Historical Changes in Parental Orientations to Children

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### Introduction

By virtue of birth into human society the child is assigned a place in the family grouping. With its physical and psychological development the nature of the child changes, and so does the nature of its position in the family. The norms and customs defining the role of the child in the family and in the larger society have a socio-cultural basis, which means that the orientations of adults and the adult social institutions charged with the care and nurturance of children are constrained by the culture and the conditions of life experienced by the social group. From this perspective the nature of the child and the behavioral qualities or traits expected of it are determined not only developmentally, but socially as well.

The recognition of these facts leads one to inquire into the processes by which the nature of children and of adult orientations to children may change as a function of changes in social institutions and the social, economic and demographic conditions of life experienced by socio-cultural groups. In theory, as the institutional bases for the desired characteristics of children change, the treatment of children and expectations for their behavior may also change.

In this chapter I present evidence that over the past century in the United States there have been important changes in parental orientations to children, reflecting fundamental shifts in values. This evidence, based on results from several sample surveys varying in regional representation and using differing strategies of measurement, shows that indicators of parental values assessed over time increasingly reflect a preference for independence or autonomy in children and decreasingly an emphasis on obedience or conformity to the dictates of authority.

The changes in parental values registered here are particularly interesting because they bear witness to substantial changes in society and in the nature of the family. As Inkeles (1955) observed, parental values are an important indicator of social change. Parents experiencing social change are likely to want to raise their children differently from what they perceive were their own parents' approaches to child-rearing, adapting their child-rearing values (and practices) to meet the demands of social life as they presently experience it. Through their orientations to children, the parental generation not only passes along stable norms and values of the family and the broader society, *it also mediates social change through emphases in child-rearing aimed at preparing children for the society of the present and future.*

### Child-Rearing in Historical Perspective

The very conception of childhood, as an extended period of dependence upon adults, is a relatively modern invention, tied to particular historical conditions. Aries' (1962) provocative essays on the history of childhood reminds the contemporary observer of the necessity of viewing all stages of life in historical perspective, although childhood is of special interest. Indeed, several historians have pointed to differences over time in conceptions and treatment of children in Europe and America in the past few cen-

turies, resulting from cultural changes and the evolution in the technology

and social organization of modern society (e.g. Greven, 1970; Stone, 1977;

Elias, 1978).

### Since the Industrial Revolution[2]

To some, the history of childhood since the industrial revolution is a

nightmare from which "we have only begun to awaken," referring to past periods

in which children were subjected to exploitation, abuse, abandonment and mur-

der (DeMause, 1974). To others, such as Aries (1962), the development of the

idea of the individuality of children, the acceptance of their inherent worth,

and the emergence of the awareness of the innocence and purity of childhood

all reflect the "priviledged age" of 19th century childhood. For still

others, the industrial revolution was both a period of the greatest glorifica-

tion of childhood and its greatest exploitation (Sommerville, 1982:160). Ac-

cording to this latter view, life in an industrialized society was very dif-

ficult for children of the working classes, given their involvement in the

labor force. By contrast, the lives of children of the elite classes were

comfortable and relatively isolated from the "ravages" of working-class life.

These observations alert the student of historical trends in the nature

of childhood to take account of class differences, where possible. While it

is often useful to study changes in the family and childhood as if they occur

with uniformity across social class (and other) divisions within society,

there is the possibility that such changes occur differently among social

categories. Some social classes may not change, or such changes may occur at

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[2]I refer to the massive changes in social and economic organization
resulting from the replacement of hand tools by machine and power tools and
the development of large-scale industrial production, which occurred at ap-
proximately 1760 in England and somewhat later in other industrialized
countries in Europe and North America.

different rates among them. The reactions of different social categories (including social classes) to the agencies of change may, thus, be very different.

Stone's (1977) vivid historical account of class differences in changes of child-rearing orientations during 17th- and 18th-century England and America presents such an argument. Among the upper-classes during this period, he argues, a number of dramatic changes came about in child-rearing practices indicating a more child-centered, developmental orientation:

> Swaddling gave way to loose clothing, mercenary wet-nursing to maternal breast-feeding, breaking the will by force to permissiveness, formal distance to empathy, as the mother became the dominant figure in the children's lives (1977:284).

But this change toward a "maternal, child-oriented, affectionate and permissive" mode of child-rearing did not occur to all social classes. Stone refers to the "principle of stratified diffusion" in his interpretation of the dynamics of change among the classes, wherein new attitudes and values "take hold among those classes which are most literate and most open to new ideas" (1977:285), and only later are adopted, if at all, by lower socio-economic groups.[3]

This increased emotional commitment to children and an interest in their development among the elite classes was clearly present in other Western European cultures by the end of the 18th century. Schlumbohm (1980) refers to the differing orientations of social classes in 18th-century Germany, for example, wherein the upper classes developed explicit models for rearing

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[3]While an examination of the effects of social class is beyond the scope of this chapter, I return to this issue briefly in the consideration of the evidence for historical changes in parental values in order to examine whether, for the time period studied, patterns of change occur uniformly across categories of socio-economic position. For further consideration of the role of socio-economic factors in producing variation in parental values, see Alwin (1984, 1987, 1988).

children, devoting time, care and thought to their upbringing. The children
of these classes often lived a cloistered existence, removed from the influen-
ces of "the street" and of other children. The dominant emphasis was on the
development of the internal capacities of the child, especially his/her intel-
lect and character.[*] Although the emphasis was often upon the strict ad-
herence to rules and conformity to adult authority, the rationale for these
practices was given in terms of their achievement of specified developmental
outcomes.

