either question, people could respond that a particular action either "always," "sometimes," or "never" counted as harassment. Figure 20 shows the responses to this question for a range of activities (with the experiment collapsed) and is broken out by gender given the disparate experiences of men and women in this area.

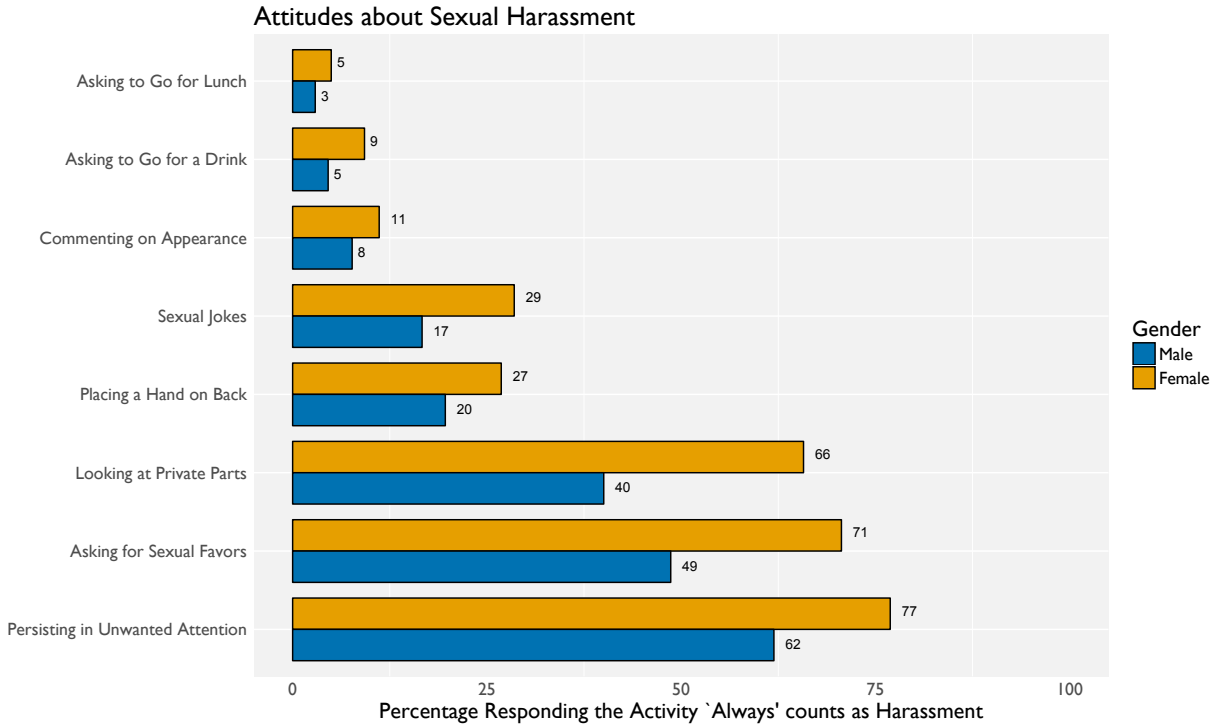

Figure 20: Attitudes about harassment by gender (collapsing the male to female and female to male treatments)

The patterns are instructive. First, it is clear that certain actions are simply less likely to be categorized as inappropriate than other activities. Asking to go for a drink, or for lunch, or commenting on someone's appearance are considered "always" sexual harassment by a relatively small number of people.[18]

[18]We note that the complexities of this question make it difficult to ask simple questions about. Of course, in some situations it is possible to think of versions of these actions that would count for most people, while it is also possible to think of situations that would not count. We emphasize that these are broad generalizations.

More people consider sexual jokes sexual harassment, and the actions most consistently labelled as such were looking at private parts (presumably clothed in the workplace, although we did not specify in the question), asking for sexual favors, or persisting in unwanted attention.

The second clear feature of this graph is that women simply have higher standards for behavior than do men. The only area where men felt an action was "always" sexual harassment was persisting in unwanted attention. Surprisingly (to these authors) only 49 percent of men believed that asking for sexual favors "always" counted as sexual harassment (for comparison, 71 percent of women felt that it "always" counted). While it is dangerous to speculate about respondent motivations or explanations for their responses, it is possible that men rationalize the behavior, possibly on the grounds that it might be wanted some of the time or acceptable in some situations. And it is true that 62 percent of men felt that persistent but unwanted attention counted as sexual harassment (compared with 76 percent of women). That was the only category where a majority of men felt that the behavior always counted.

We also examined age and racial differences and generally found that older and white respondents were more likely to believe that an activity counted as sexual harassment. For instance, 66 percent of those aged 65 or older believed asking for a sexual favor always counted as sexual harassment, but the number fell to only 51 percent among those between 18 and 29.

Broadly, when we considered the category that responded that these activities never counted as sexual harassment, there were relatively few patterns to the data, though a few things did stand out. With respect to race, of those who responded that all behaviors "never" counted as sexual harassment, only 39 percent were white, while 23 percent were black and 38 percent were Hispanic, suggesting that whites are underrepresented in this group, but there were not dramatic political or other patterns to the data.

As a second check on how people feel about these experiences, we embedded an experiment in the questionnaire. Half of all respondents were asked about men doing this to a woman, but the other half were asked about women doing this to a man. Figure 21 displays the differences in how people reacted to that experiment and it serves as important context. While there are essentially no differences between how the public perceives sexual harassment by its direction for the behaviors that only rarely count as harassment, there is a clear bias on the other behaviors: it is more likely to be considered harassment if it is a man doing it to a woman than it is if a woman does it to a man.

Who is it that is inconsistent? Broadly, all categories were at least somewhat inconsistent in how they answered this question. Men are simply more likely to be seen as harassers by everyone. However, there is a clear pattern and it is, perhaps unsurprisingly, also related to gender. Figure 22 displays the three actions most commonly considered as always meeting the definition of sexual harassment: unwanted attention, asking for sexual favors, and looking at private parts. The left panel displays men and the right panel displays women. The bars display the differences between the man to woman and the woman to man conditions. The figure shows that there is inconsistency in essentially every case; the size of the inconsistency is just larger among men, who clearly are more likely to say that something is harassment when it is a man doing it to a woman, rather than the reverse.

This actually changes how we might see some of the results above. We noted that a majority of men did not see asking for sexual favors as always consisting of sexual harassment. Though that's true, it is clearly dependent on the context. A majority of men do believe that when a man does this to a woman it is sexual harassment, but a majority does not believe the reverse.

Table 20 takes up a slightly different, but obviously related issue. On the survey, we asked about the nature of consent. The specific question wording was, "In your view, does someone need to ask consent before initiating each of these things with a person they are interested in romantically?" In general, people do not believe that verbal consent is required for actions such as holding hands, putting an arm around

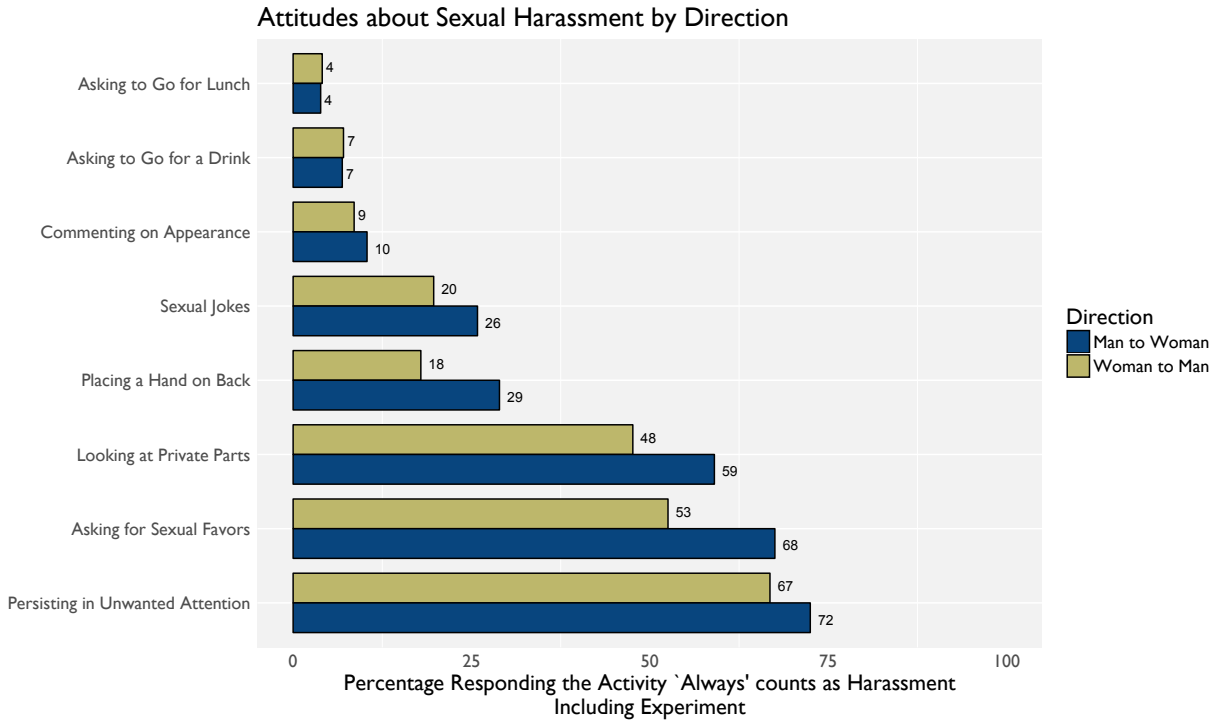

Figure 21: Attitudes about harassment by experimental treatment

someone, or a kiss (though that last action does display a slightly different pattern). However, the modal response for all of those categories is that consent is required, just that it could be non-verbal.

