

# THE PUBLIC PERSPECTIVE

## A Roper Center Review of Public Opinion and Polling

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### CONVENTIONAL WOMEN AND MEN IN A WORLD OF CHANGE

The newly-released Virginia Slims Opinion Poll (field work in July and August, 1989) is the sixth in a series begun in 1970. The last four of these surveys have been done by the Roper Organization, the most recent under the direction of Kathleen O'Neil.

An enormous amount of change in women's status has occurred over the last two decades, and the report prepared for release with the latest study appropriately emphasizes areas where attitudes and assessments have shifted.

Still, we at Public Perspective are most impressed by the powerful continuities the surveys have found in men's and women's outlook and by, well, just how conventional their views are. Consider these responses. [The data are presented inside.]

•Today's "modern" woman describes her children, role as mother, and her friends as the most satisfying aspects of her life.

•Today's woman may have a lot of new needs, but she lists a very old one — more money — way ahead of everything else.

•To relieve stress, modern women are most inclined to take a bath or shower, read, talk on the phone, shop, walk, or cook. (Men do all these things too, but not as much.)

•Many women today want a career, but more want marriage and children (often along with a career). About half of all women say they would prefer to stay at home, rather than have an outside job.

•Roughly 3 women in every 10 say that if the wife is offered "a very good job" in another city (and the couple have no children), the husband should quit his job, relocate with his spouse, and try to get a new job. More than 6 in every 10 say, when things are reversed and it is the husband who is offered the attractive post elsewhere, that the wife should quit her own "good and interesting job" and follow him.

•Seventy percent of women think the *ideal* — hard to attain for economic reasons — is for working women with

new babies to stay home caring for them, for at least the first year. Forty percent think the woman should stay home until the child enters school.

•A plurality of married women who work say they do so to bring in extra money, rather than to support the family. A large majority of single women work to support themselves.

•The survey asked: Of all the people you have known, which one or two has had the biggest effect on you? In our rapidly changing world, most men and women alike say either "my Mom" or "my Dad."

Plus ça change....

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•A most comprehensive review -- data, and more data, and interpretation -- of values and value change in the US

•Leading figures in opinion research describe "the most important poll I have ever seen"

•What happened to the polls in Nicaragua?

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