Consistent with Stone's (1977) analysis of England and America, the em-
phasis on the individuality of the child recorded by Schlumbohm among the more
educated, bourgeoise classes in Germany was not replicated among the working
classes. The emphasis among the guild craftsmen of this period, for example,
is seen in the conditions of their subsistence orientation, which meant that
they often had "little time for their children and did not concern themselves
much with their education and the aims of child-rearing" (Schlumbohm,
1980:77), and where there was concern for child-rearing, it often revealed a
strict orientation to the obedience of children (1980:79). Children of the
working classes, according to Schlumbohm, were often ignored to the extent
they were not economically useful.

Some of these class differences in orientations to children can also be
followed into the 19th and 20th centuries. Zelizer (1985), for example, has
argued that the "economically useful" child of 19th-century industrialized
society was eventually replaced by the "economically worthless, but emotional-
ly priceless child" in the 20th. Zelizer contrasts two views of childhood,
expressed in a variety of historical public documents she examined (child

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[*]The institution of the "street" is often given credit for much of the
socialization of working-class children in industrializing Europe and America
than is the family (see Schlumbohm, 1980).

labor legislation, life insurance for children, compensation for the death of children, and patterns of adoption and foster care). One historically relevant view, articulated by Zelizer, is of the child engaged in labor, for which an economic value existed and in terms of which the value of the child was assessed. The second, now contemporary, view is of a nonlaboring, "priceless" child, whose moral value far outweighs any associated economic value. Zelizer traces the conflict of these values in public and private institutions from 1870 to 1930, observing the gradual prevalence of the second view over the first and the tendency toward defining the economic value of children in terms of sentimental or moral considerations. This latter view is, of course, indicative of the orientations both Stone (1977) and Schlumbohm (1980) attribute to the upper classes in European cultures during this time.

The 19th-century value conflicts referred to in Zelizer's (1985) work also reflect important class differences. Working-class children were those exploited by the industrialized economy and to some extent by the circumstances of their own families. But middle-class reforms against child labor eventually denied them access to income from jobs in factories and stores. The children of the elite and business classes were rarely involved in paid-labor and were removed from the public environments of the "streets." The promulgation of the "sentimentalized" conception by middle-class reformers, thus, conflicted with working-class strategies to obtain optimal economic well-being for the family unit through the labor-force involvement of their children.

**The Twentieth Century**

One of the best early descriptions of the family and parental orientations in the early 20th century in the U.S. is Robert and Helen Lynds' Middletown (1929). Whereas the Middletown of the 19th-century had given emphasis to the importance of child-bearing, because of its link to the agrarian

economy of the area, the more urban Middletown of the 1920's, having shifted

its technological base, showed evidence of a greater emphasis on child-

rearing, that is, an emphasis on providing for children in a way that would

enhance their development (1929:131). They observed that the traditional con-

ception of child-rearing in the late 19th century had consisted primarily of

"making children conform to the approved ways of the group," securing the

maximum of obedience from them. The Middletown of the 1920's, by contrast,

was seen as more differentiated in responsibilities toward children and the

family as a less potent force in securing adherence to "established group

sanctions."

The decline in the influence of the traditional institutions of church

and family and the increasing role during this period of the school in the

socialization of young people in American society is confirmed by the observa-

tions of Ogburn (1922), Sorokin (1927), and Thomas and Thomas (1929). The

concerns of parents were often with the fact that their children had too much

independence and that their socialization through the formalized social system

of the school made many demands upon children for independence of action for

which parents did not believe they were prepared (Lynd and Lynd, 1929:131-

152). Thus, adults often wanted young people to pay greater attention to

their parents and behave in ways consistent with institutionalized definitions

for appropriate behavior. From the perspective of social scientists, young

persons were often viewed as having to adapt to rapid social change, and were

particularly vulnerable given that the new social forms of preparation for

life (new social structures and social norms) had not yet stabilized. This

caused W.I. and D.S Thomas (1929) to comment that it was "widely felt that the

demoralization of young persons, the prevalence of delinquency and crime, and

profound mental disturbances are very serious problems, and that the situation

is growing worse instead of better" (1929:xiii). Parental emphases in child-rearing often stressed obedience to parents and loyalty to institutional authority, although perhaps somewhat less so than was true in the earlier era.