The last two categories are quite different. Clear majorities believe that intimate touching and sex require verbal consent. However, it should be noted that there is, again, a gendered pattern to this result. Figure 23 displays the proportion of men and women who feel that consent (both verbal and non-verbal) is a requirement for different types of sexual activity. There is a bit over a ten percentage point gap between men and women for each of these two activities; the other actions displayed no such gap. Taken broadly, the results suggest that people generally feel strongly about verbal consent for the more intense forms of sexual contact, but that, again, there is a gap in the intensity of this feeling for men and for women.

Figure 24 explores a similar relationship, but examining Trump supporters. There is a discernible, but not enormous, difference in how those who approve of Trump (vs. those who disapprove of Trump or

Table 20: Attitudes about Consent

Action	Yes, consent must be verbal	Yes, but consent could be non-verbal	No
Holding hands	16	43	35
Putting your arm around someone	17	46	30
Kissing someone	34	49	12
Intimate touching	57	32	7
Having sex	67	22	6

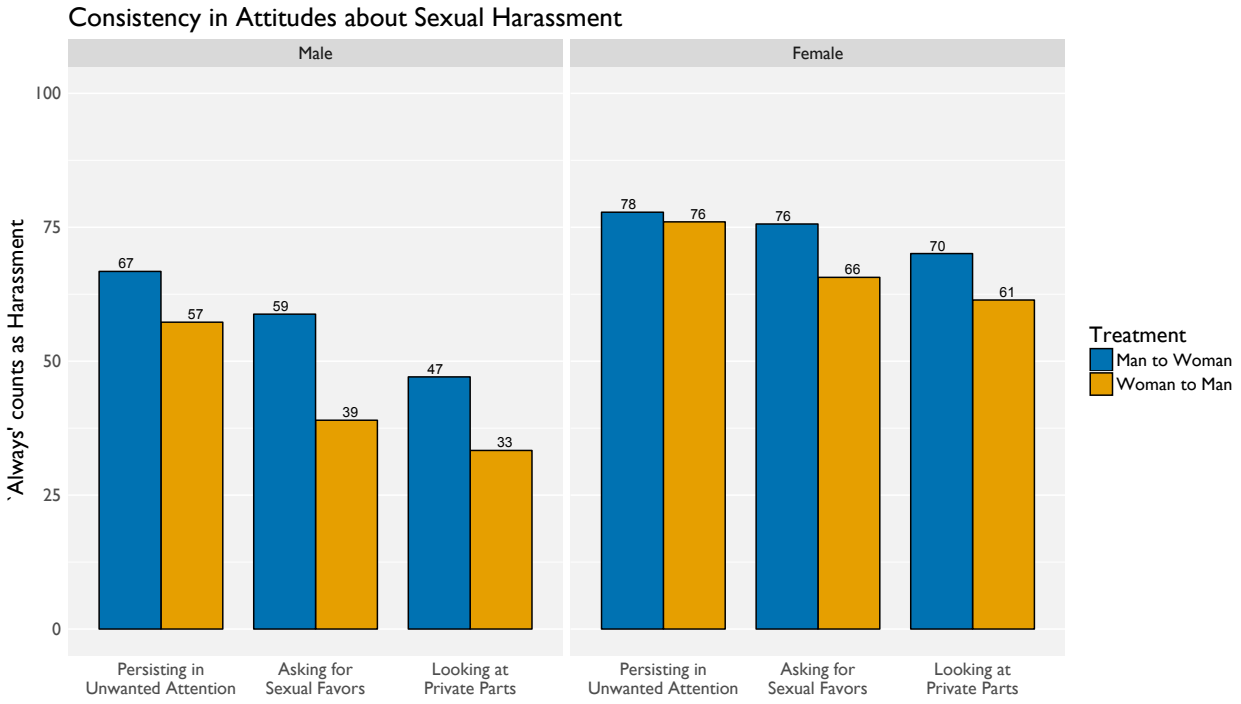

Figure 22: Reporting of discussions about sexual topics, by partisanship

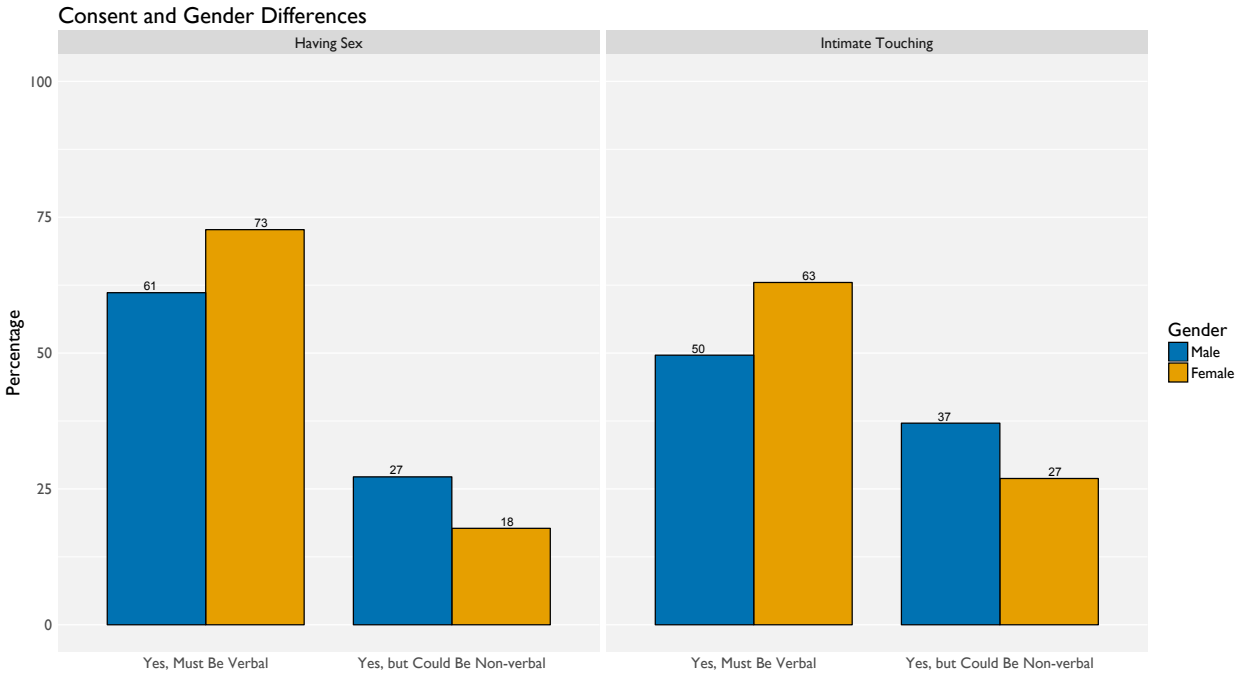

Figure 23: Attitudes about consent by gender

are neutral about him) think about consent. Trump supporters are somewhat less likely to favor verbal consent, although both groups overwhelmingly favor consent of some kind in these two situations (the differences across Trump attitudes are similar for the other categories). While it is common for partisans—or opponents and supporters of the president—to make claims about their political opponents' lack of a moral compass, these results suggest that on the issues of sexual harassment and the need for consent the differences exist but are not large.

