

# Liberation, libations, and love



by Brian Mahoney

A University of Alberta sociologist has found that husbands with traditional views of marriage are more prone than their "liberated" counterparts to hit the bottle when their wives' success outside the home equals or betters their own.

In his report, "Do Liberated Women Drive Their Husbands to Drink? The Impact of Masculine Orientation, Status Inconsistency, and Family Life Satisfaction on Male Liquor Consumption", Dr. W. Andrew Harrell studied the link between male sex roles and coping strategies, the theme of his current program of studies.

Harrell's subjects were 62 Edmonton men married and living with their spouses, and both they and their wives worked outside the home.

"I just happened to have a couple of surveys on liquor consumption in women who were married and had jobs," he said, "but nobody had ever looked at the effects of a dual-career family on male liquor

consumption."

While the results for women were mixed, Harrell found that in men, dissatisfaction with family life and a perception of conflict between the wife's work and the marriage led to drinking as a means of reducing stress.

Using a number of scales measuring traditional and non-traditional values in men, Harrell found he was able to predict that "non-traditional men are much better to adapt to the dual-career situation, and they drink less."

"The men who were more traditional in their outlook were the ones who were sort of traumatized by their wives working and basically saw their wives' work as getting in the way of their marriage... They basically felt they wanted to be the sole breadwinner and they had hoped to have a wife who would stay at home and not invest so much time in a career and that sort of thing."

He pointed out a male's "liberatedness" is not a permanent con-

dition. Men who have this predisposition can lose it as the circumstances of their lives change. If the wife stops working, stops bringing in the income, or stays at home with the baby, these men can become very traditional in response.

Similarly, if the wife later returns to work, the husband may then return to his "liberated" attitudes. This reflects his ability to adapt to situations, according to Harrell.

"Then there's others, who you might call the dinosaurs... They don't seem to be affected by much that's going on out there, whether it's things in the mass media or things in their own lives such as their wives going to school or working. They're the ones that have the greatest problems."

Harrell says his results show clearly that coping with this type of conflict through drink is a characteristic of the traditional male. Women, and liberated men, in the identical situation don't drink to cope, suggesting that it is not for

them a stress-reducing strategy.

"I think it's been culturally defined," he said. "W.C. Fields comes to mind. He's an example of a nineteenth-century male who's henpecked at home... and so takes off to the saloon. It's an image that's been very prevalent in the literature of North America as a male coping strategy."

He says the value in this type of study, taken as a part of his larger program of research, lies in its use of masculine orientation to predict where conflicts will occur as dual-career families become more the norm, and how these conflicts will be handled.

"As unemployment increases in this city, we're going to have the situation where maybe the wife is the only one with a job and we're going to see these conflicts aggravated even more. So we're going to see more marital conflict, more

child abuse, wife abuse, and more liquor consumption. They all go together."

While Harrell feels that the survey is representative particularly of the western "frontier" regions of North America, it could apply also to Canada as a whole.

"But," he adds, "I don't think you'd get this type of study in Eastern Canada. They're really not concerned about men. They even call these kinds of studies 'Women's Studies Courses' and 'The Sociology of Women' and that sort of thing, and their research shows that bias, I think."

"So they're not curious about comparing men with women and looking into the variables within men. They assume all men are the same and my assumption's been not all men are the same. Some cope better than others and I'm curious to find out why."

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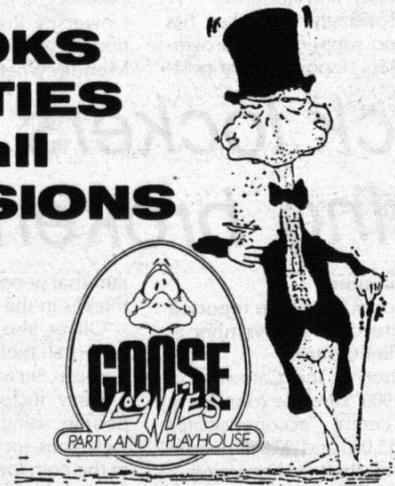
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