One of the distinctive conclusions arrived at by the Lynds in Middletown was that *developmental* views of children were widespread, with varying levels of strength, among *all* segments of the community. They remarked, for example, that "one cannot talk with Middletown mothers without being continually impressed by the eagerness of many to lay hold of every available resource for help in training their children (1929:149). While the Lynds observed class differences in habits of training children (1929:143-44), their work did much to verify the presence of these developmental emphases among nearly all social groups.

**Class Differences.** Research on class differences in child-rearing orientations in U.S. society have, in part due to the influence of the Lynds' work, appropriately focused on modes of promoting child development, rather than the value placed on child development as a basic objective of family life. In the 1940's and 50's, for example, researchers debated whether the working class was more permissive than the middle class (see Davis and Havighurst, 1948; Havighurst and Davis, 1955), or vice-versa (see Maccoby, Gibbs, et al., 1954; Sears, Maccoby and Levin, 1957). Later interpretations (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1958; Kohn, 1959a) focused explicitly on the goals of child-rearing rather than the means. Kohn (1963, 1969, 1981), for example, emphasized the concept of parental values as embodying the standards of desirability parents use in evaluating the behavior of their children, regardless of their child-rearing practices, that is, regardless of the means they use to achieve their child-rearing goals.

The principle contrast in parental values used almost universally in research on class differences in child-rearing orientations was initially identified by the Lynds' (1929) analysis of the family in Middletown. This was the contrast between parental emphasis on autonomy or self-direction in children vs. the emphasis on obedience or conformity, and several lines of research following the Lynds' work utilized this contrast in values. Miller and Swanson (1958), for example, contrast parental orientations that are "entrepreneurial," which emphasize child self-control and a manipulative stance to the environment, with those that are "bureaucratic," which stress reliance on external forms of behavioral control and an accomodation to the environment. Similarly, Kohn (1959a, 1959b, 1963, 1969, 1977) identifies the contrast between "self-direction" (thinking for oneself) and "conformity to external authority" (following the dictates of authority). And, Lenski (1961) used the terms "intellectual autonomy" (thinking for oneself) and "intellectual heteronomy" (obedience to the dictates of others) to make this distinction.[5]

The results of the several studies of class differences in child-rearing orientations have done much to confirm the observations of the Lynds, namely that the middle and upper classes express a greater preference for autonomy or self-direction in children, while the working classes give a relatively greater emphasis to obedience and conformity to authority and tradition (see Duvall, 1946; Maccoby et al, 1954; Sears et al, 1957; Miller and Swanson, 1958; Bronfenbrenner, 1958; Kohn, 1959a, 1959b, 1963, 1969, 1976, 1977, 1981; Kohn et al., 1983; Lenski, 1961; Kerckhoff, 1972; Gecas, 1979; Alwin and Jack-

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[5]Even before all of this work, Piaget (1932), in his examination of the principles of moral judgement in children, developed a contrast between *moral autonomy*, referring to independent thought and action, and *moral heteronomy*, referring to thought and behavior conforming to the dictates of external authority.

son, 1982b; Alwin, 1984, 1987). These results, in addition to the observa-
tions of Stone (1977) and Schlumbohm (1980), alert the student of historical
trends in orientations to children to represent all class groupings in the in-
vestigation of change, and where possible, take into account the differential
changes of classes in the investigation of historical change. Thus, histori-
cal accounts that vary in their dependence upon documents from the full
spectrum of society may give a biased description of the predominant orienta-
tion to children during a given time period. Similarly, survey data that fail
to fully represent the socio-economic heterogeneity in society may be less
valuable in their ability to depict the phenomenon.

With this perspective on the history of child-rearing in hand, I turn now
to an examinination of several survey studies, undertaken over the past fifty
years, which provide some insight into more recent historical changes in
parental orientations to children. After presenting these results, I briefly
consider the possible interpretations for these changes and outline the ini-
tial elements of a theoretical understanding of these results.

## Evidence of Recent Historical Changes in Parental Values

In this section I review five sets of survey measures of social change in
parental values. Two of these sets are based on earlier studies of changes in
parental values in which systematic historical changes were observed (see Al-
win, 1984, 1988). I review these two studies only briefly here. The remain-
ing three sets of survey measures have not been previously discussed, and
these results will be presented for the first time in this context. Of
course, responses to surveys are just one source of data on social change in
parental values, and as with any source of scientific information, these sur-
veys vary in the extent to which they are adequate for the purpose of assess-
ing social changes in values. Thus, I strive to evaluate the available

evidence both in terms of their substantive implications and in terms of the overall quality and appropriateness of the data.