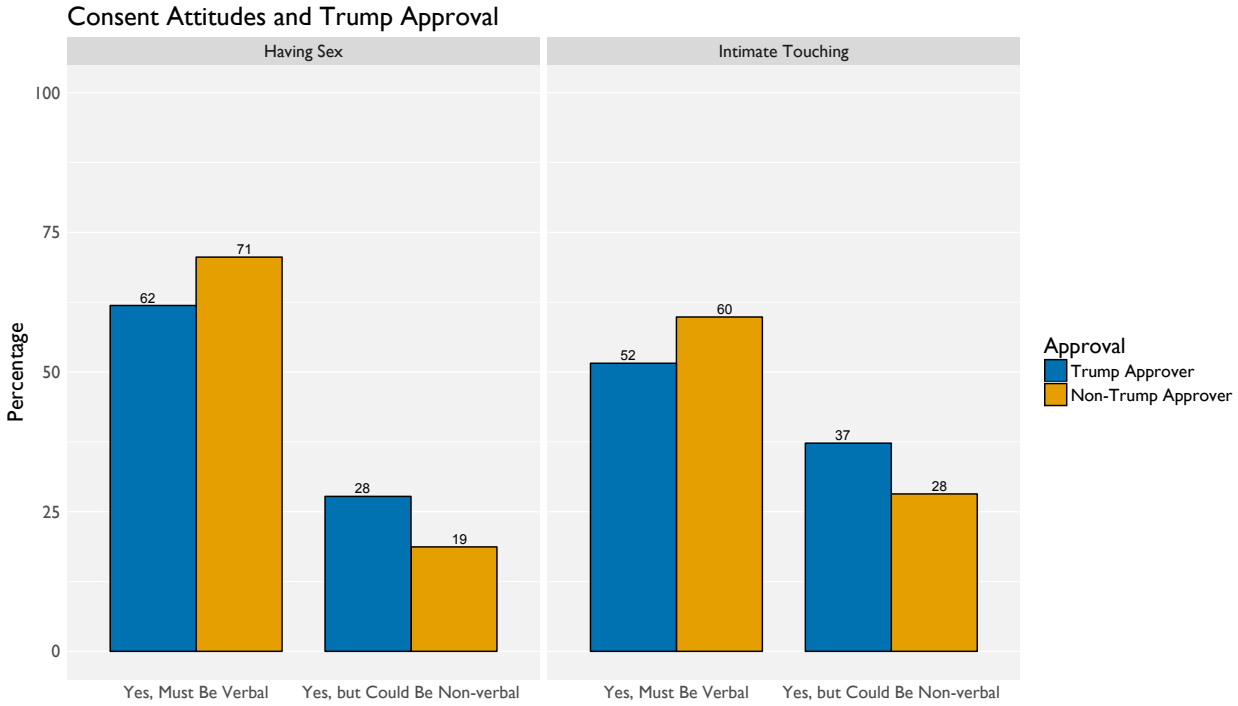

Figure 24: Attitudes about Consent by Trump Support

We also discovered something of a racial aspect to these attitudes, though it is a somewhat complicated relationship. Table 21 displays the percentage of respondents replying "always" to the listed activity, but, in this case, broken out by the most populous racial categories in the sample (they are roughly listed in descending order of the percentage agreeing). Scrutiny of the results reveals an interesting pattern. Though there are never massive differences between any of the races, there is a pattern that whites tend to have more rigorous standards for certain categories that are most commonly listed, especially persisting in unwanted attention and requesting a sexual favor, but they are less likely to respond "always" than are blacks to some of the activities that generate a more middling response.

Take, for example, making sexual jokes and placing a hand on someone's lower back. Though there are differences by the experimental treatment, there is a gap roughly 10 to 15 percentage points, with the black respondents holding the more rigorous standard on those activities. On the answers that generate the fewest "always" responses, the differences between the two groups dissipates. Hispanics tend to be somewhere between the two groups in their assessments of these activities.

We will not speculate here on the broader social meaning of these findings, instead merely noting that there are interesting inconsistencies in people's opinions, that there is a great deal of variation in how people respond to these questions, and that all of it is clearly connected to gender, and, to a lesser degree, race.

Table 21: Percentages replying "Always" for each of the activities listed by Race

Activities: Man to Woman	**White**	**Black**	**Hispanic**
Persisting in Unwanted Attention	74	64	58
Looking at Private Parts	59	54	51
Requesting a Sexual Favor	68	56	60
Making Sexual Jokes	23	32	29
Placing Hand on Lower Back	23	39	42
Commenting on Appearance	8	12	19
Asking to Go for a Drink	6	9	8
Asking to Go to Lunch	3	5	6

Activities: Woman to Man	**White**	**Black**	**Hispanic**
Persisting in Unwanted Attention	68	58	50
Looking at Private Parts	48	43	38
Requesting a Sexual Favor	54	48	37
Making Sexual Jokes	18	30	16
Placing Hand on Lower Back	15	30	19
Commenting on Appearance	7	13	10
Asking to Go for a Drink	7	7	7
Asking to Go to Lunch	4	4	6

Finally, we also asked about whether or not people had talked about sexual matters with their children. Table 22 displays the percentage of people who have had a conversation about each of these topics with their children (the question was only asked of parents). The clear answer is that a little over half of the respondents had done this for all topics except sexual identity which is lower.

Table 22: The percentage reporting each type of discussion

Discussions	**Percentage**
Sex	59
Contraception	53
Consent	54
Sexual Harassment	51
Sexual Identity	42

We examined the demographic correlates of this quite closely and turned up little of any value. There just are not any large differences across groups in the rate of reported behavior. Figure 25 shows the question broken down by partisanship, and there are effectively no differences, except on the question of identity, where Republicans are slightly less likely to have had the conversation. Figure 26 breaks the question down by church attendance (where churchgoing is defined as once a month or more) and it similarly sees no distinctions of any significance.

The one demographic pattern that we did find variation in was age, although we interpret this largely as a response to the fact that sexual discussions with small children are generally perceived as less needed or valuable (though we do not draw that conclusion here). Other than that, we found a great deal of variation in who talks to children about sex, but very little to predict who does that.