## The Middletown Studies

One basis for the Lynds' (1929) analysis of the family and of changes in the relations between parents and their children in the *Middletown* of the 1920's was a set of quantitative data they collected by interviewing a small sample of mothers (n = 141). Although one is justified in being cautious about the interpretation of these data, since they may not measure up to the sampling standards of modern survey research, this is nonetheless an important source of information on changes in parental values.[6] This is especially true given that the Lynds' questions were exactly replicated in a study of *Middletown* carried out in 1978 by Caplow, Bahr and Chadwick (1982) (n = 333).[7] The data from the Lynds' 1924 study are available in the appendices of their 1929 book. The data from the 1978 survey were only briefly considered by the original authors (see Caplow and Chadwick, 1979), but are more thoroughly analyzed in Alwin (1988). Here I present a brief review of these results.

Both studies involved an interview with married women. In each study the women were asked to rate a list of 15 qualities of children according to their emphasis upon them in child-training.[8] The qualities involved were in fact

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[6]The Lynds' methods are described in the appendices to their book, and will be only briefly sketched here (see Lynd and Lynd, 1929:505-10).

[7]The methods of the 1978 study are described by Caplow et al. (1982:403).

[8]The rated qualities, used in both studies, were as follows: frankness; desire to make a name in the world; concentration, social-mindedness (defined as a "sense of personal responsibility for those less fortunate"); strict obedience; appreciation of art, music and poetry; economy in money matters; loyalty to the church; knowledge of sex hygiene; tolerance (defined as "respect for opinions opposed to one's own"); curiosity; patriotism; good man-

attributes of children, so the ratings reflected desiderata for the qualities of children, or parental values (see Kohn, 1969; Alwin, 1984). The women were asked to select from the list of 15 the three qualities of child-rearing habits that were most important, the five that were next in importance, any which were of a third category of importance, and any which were regarded as unnecessary or undesirable. Here I focus solely on those traits selected as among the three most important. The women were also asked to rate the same list of qualities according to how they believed their mother would have rated it thirty years earlier.'

Table 1 gives the percentage of respondents in the 1924 and 1978 samples selecting each of several qualities as one of the three most important for children to have. Six qualities are presented, three which tap the *conformity* dimension and three tapping the *autonomy* dimension referred to above. The ratings given by these women for how they believed their mothers would have rated the qualities are also arrayed in the table, as if they represented ratings for 1894 and 1948.[10]

<u>Insert Table 1 Here</u>

The results for 1924 and 1978 provide considerable evidence that parental orientations to children in Middletown have changed dramatically. Parental preferences for autonomy in children increased markedly during this period.

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ners; independence (defined as "ability to think and act for oneself"); getting very good grades in school.

'There was a different design used in the 1978 study. The qualities were rated separately for the training of boys and the training of girls. The ratings for boys and girls were actually quite similar for all traits, and so for present purposes the average rating is used (see also Alwin, 1988).

[10]There is some ambiguity in the interpretation of the respondent ratings of their parents (see Alwin, 1988). They potentially reflect both the realities of family life at an earlier timepoint and the biases of grown childrens' perceptions of their parents.

Preferences for "independence," the most important trait overall in 1978, increased as one of the three most desirable traits from 16 percent to 76 percent (p < .001). Similarly, preferences for "tolerance" and "social-mindedness" increased substantially as well. At the same time, preferences for conformity orientations decreased dramatically between 1924 and 1978. For example, preferences for "strict obedience" declined sharply from 45 percent in 1924 to 17 percent (p < .001), and preferences for "loyalty to the church" and "good manners" also decreased during this time.

In addition to this general pattern of increasing preferences for autonomy and decreasing preferences for conformity, these patterns appear to occur with considerable consistency over class groupings. Using the definitions of the "business" and "working" classes articulated by the Lynds (1929:22-24), I present these patterns by class for four of the traits described in relation to the figures given in Table 1 (see Table 2). As noted, these results reveal that both the business and working classes generally exhibit the changes observed above and that the changes observed are not especially unique to one or the other. There is one case in which there seems to be a somewhat more rapid rate of change among the working class-- there has been a more dramatic decline in the working class in the importance of *loyalty to the church* than was true for the business class. But generally, the changes appear to be relatively uniform with respect to class.

### Insert Table 2 Here

In addition, as observed elsewhere in the literature on social class and socialization, the business class is more likely to stress independence and less likely to emphasize strict obedience, regardless of the time period (see especially Duvall, 1946; Kohn, 1969; and Alwin, 1984, 1987).

Finally, if one chooses to interpret the reports by the Middletown women of their mothers' child-rearing emphases as further evidence of child-rearing approaches at earlier times (see Table 1), then a picture of a change from obedience to autonomy emerges over an even longer period of time. However, it is not clear that it is justified to place such an interpretation on these data, and conclusions from such evidence must be drawn cautiously (see Alwin, 1988).

**The Detroit Studies**

The above findings are consistent with my analysis of data collected on parental values in the Detroit metropolitan area (see Alwin, 1984, 1986). These studies use a different approach to the measurement of parental values and represent a somewhat stronger inferential basis, since the research benefited from modern statistical sampling procedures and the resulting data are presumably of somewhat higher quality. The main drawbacks of the Detroit data are the short period covered, from 1958 to 1983, and the somewhat narrower range of content. Nevertheless, the direct measurement of the dimensions of autonomy and conformity in these data provides a strong justification for their consideration here.

These studies rely on a measure of parental values developed in the 1958 Detroit Area Study by Lenski (1961). Using the contrast between parental preferences for *intellectual autonomy* (thinking for oneself) and *intellectual heteronomy* (following the dictates of others), Lenski asked respondents to rank five qualities according to their importance for preparation for life: *to obey, to be well-liked or popular, to think for himself, to work hard, to help others when they need help.* Of principle interest in this list of qualities, both in Lenski's work and in the research program described here, is the contrast between the choices *to obey* and *to think for himself* (see Alwin and

Jackson, 1982a).[11]  In 1971 the Detroit Area Study conducted by Otis Dudley

Duncan, Howard Schuman and Beverly Duncan replicated this measure (see O. D.

Duncan et al., 1973; B. Duncan et al., 1978).  And in 1983, my own survey of

the Detroit metropolitan area carried out by Michigan's Survey Research Center

also replicated this measure.[12]

Table 3 presents the results of the three Detroit surveys.  These figures

reflect the average ranking (5 = most important, 1 = least important, etc.)

assigned to each of the five child qualities in 1958, 1971 and 1983.  They

reveal a clear and consistent increase in autonomy (thinking for self) and a

similarly persistent decline in conformity, for children *to obey*, over this 25

year period.  These shifts, while seemingly small in magnitude, are nonethe-

less highly significant on statistical grounds (see Alwin, 1984).  As reported

in the original research, these patterns are most highly pronounced among

Roman Catholics, reflecting a convergence in values with Protestant groups

(see Alwin, 1984, 1986), but these differences are also apparent throughout

the subgroups of the samples studied.

<u>Insert Tables 3 and 4 Here</u>

Also important for present purposes is the extent to which these trends

are reflected in all class categories, as discussed above.  Although I do not

present all of the results here, it is clear from the earlier analysis of

these data that these changes in the contrast between *autonomy* and *obedience*

are highly uniform across socio-economic categories.  Parallel shifts were ob-

served within categories of education, occupational class, and income quar-

tiles (see Alwin, 1984:371).  The results for categories of occupation are

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[11]In later research (Alwin, 1984) this option was changed to *to think for
himself or herself.*

[12]Details of the Detroit studies are given in Alwin (1984, 1986, 1987).

reproduced in Table 4.[13]  Here increases in preferences for autonomy and

declines in preferences for obedience are seen in both the working and busi-

ness classes.  Thus, these changes do not appear to reflect the type of

"stratified diff  ion" referred to by Stone (1977).  Indeed, it appears that

independent of o  upation categories, intertemporal changes in values still

occur.

**National Data**

Despite their considerable merit, the geographical limitations to the

data reported in the foregoing may cause certain skepticism regarding the

generality of the reported trends.  For the purpose of meeting this skepticism

I turn to available national data sources involving similar measures of paren-

tal preferences for qualities of children.  One such source is the 1986

General Social Survey (GSS), which used the Detroit measures examined above.

These data are based on a national probability sample of a cross-section of

the adult household population in the U.S.[14]  The average rankings of impor-

tance for the Lenski qualities are given in Table 5.  These figures are given

for the total sample, as well as for six age categories.

<u>Insert Table 5 Here</u>

The results in Table 5 show two general patterns consistent with the

evidence presented above.  First, the ordering of the qualities in the sample

as a whole is in complete agreement with the ordering of these characteristics

in the 1983 Detroit data. *Think for self* is the most important quality, while

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[13]Following the Lynd's (1929:22-24) definition of *social class*, essentially
in terms of broad occupational categories, I here rely on an occupational
definition of class (see also Bendix, 1974).  Here I use two broad categories
of occupation, without taking into account differences in the educational and
economic experiences of individuals.  See Alwin (1984:366) for further details
regarding the operationalization of this defintion.

[14]See NORC (1987) for details about the General Social Surveys.

*Obey* is ranked fourth overall (see Table 3 above).[15] Second, using age as a proxy for historical time, there is a general pattern in these data consistent with those observed above, namely the older cohorts are much more likely to prefer obedience over autonomy, whereas it is the reverse in the younger cohorts. In the very youngest two cohorts there is an apparent weaker preference for autonomy and stronger relative preference for obedience, which runs counter to the expected pattern. Still, the results generally show there to be greater preferences for autonomy in younger age-cohorts and greater preferences for obedience among the older ones.

While it is possible to interpret these patterns in historical terms, to do so is not without risk. These differences may instead be due, at least partially, to life cycle differences, including processes of aging. There may be a tendency, for example, for older persons to prefer conformity to autonomy to a greater extent than younger persons, not because of the historical period in which they acquired their values, but because of their age (see Riley, 1973). And, the younger cohorts may have a greater preference for autonomy and independent judgement on the part of children, not because of the unique historical experiences of their age-cohort, but because of their youth and its accompanying life cycle experiences. Nevertheless, given the substantial com-patibility of these patterns with the historical data presented above, they lend some credence to those earlier conclusions, that there has been a shift in values from obedience to autonomy over most of the 20th century.