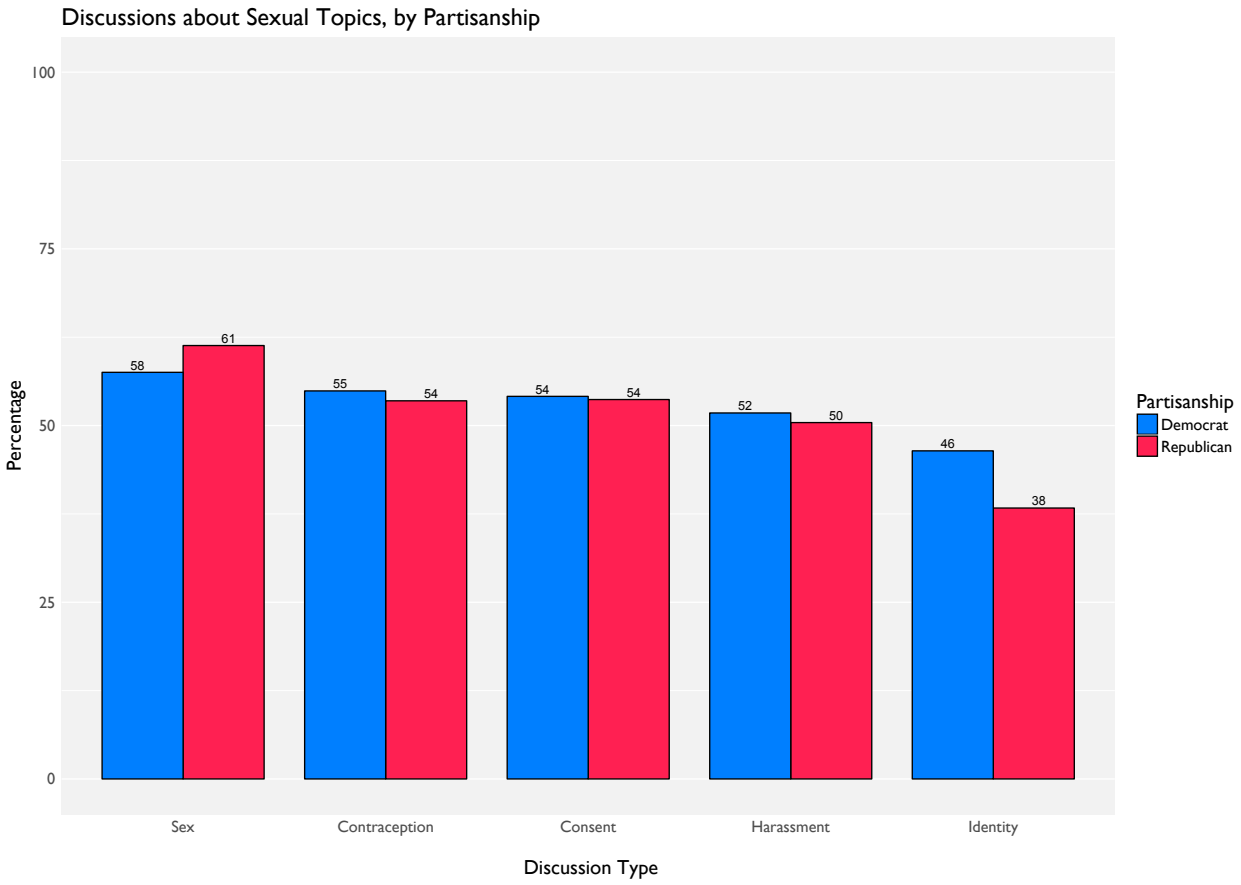

Figure 25: Reporting of discussions about sexual topics, by partisanship

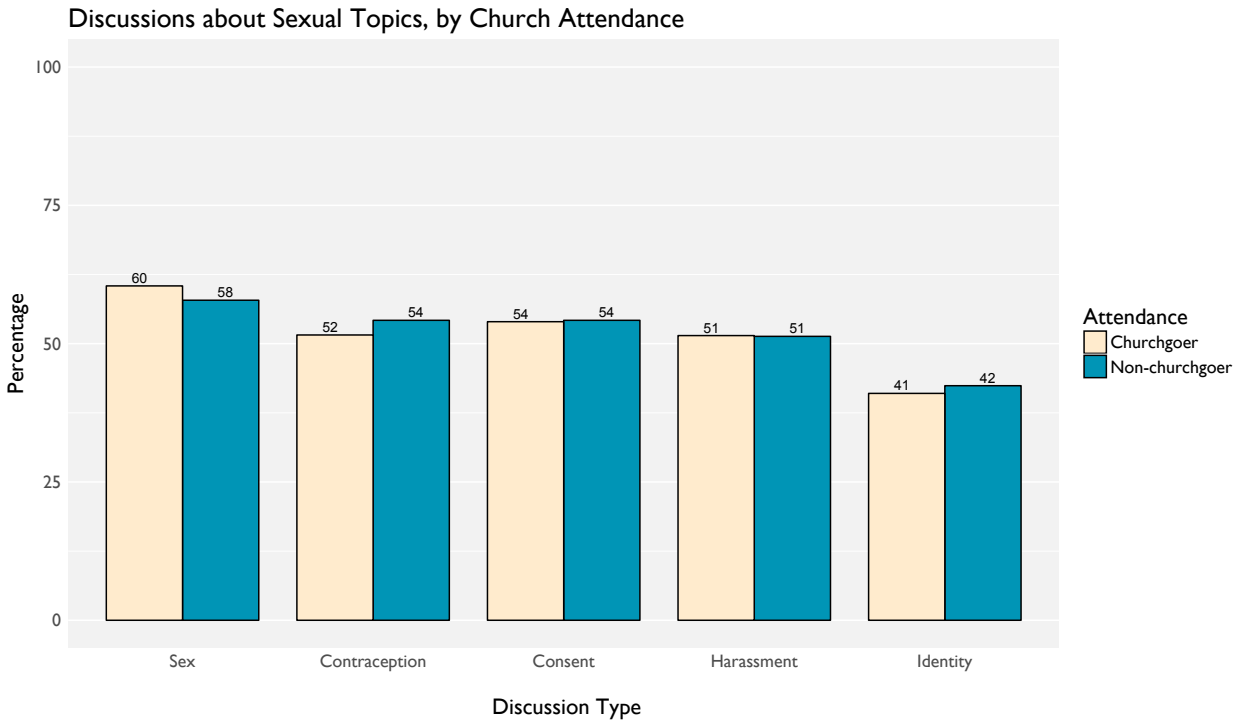

Figure 26: Reporting of discussions about sexual topics, by church attendance

6 Social Capital and Support Networks

In previous versions of the survey we focused our attention on measures of social capital. This year we specifically asked about networks and whether or not people relied on their family, someone else, or just on themselves. Table 23 reports the percentages of people who rely on each network. Family is the key resource for help with childcare and advice about children. But after that, the most common answer is that people rely largely on themselves, though family is often important as well. The one area where the friend network takes precedence over family relationships (though it is close) is advice about relationships.

Table 23: The percentage of people who rely on the given network, or simply rely on themselves

Discussions	Friend Network	Family Network	Neither
Help with Childcare	9	55	36
Advice about Children	15	47	38
Advice about My Relationship	28	24	48
Financial Help	12	38	49
Taking Care of My House or Property	17	33	51
Transportation to an Important Appointment	16	37	46

We looked for even small correlations with other outcomes on this survey, such as the battery of marriage activities and family activities, and found nothing to report. In general, it does not seem that relying on one's family has much predictive power for whether or not the family is heavily engaged or not. However, the exception to this rule is that people who are quite engaged with their families tend to think their marriages (and families) are getting stronger, as can be seen in Figure 27.

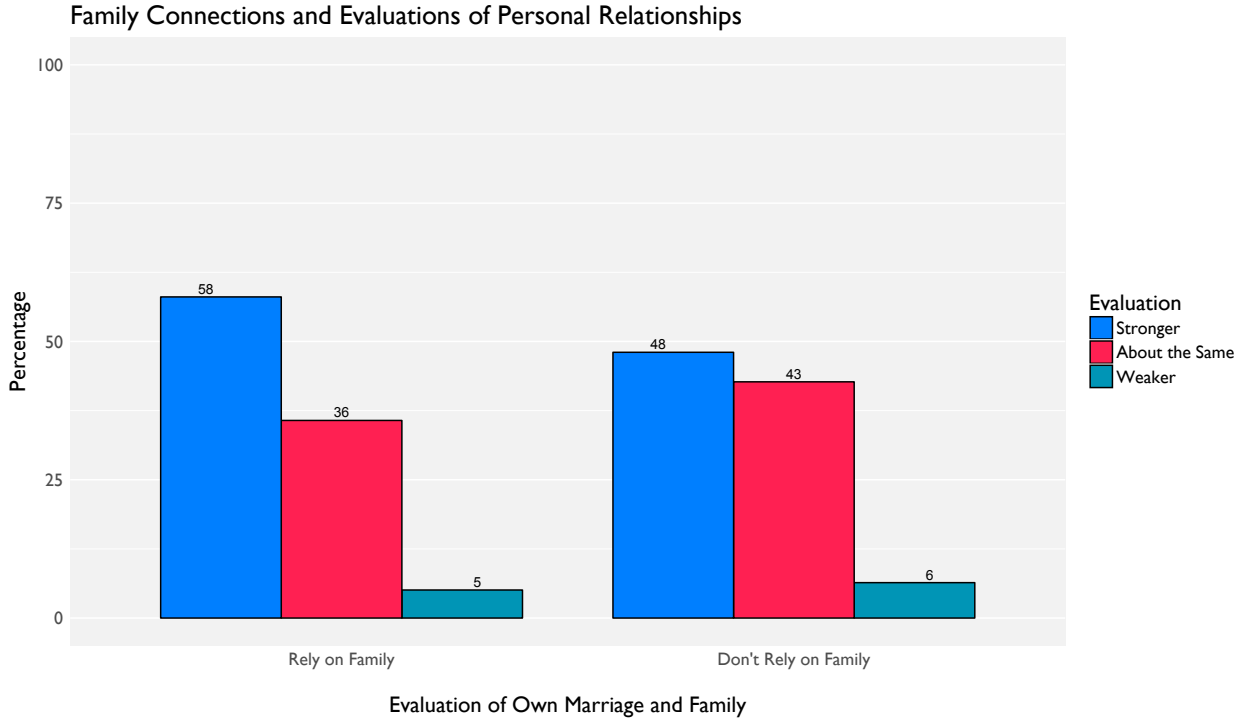

Figure 27: Family connections and evaluations of respondent's marriage and family

This extended to other variables like life satisfaction, but not to personal family outcomes that we found.

7 Family and Public Policy

One of the goals of the American Family Survey has been to understand the way in which family relationships matter for public policies of many different sorts. In this section we take up a series of areas: national programs, local spending, immigration, the recent tax cuts, and funding for Planned Parenthood to see how family status predicts one's opinions on these issues.

7.1 National Government Programs

In previous years we have looked at several national policies. Two policies we have been keeping track of for some time are Medicaid (and other health subsidies) as well as food stamps. Figure 28 displays the time series for both of these policies. This is the first year that evaluations of the two programs seem to have diverged slightly. In previous years the two were essentially in lockstep, while at the moment it seems that health subsidies and Medicaid have grown slightly more popular. Though the difference is not large, it is a trend that bears watching.

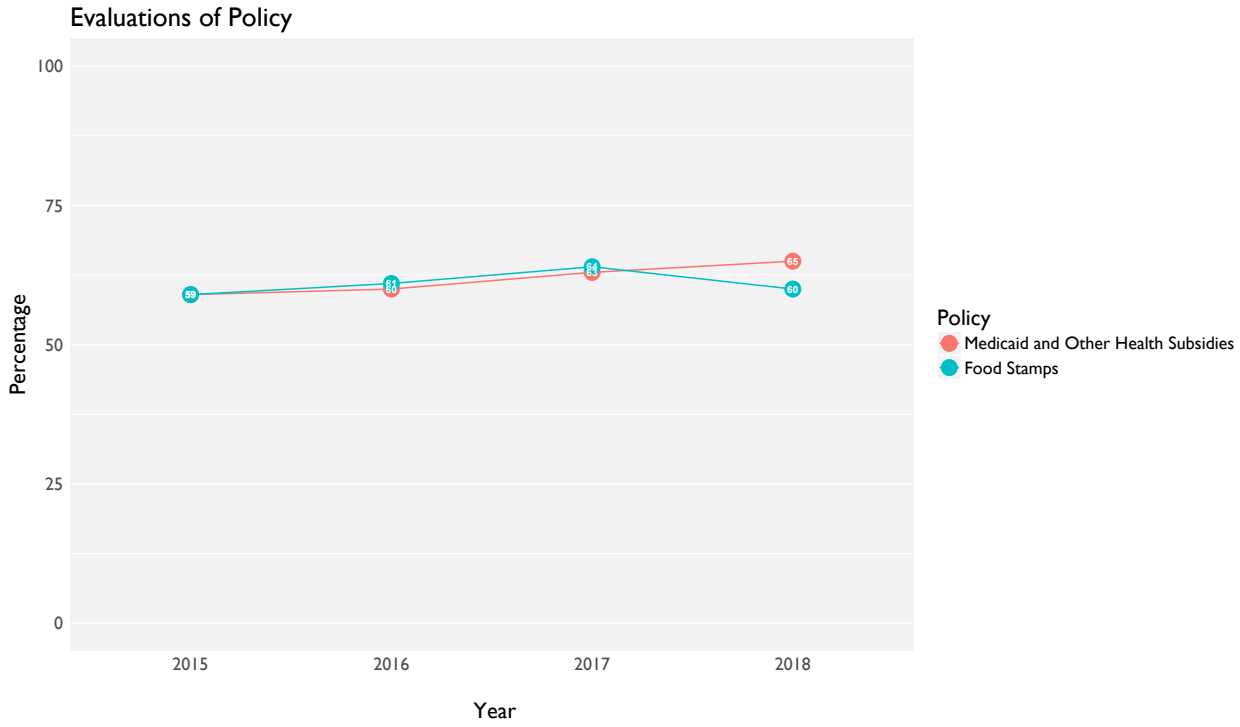

Figure 28: Evaluations (100 = more positive) of how Medicaid and Food Stamps affect families

Table 24: A selection of local policy tradeoffs offered to respondents (a non-exhaustive list); percentages indicate the proportion that would choose the first item in the tradeoff (e.g., the first row references affordable housing against basic services.