A second, somewhat more extensive source of relevant national data invovles a measure of parental values that is much more similar to that used by the Lynds, referred to above. Data are available from several national surveys. The first of these is Melvin Kohn's 1964 national study of men conducted by

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[15]Recall that in 1958 *Obey* was ranked 2nd; in 1971 it ranked 3rd.

the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) (see Kohn, 1969). Using a list of

qualities developed on the basis of Duvall's (1946) research, Kohn asked

respondents to select from among a list of 13 qualities those *three* which he

felt were the most desirable for a boy or girl to have.[16] In addition, the

General Social Survey (GSS), also conducted by NORC, has gathered data (since

1973) on an adaptation of Kohn's questions. Whereas Kohn (1969) had asked

respondents to answer the questions with respect to a specific one of his

children, the GSS asked the question with respect to children in general. The

GSS has included this question in 1973, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1980, 1983 and 1984

(see Alwin, 1986:420-22).[17] Here results for 1973 and 1975 are combined to

provide a data point for the early 1970's and the 1983 and 1984 data are com-

bined to provide data for the early 1980's.[18]

### Insert Table 6 Here

In Table 6 I present the percentage of respondents selecting each of

several qualities on Kohn's list in the 1964, and combined 1973-75 and 1983-84

national samples. The qualities representing the *conformity* domain are:

obedience, good manners, being neat and clean, and role conformity (acting

like a boy/girl should). Those representing *autonomy* are: good judgement,

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[16]The qualities on Kohn's (1969) list are as follows: good manners, tries
hard to succeed, honest, neat and clean, good sense and sound judgement, self-
control, acts like a (boy/girl) should, gets along well with other children,
obeys his parents well, responsible, considerate of others, interested in how
and why things happen, and good student. Kohn continued by asking respondents
to choose among these three qualities the single one that was most important
of all, and further he asked respondents to select the three qualities that
were the least important and the one of them that was the least important of
all. For my present purposes, only the three most important qualities given
are analyzed here.

[17]The question was also asked in 1984, 1986 and 1987, but in reversed order
(see Krosnick and Alwin, 1987). I do not make use of these data here.

[18]Kohn's 1964 data were compared with the 1973 GSS data by Wright and
Wright (1976), and the present analysis builds upon their work (see also Al-
win, Forthcoming).

curiosity (interest in why and how things happen), being considerate, and being responsible.

As the figures in Table 6 indicate, the trends observed in the studies presented above are evident in these national data as well. The major patterns in this table that are consistent with those observed in my earlier presentation are between the 1960's and the later decades. For example, there are declines in all indicators of conformity values and an increase in all measures of autonomy between 1964 and 1973-75, and many of these changes are substantial. In more than one-half of the selected measures there are continued changes in these directions between 1970's and the 1980's. For example, preferences for responsibility continue to rise into the 1980's, and there are continued declines in the percentages choosing role conformity and neatness/cleanliness as one of the three most important qualities of children.[19] However, previous analyses of these data reveal very little linear trend in relevant items between the 1970's and 1980's (see Alwin, 1986:423).

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Insert Table 7 Here

These patterns are also evident from the presentation of these measures classified by age, as discovered in our analysis of the 1986 GSS-Lenski measures given above. Table 7 presents the percentage figures used above by categories of age. There is a general tendency in these data that agrees with the earlier findings, although there seems to be a persistent cohort effect for the youngest cohorts. In 1983-84, and to some extent in the 1973-74 data

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[19]Since the 1964 NORC respondents were all men and the later GSS data contain both men and women, I examined the possibility of a sex difference using the GSS data for all available years. These data (not presented here) show a very slight, but statistically significant, effect of being female on preferences for autonomy over obedience, but such an effect cannot be held responsible for the changes observed here.

as well, the two youngest cohort categories tend to resemble the older cohorts more than their immediate elders. Again, however, in order to attribute these effects to historical change one must assume that effects of aging do not exist in these data. This is not theoretically plausible, so it is not clear the extent to which the results based on the GSS cross-sections can be said to be due to historical factors and which to processes of aging.[20]

Most of these results are consistent with those I reported earlier for the Detroit and Middletown areas (see Alwin, 1984, 1986, 1988). Coupled with these findings and the clear national patterns of change between 1964 and 1973, I conclude that these national data provide further support for the thesis of a shift from obedience to autonomy in parental values.

Insert Table 8 Here

Finally, in order to further ascertain the extent to which these patterns were replicated across socio-economic categories, I examined variation in parental values across the categories of occupation used above. These results are given in Table 8. These results generally show that both occupational categories experienced declines in preferences for conformity between the 1960's and later decades, consistent with the patterns revealed above.