Tradeoff Examples	**Democrats**	**Republicans**
Areas of Partisan Disagreement		
Affordable Housing over Basic Services	58	37
Public Transportation over Pensions	56	42
Roads over Basic Services	41	60
Roads over Law Enforcement	61	48
Better Schools over Law Enforcement	78	44
Affordable Housing over Better Schools	58	45
Areas of Agreement		
Roads over Parks	79	88
Roads over Pensions	51	71
Basic Services over Parks	80	80
Affordable Housing over Pensions	73	63
Basic Services over Pensions	69	79
Affordable Housing over Public Transportation	77	70

7.2 *Local Government Programs*

As part of our analysis this year, we wanted to investigate government programs that were not national but rather more local in character. Spending on such items as public parks, local schools, basic services, and law enforcement (to name only a few) have a more direct impact on many people than do the national programs just discussed. To that end we asked a simple tradeoff question about "which option would benefit your family the most?" between such tradeoffs as: roads, parks, pensions, public transportation, better schools, affordable housing, basic services, and law enforcement.

There is a partisan split on such concerns in some cases, though not all cases. Table 24 gives an indication of where there were the most strong partisan splits on a few of the local issues we surveyed (in the upper half of the table), as well as a few areas where the partisan splits were less stark (in the lower half of the table). Some of the distinctions make strong political sense: Democrats are not terribly favorable to law enforcement and Republicans really like roads (although not when pitted against law enforcement). But there are potentially surprising results. Neither side favors pensions very often. And even Republicans want spending on affordable housing against most of the tradeoffs.

Keeping in mind that partisan splits matter some of the time—but far from all of the time—we now turn to an examination of the attitudes about these tradeoffs (for a few cases) broken out by some limited family status categories. Figure 29 displays the percentage choosing roads over better schools. Democrats are grouped on the left and Republicans are grouped on the right; however, each group is broken out by family status into four categories (that occasionally overlap): single, without children, married, and parents of kids. The difference between Democrats and Republicans can be seen in the height of each group of bars and it is clear that, on average, Republicans are more likely to prefer spending on roads than are Democrats. However, breaking out the party groups by family status, even in these broad categories, also reveals the fissures within each party and how those differences in family status are related to attitudes on this tradeoff. In both parties, it is the single and the non-parent respondents that tend to favor roads. In fact, married persons and parents in the Republican Party look quite similar to single and non-parents in the Democratic Party.

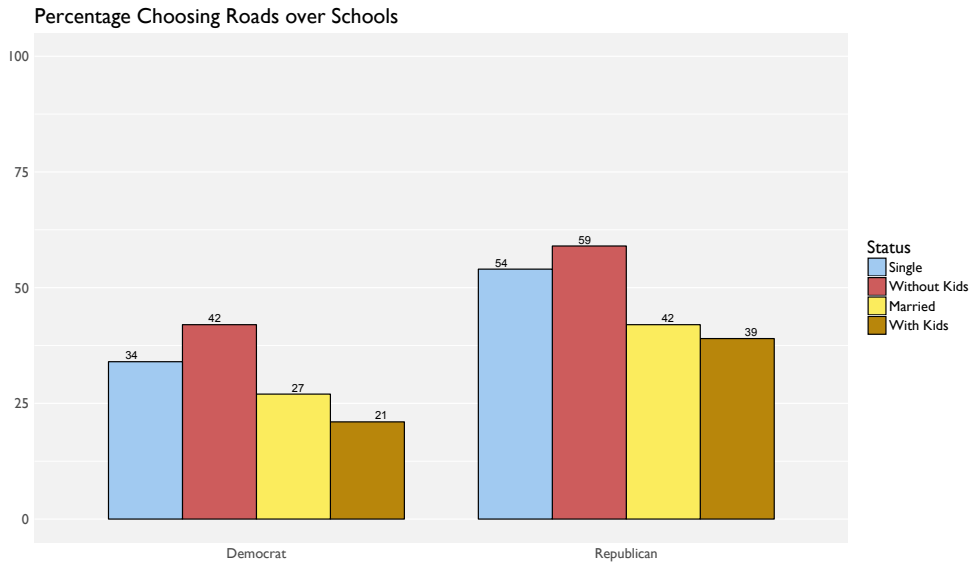

Figure 29: Respondent views on the tradeoff between roads and schools

An exhaustive review of the tradeoffs is beyond this report, but we briefly discuss three other tradeoffs and the patterns that they show. When it comes to public transportation vs. pensions (see Figure 30), the group that is, by far, most strongly in favor of public transportation are Democrats, but only those who are either single or without kids (the most urban group). That difference within the Democratic Party overwhelms any differences between the two parties and is much larger than any difference within the Republican Party, where it is true that, though those family status characteristics prefer public transportation more than the married and parents, the internal party disagreement is not so strong.

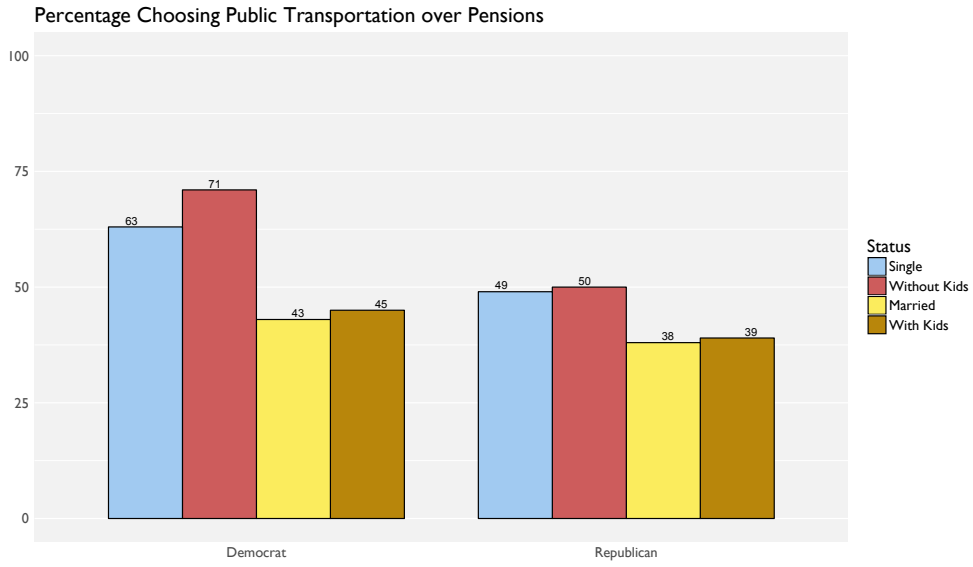

Figure 30: Respondent views on the tradeoff between public transportation and public schools

There are cases where the partisan disagreement is substantial. One of those is the tradeoff between

spending on public parks vs. law enforcement displayed in Figure 31. Democrats uniformly prefer spending money on parks. Republicans are never very enthusiastic about parks in this context. But the variation within each party follows the same pattern and the variation within the Democratic Party is quite substantial. Single Democrats fairly strongly favor spending on law enforcement, while all other Democratic groups are either divided on the question or (in the case of the married) prefer spending on parks. This variation within the Democratic Party is about as large as the variation across the two parties generally.

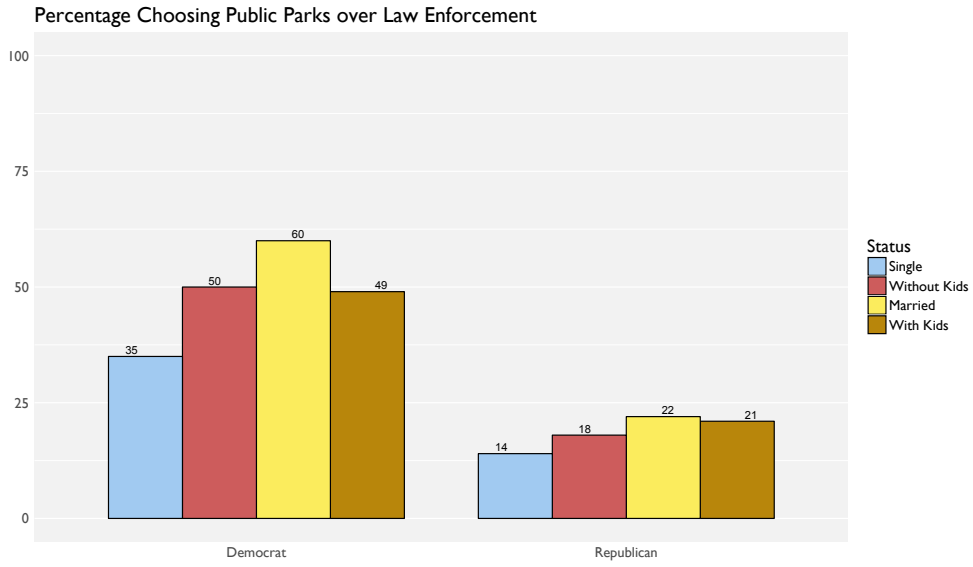

Figure 31: Respondent views on the tradeoff between parks and law enforcement

Our final example pits affordable housing against basic services. Here the patterns are quite striking. Single and childless Democrats strongly favor spending money on affordable housing, while married Democrats and those with kids are evenly split. Republicans favor basic services more often, but the group that most strongly favors more affordable housing are Republicans who do not have children.

The point of showing these tradeoffs is that much political analysis focuses on the fissures between the parties, but the fissures *within* the parties are equally interesting, and sometimes more so. Much of what we have shown here may also have to do with choices about where to live (urban dwellers care more about public transportation and so forth), but collectively it shows that whatever factors are driving support for various programs are strongly connected to family status.

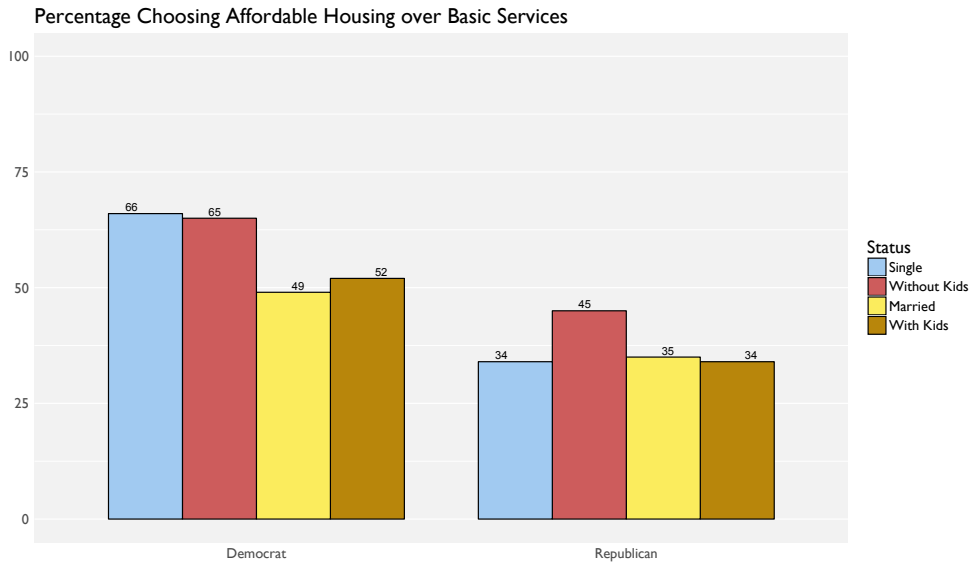

Figure 32: Respondent views on the tradeoff between affordable housing and basic services

7.3 Personal Experience and Support for Immigration

As in past years, on this survey we asked about immigration, but we employed a question that is original to the American Family Survey: "Immigrants who legally become naturalized citizens can sponsor family members to come to the United States. Which of the following family members should they be able to sponsor?" Respondents could check off any family relationship they wished, or no family relationships at all. The aim with this question was to get beyond simple pro- or anti- stances and find the more nuanced views of respondents.

Figure 33 displays the partisan pattern on this question of who should be allowed to immigrate or not. The clear distinction that Democrats are in favor of more immigration can be seen in the difference across all categories. However, it should be noted that Republicans are actually in favor of immigration in some cases and Democrats are against it in some cases. Republicans tend to favor family immigration for the immediate family—a child and a spouse are selected a majority of the time, with parents coming in right around 50 percent. Democrats favor immigration for these groups as well as siblings and grandparents, but less than a majority of Democrats support immigration for aunts or uncles, nieces or nephews, and cousins (where very few Republicans support immigration).

Partisanship was, by far, the best predictor of this type of attitude, but we did find a striking instance of how family background and experience influenced people's attitudes. Figures 34 and 35 show the exact same graph for Republicans and Democrats, but broken out by a respondent's experience. Each graph shows a similar pattern. People who are married and have kids are somewhat more likely to support immigration for spouses and children. Single respondents are more likely to favor sponsorship for immigration of *all* of the other extended family categories. This pattern is *exactly* the same for both Democrats and Republicans (accounting for the overall partisan difference). Again, while it is difficult to interpret motivations for respondents and their beliefs about questions, these results are consistent with the idea that one's family experience leads one to think about family connections in different ways. Single persons appear to place more value on the extended family relationships than do married persons with children.

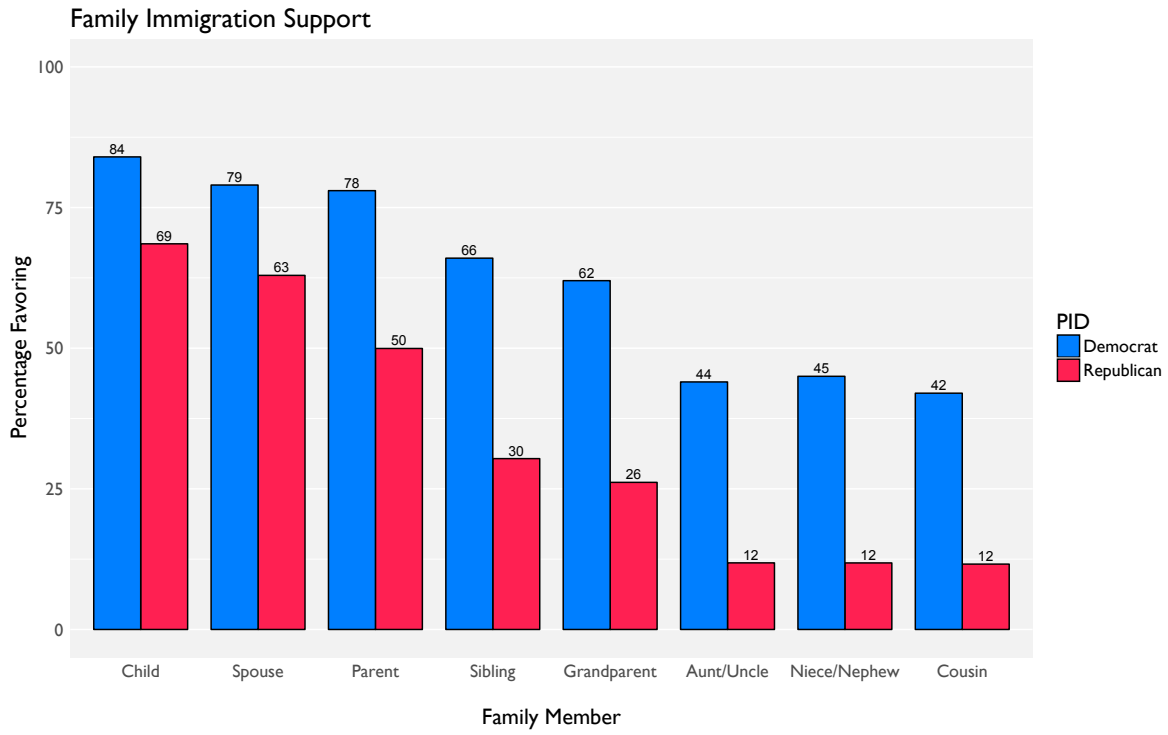

Figure 33: Respondent views about which family members should a citizen be capable of sponsoring for citizenship in the U.S.; pure independents are omitted from the graph

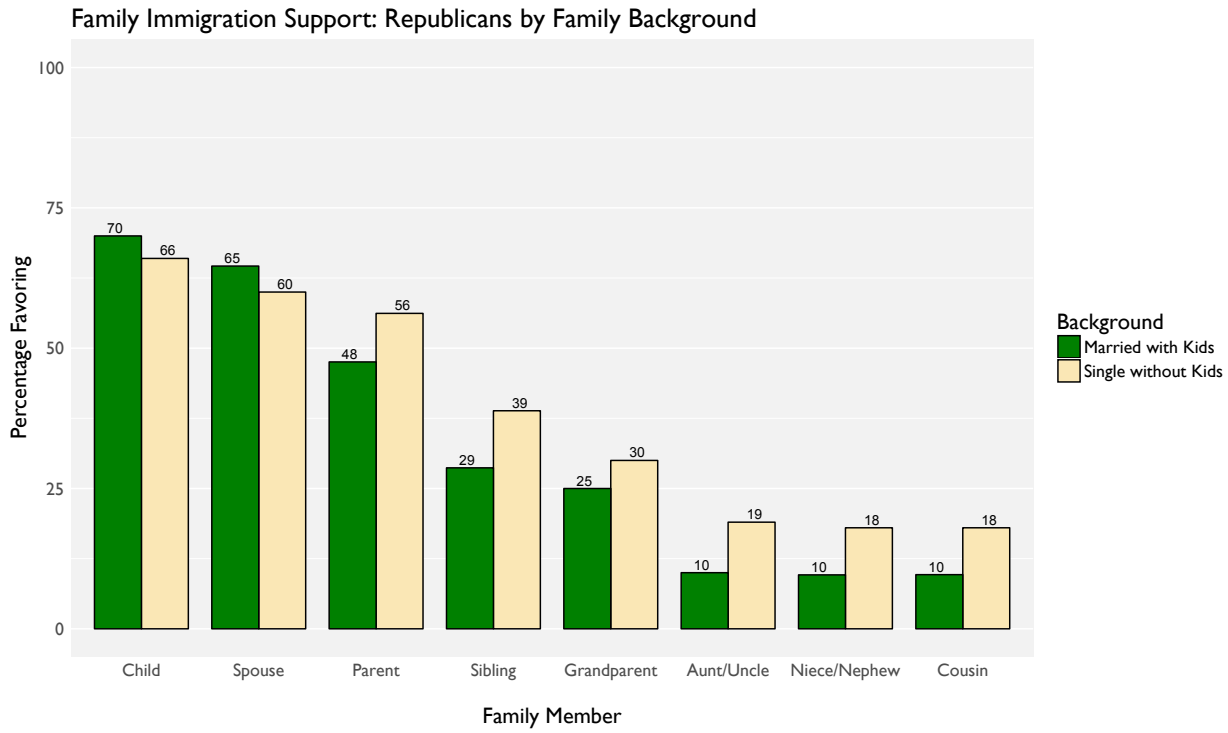

Figure 34: Respondent views, among Republicans, about which family members should a citizen be capable of sponsoring for citizenship in the U.S.