**International Evidence**

Although one might hypothesize that the changes observed above have occurred in most industrialized nations over the past century, there is little available evidence of the type examined here that is accessible for other

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[20]Elsewhere I analyze these data more thoroughly by taking educational experiences, aging and cohort factors into account (Alwin, Forthcoming).

countries.[21][22]   One source, however, that approximates the present focus on

parental values is available from an international survey carried out in 1985.

In that year the International Social Science Program (ISSP) was carried out

in the U.S., Great Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany and Italy.[23]   The

primary focus of the 1985 survey was on the *role of government*, and there was

a series of items included having to do with *what schools should teach*.

Respondents were asked to give ratings of importance to nine topics or

qualities of children.   Four of these items are particularly relevant to my

present purpose: *(1) respect for authority, (2) discipline and orderliness,

the (3) ability to make one's own judgements, (4) sex education,* all of which

reflect desirable qualities and experiences of children.   Inasmuch as these

ratings reflect something very much akin to parental values, I believe they

are especially relevant here.   The first two of these qualities reflect a

desire for conformity and obedience in children, the second two reflect a

desire for autonomy.

<u>Insert Table 9 Here</u>

Table 9 presents the average ratings of respondents in these four surveys

by categories of age.   These results reveal great consistency in all four

countries, with the possible exception of the United States.   In all cases

conformity orientations are seen to increase with age, and preferences for

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[21]Although cross-national studies of parental values have been conducted
(see Pearlin and Kohn, 1966; Slomczynski et al., 1981), these studies have not
focused on historical changes in approaches to child-rearing.

[22]Karl-Heinz Reuband, of the Central Archive of the University of Cologne,
has informed me that such data exist for the Federal Republic of Germany, and
that the patterns observed here are replicated in national surveys of the Ger-
man adult population since the early 1950's.

[23]The survey is the first of a series of international surveys carried out
in the U.S., Britain (England, Scotland and Wales), the Federal Republic of
Germany and Italy under the rubric of the International Social Survey Program
(ISSP).

autonomy are more apparent in the younger cohorts. These patterns appear to be strong and relatively linear with respect to age in all countries, except for the U.S. The results for the two youngest age cohorts in the U.S. given in Table 8, as above, reveal greater desire for obedience than is expected and slightly less of a preference for autonomy (ability to make own judgements). In any case, to the extent that the general results here can be interpreted as reflecting historical changes, then, these patterns provide further support for the changes documented above.

## Interpretations

Throughout the history of the Western world, the nature of the family and the relationships among its members has been under continual flux. While some aspects of the family may have remained unaltered, e.g. the predominant practice of monogamy, there are many areas in which the family has experienced considerable change. With the industrial revolution the relationships within the nuclear family, especially those between parents and their children, changed in the direction of greater affection toward children and a greater interest in their development. Originating in the upper classes, parents increasingly treated children as if they had greater value than in earlier centuries. Children's lives became relatively more controlled by adult society, more affection and other resources were devoted to their development, and serious consideration was given to modes of child-rearing. Variations in these elements of society seem to have undergone considerable change over the past few centuries, especially the preferred modes of producing child development.

Whatever the longterm trends in the nature of the family and the relationships between parents and their children, our present interpretive chal-

lenge is more immediate.[24] We are here concerned with accounting for the relatively recent changes that seem to point in a direction *away* from an emphasis on conformity and obedience in child-rearing and *toward* one of assigning relatively more importance to independence or autonomy. What accounts for the changes suggested by the present body of survey evidence? Do these results reveal cultural change, structural change, or the influences of historical factors?

To some extent, all of these possible interpretations are plausible, depending upon their relevance to any given socio-historical setting. One possible interpretation of the changes witnessed here relies on the idea behind modernization theory, the idea that such changes reflect the movement of society along a dimension of *increased complexity* (Lynd and Lynd, 1929; Caplow et al, 1982).[25] One indicator of such movement is the level of education experienced by individuals in the society (Inkeles and Smith, 1974), a variable that has increased significantly (see Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Collins, 1979) and is potently related to the types of parental values examined here (see Alwin, 1984, 1987). Thus, with increases in levels of education there appears to be an associated increase in the valuation of autonomy and a decrease in values of conformity.

A second indication of the historical movement of society in a uniform direction, which is perhaps best described in terms of the *secularization* of society (rather than by the modernization concept), involves the declines that have been observed in church attendance (Gallup, 1985, 1987). Parental

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[24]See Thornton (1987) and the references contained therein for a discussion of longterm social, demographic and economic changes of the family.

[25]Although I am uncomfortable with some of the central assumptions of modernization theory (see Inkeles and Smith, 1974), there is evidence that economic change is linked to educational and demographic change, which are further linked to differential change in values.

preferences for obedience are linked to levels of church attendance (independ-
ent of educational level), and with declining levels of church attendance in
American society, parental values may change accordingly (see Alwin, 1986; Al-
win, Forthcoming).