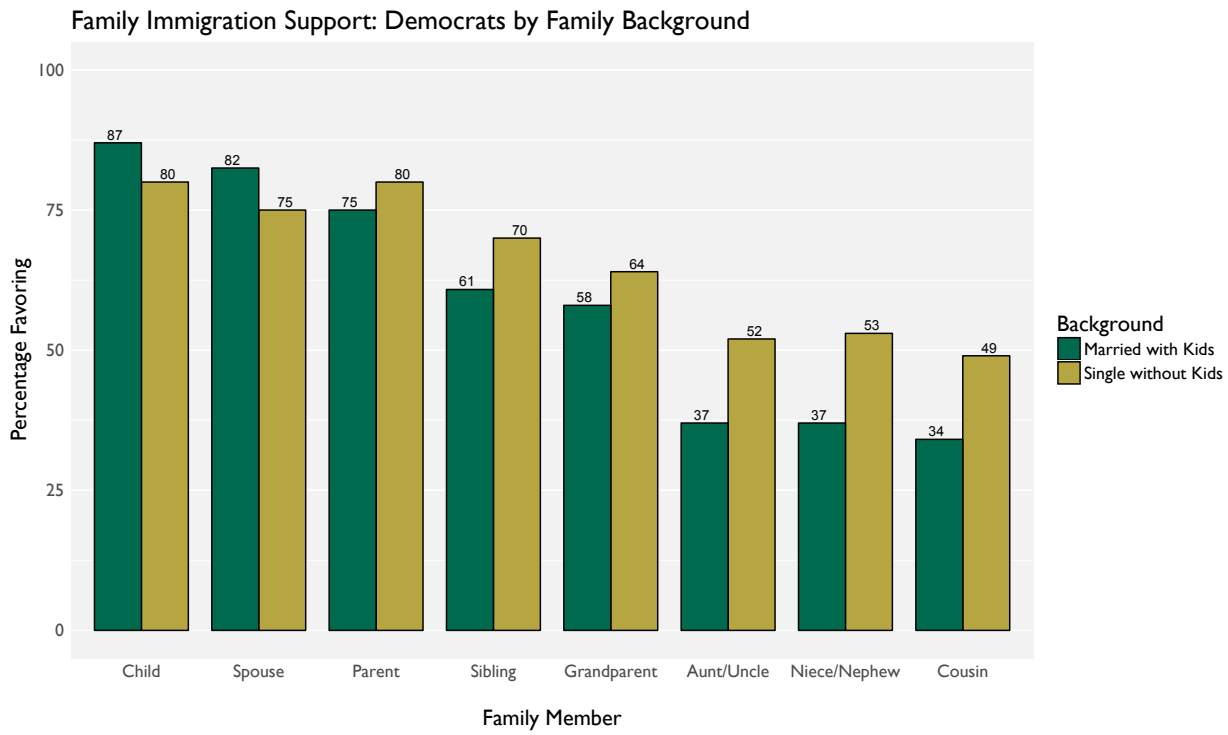

Figure 35: Respondent views, among Democrats, about which family members should a citizen be capable of sponsoring for citizenship in the U.S.

Since one of the key issues with respect to immigration has been family separation, we asked a series of questions about how to handle immigrant families. The questions were asked in a series as follows. All respondents were first asked,

> "The federal government has been dealing with the challenge of families that cross the border without a visa and request asylum. Should parents and children be separated at the border or kept together?"

The results of this question are in the top third of Table 25. The results show an overwhelming preference to keep families together. For the 17 percent of respondents who favored separation, we asked,

> "When families are separated, parents are detained. What should happen to the children?"

Most of these respondents believed that children should be placed in a detention facility, but slightly over a third responded that such children should be placed with relatives in the U.S. or in foster care if necessary (see the middle portion of Table 25).

Table 25: Percentages of people choosing each category in the question series.

Should parents and children be separated at the border or kept together?	**Overall**	**Parents of Children**
Parents and children should be separated	17	18
Parents and children should be kept together	83	82
When families are separated, parents are detained. What should happen to the children?		
Children should be placed in a detention facility	64	65
Children should be placed with family members in the U.S. or be placed in foster care, if necessary.	36	35
If families are not separated, what should happen to the families?		
Parents and children should be kept together in a detention facility until an asylum hearing.	44	50
Parents and children should be allowed to enter the country together, subject to an asylum hearing.	56	50

Finally, for the 83 percent of respondents who favored keeping families together, we asked,

> "If families are not separated, what should happen to the families?"

These results are shown in the bottom of Table 25 and display the closest split. Forty-four percent of all respondents favor keeping the respondents together in a detention facility, while 56 percent of all

respondents favored allowing the families to enter the country together subject to an asylum hearing. In this case, and it was the only one in the series, there is a slight difference by whether or not a respondent had children. For these respondents the split was perfectly even, with half of parents choosing detention and half of respondents choosing the option of letting the family enter the country.

Implicitly, this series of question created four policy categories. Figure 36 displays the preferences given by respondents. It demonstrates that there is a very clear preference in the public favoring keeping families together, there is more division on the appropriate policy assuming that position. Almost half of the respondents favored simply letting families enter the country subject to an asylum hearing, but well over a third favor keeping families together in a detention facility.

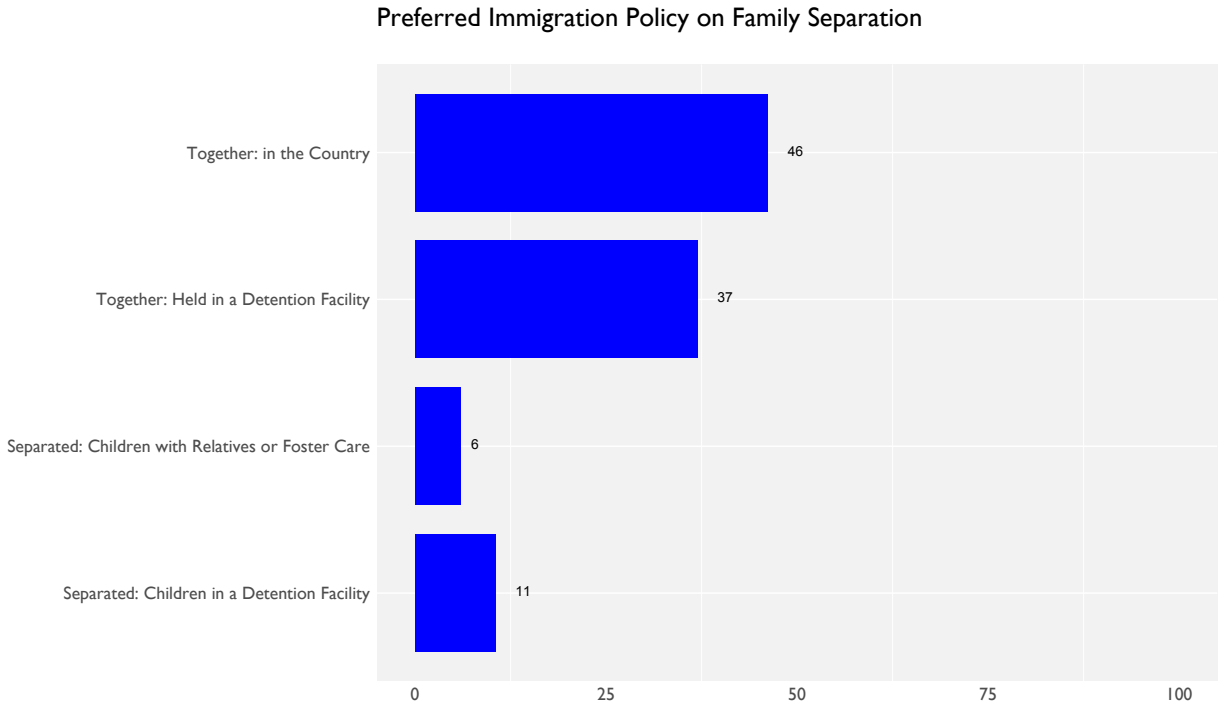

Figure 36: Policy Preference on Family Separation

These patterns were not ever very different by demographic categories, especially in the case of the first question about family separation. With respect to the second question about how a united family should be treated, younger respondents were slightly more likely to favor the option of letting united families enter the country subject to an asylum hearing, as were minority respondents, but in most such cases all demographic groups favored letting the family enter and the differences were largely of degree. The lone exception to this pattern was among those over age 65. This group preferred keeping family members together at a detention facility.

There was a significant, and predictable, partisan split on the issue, although it does not break the overall pattern. Fifty percent of all Republicans favored keeping families together but in a detention facility (their preferred option), while only 26 percent of Democrats favored this option. Seven out of ten Democrats favored letting a family into the country subject to an asylum hearing.

7.4 Family Experience and Tax Cuts

How do people feel about the recently passed tax cut bill? On this survey we asked how people felt that the bill affected various groups, described in Table 26. There was a predictable partisan split on the tax bill, with Republicans favoring it much more often than Democrats. Nonetheless, strong majorities of the respondents believe that the tax bill will help large corporations and wealthy individuals. The sample was effectively split down the middle on whether it would help small businesses. Only a minority believed that the bill would help middle- and lower-income persons. The most striking feature is that by the group least likely believed to get any benefit out of the tax bill is the respondent's own family.

Table 26: Beliefs about whom the recent tax cut would "help"

Groups	**Overall Average**
Large Corporations	68
Wealthy Individuals	63
Small Businesses	49
Middle-Income Individuals	43
Low-Income Individuals	37
Your Family	35

We investigated the degree to which these attitudes varied across the key sub-populations examined in the American Family Survey. While it is true that higher income individuals were more favorably disposed toward the tax cut, we generally found only muted variation by group. Figure 37 breaks down support by key sub-groups: gender, marital status, and whether or not a respondent had children. The clear pattern is that the object of help was the dominant consideration for most respondents. While it is true that women tended to think that the tax cuts would help less across the board, all demographic groups we investigated followed the same basic pattern of believing that various types of business would be helped by the law, as would wealthy citizens. People are simply more skeptical that the policy will help out other groups in society.

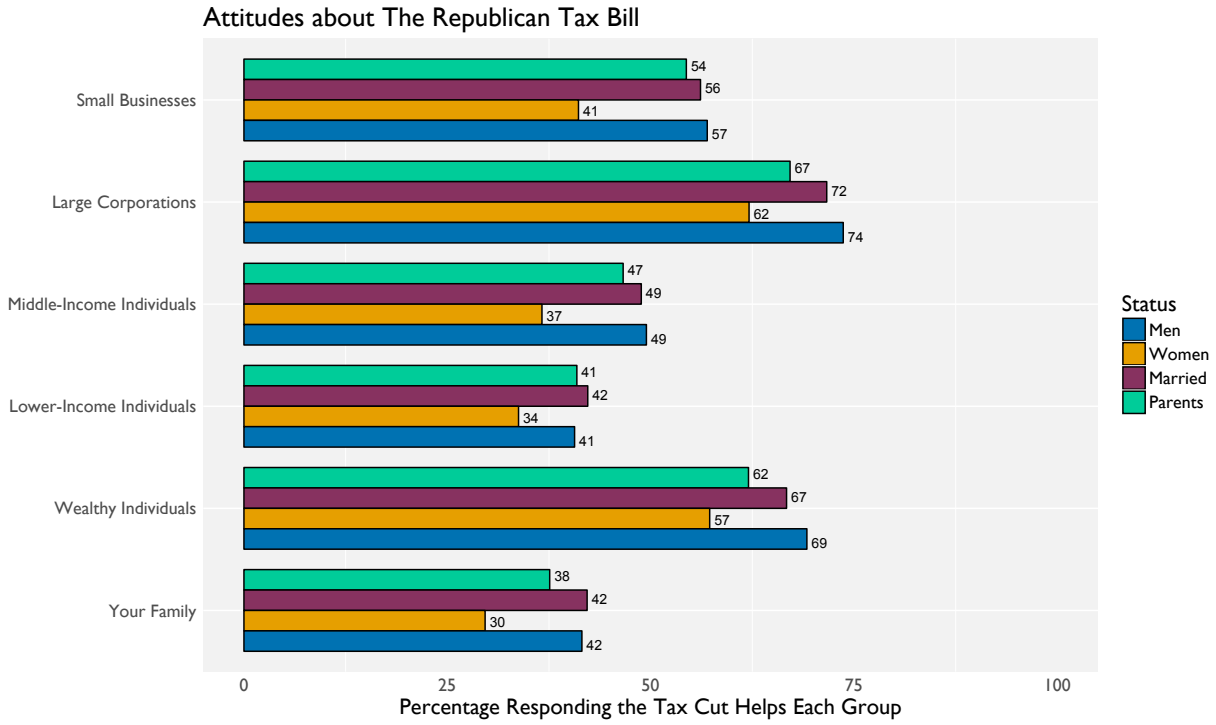

Figure 37: Attitudes about the Republican tax bill by gender and family status

7.5 Family Background and Support for Planned Parenthood

A final area of public policy we explored on this year's survey was the recent defunding of Planned Parenthood. Predictably, there is a wide partisan split on this issue (found in many other surveys). We focused on beliefs about how this policy would affect individuals. Table 27 displays the reactions of various groups to how this policy will affect them. Most respondents felt that it would not affect them at all (more than seven in ten). However, it is really subsets of the population—particularly younger women—who are probably most concerned with the services provided by Planned Parenthood. When we subset to those groups we discover far greater percentages who believe that the policy will affect them—or who respond that they "don't know" if it will affect them. Indeed, only 45 percent of single women under age 45 believe that it will not affect them at all.

Despite our efforts to focus on experiences rather than partisan splits, we should note that there was an ineradicable partisan difference on this question. Focusing solely on the population of women under

Table 27: Percentage believing that recent defunding of Planned Parenthood will affect them ...

Responses	All Respondents	Men	Women	Women Under 45	Married Women Under 45	Single Women Under 45
A Great Deal	7	6	8	12	9	13
Somewhat	10	9	10	16	13	18
Not at all	71	74	68	50	59	45
Don't Know	13	12	13	22	19	24

age 45, Democrats in this group believed they would be affected at some level 38 percent of the time, while Republicans believed this only 14 percent of the time. Other control variables like marital status and income did not eliminate the difference. The pattern of answers could be due either to expressive reporting of people who were unlikely to need the services but opposed the policy, or because the Democrats (perhaps because of geographic reasons) use the services of Planned Parenthood more often (likely both factors are in play). Whatever the reason, this is not an area where partisan differences are simply muted. On the contrary, when considering Planned Parenthood funding, there are strong and abiding partisan differences.

8 Conclusions

Now in its fourth year, the 2018 American Family Survey reveals a great deal of consistency with previous iterations of the survey (which can all be found here). It is not the case that the American Family is in steep decline, or that it is achieving new highs. Instead, we find that views about relationships and families differ depending on one's background and experiences. People like marriage. Indeed, it is fair to say that people generally think it is an important benefit—though it must be noted that many people (a little less than half) believe personal commitment is more important than the formal institution.

One of the key findings in this survey was the importance of identity. The evidence is clear that parents and married people derive enormous satisfaction from their identities as parents or spouses. In some ways this makes the challenges to family all the more important. When a part of people's identities are challenged by societal changes, economic instability, personal financial stresses, or depression and anxiety, it reflects a problem that people must take seriously. And even in the midst of what by many indicators is a booming economy, we find that many families experience economic challenges and worry a great deal about them, especially about the high costs of raising children.

Though we did not directly ask the question of how it threatens families, the results in this survey on sexual harassment should give policymakers pause, in our opinion. The fact that such a large portion of the public—three in ten men and six in ten women—have experienced an inappropriate experience demands a significant response from society. Though we did not poll on solutions, it is clear that at least part of that solution must be cultural change. The divide in attitudes between men and women merits considerable additional discussion (including discussion of the fact that standards shift when the direction of the attention shifts).

Despite the stresses and other difficulties of family life, this survey continues to send a clear message: that people often find deep happiness—even the sources of their identities—inside of families. To quote last year's report: "This should underscore the value of marriage and children for society. Consistently, we have found that those who enjoy marriage and children—though the latter only inside of marriage—seem better off in a host of ways, even if they perceive threats looming for families."

This year's survey underscores that people see multiple stresses and sources of tension for families, but that the institution remains resilient in the face of these tensions. It is our aim to continue to study this institution and how it relates to politics and policy in America. We continue to believe that, despite the challenges of the research, family relationships remain one of the most important sources of meaning and happiness for most Americans.

9 Appendix: Statement on Methodology

YouGov interviewed 3332 respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 3000 to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education. The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights on the public use file). The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores.

The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, and region. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles. The weights were then post-stratified on 2016 Presidential vote choice, and a four-way stratification of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories), and education (4-categories), to produce the final weight.

10 Appendix: Topline Report

What follows is a topline report of all survey questions asked in the 2018 American Family Survey. This topline report was generated by YouGov. Any questions about the survey or the topline should be directed to BYU's Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy (csed@byu.edu).