While some social processes produce rather gradual shifts in family rela-
tionships and the nature of family life, some are more dramatic. More
dramatic or episodic changes might account for social change linked to his-
torical and social events. Such changes may be linked to changes unique to
certain segments of society rather than upon the society more generally.
There is substantial evidence, for example, that American Catholic ethnic
groups of European descent have changed their orientations to the family and
child-rearing in part as a result of the autonomy-oriented changes produced in
the American Catholic Church as a result of the pronouncements of the Second
Vatican Council (see Alwin, 1986). These changes may be interpreted as part
of a larger broad-based convergence between such Catholic ethnic groups and
many American Protestant groups over the past several decades (see Alba, 1976,
1981, 1985).

Such social change might also reflect the historic influences on dif-
ferent "generations" or "cohorts." One popular notion is that parents not
only react to the changing social environment, they also react against the
ways in which they were raised. Thus, one generation may be described as more
"permissive," or one more "conformist" than another, and these orientations
may in part be in response to the preceding generation (see Sampson, 1975;
Harris, 1987). There is some suggestion in the data presented above that the
very youngest cohorts of adults (born during the 1950's and 1960's) are some-
what more oriented toward conformity and obedience than were the cohorts born
within a few decades earlier. Indeed, one of the empirical chinks in the ar-

mor of the simple "uniform historic change" interpretation of changes in
parental values has been the fact that the youngest cohorts of adults tend to
resemble their contemporaries *several generations their elder* more than those
born in the 1930's and 1940's.  Thus, there may be cohort-based cycles of
parental orientations to children that help account for some of the above
results.

All of these interpretations may prove worthy of consideration.
Educational expansion must certainly have produced changes in parental values.
Declining levels of church attendance must also be linked to this process,
with the values of Catholics changing even more rapidly than other religio-
ethnic groups.  To some extent the succession of cohorts must also be respons-
ible for some of these patterns, especially those that run counter to the
general directions of change suggested by most of these data.

It is not clear from these data, however, which of these changing aspects
of society is *exogenous*.  Does structural change produce a change in values,
or are social structural changes and changes in values simply reflective of
more fundamental changes in culture?  In other words, do values and the cul-
tural changes they represent produce changes in structural features of
society, e.g. the expansion of the educational system, *or* do value changes
result from the changing structure of society?  I cannot answer these ques-
tions on the basis of the evidence given here, but whatever the importance at-
tached to any one of these (or some other) interpretations of the changes
reflected in the survey evidence presented above, it should be clear that more
work is necessary to obtain a more precise picture of recent historical chan-
ges in parental orientations to children.

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Table 1

Percentage Selecting Characteristics As One of the Three Most Important
Emphases in Child-rearing:  Middletown Data, 1924 and 1978

| Characteristic | Year | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1890 | 1924 | 1945 | 1978 |
| Conformity | | | | |
| Strict Obedience | 64.4 | 45.4 | 43.8 | 16.8 |
| Loyalty to Church | 69.3 | 50.4 | 35.0 | 22.4 |
| Good Manners | 40.6 | 30.5 | 40.4 | 23.2 |
| Autonomy | | | | |
| Independence | 15.8 | 24.8 | 34.4 | 75.8 |
| Tolerance | 5.0 | 5.7 | 21.9 | 46.8 |
| Social-Mindedness | 6.9 | 12.8 | 17.3 | 25.7 |
| Sample Size | (101) | (141) | (333) | (333) |

SOURCE: D. F. Alwin (1987), "From Obedience to Autonomy: Changes in
Traits Desired in Children."  Public Opinion Quarterly, Forthcoming.

Table 2

Percentage Selecting Characteristics As One of the Three Most Important Emphases in Child-rearing, by Class:  Middletown Data, 1924 and 1978

| | Year | | | |
| Characteristic | 1924 | | 1978 | |
| | Working | Busness | Working | Busness |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Conformity** | | | | |
| Strict Obedience | 46.2 | 43.2 | 20.7 | 13.6 |
| Loyalty to Church | 55.8 | 35.1 | 23.3 | 22.8 |
| Good Manners | 34.6 | 18.9 | 32.2 | 17.4 |
| **Autonomy** | | | | |
| Independence | 17.3 | 45.9 | 67.0 | 83.7 |
| Tolerance | 3.8 | 10.8 | 45.6 | 50.8 |
| Social-Mindedness | 9.6 | 21.6 | 21.8 | 30.0 |
| Sample Size | (104) | (37) | (135) | (184) |

SOURCE: D. F. Alwin (1987), "From Obedience to Autonomy: Changes in Traits Desired in Children."  Public Opinion Quarterly, Forthcoming.

Table 3

Average Rankings Given Five Child Qualities:  Detroit
Metropolitan Area, 1958, 1971, and 1983.

| Trait | Year of Study | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1958 | 1971 | 1983 |
| 1.  To Obey | 3.19 | 3.00 | 2.81 |
| 2.  To Be Well-liked | 1.76 | 1.57 | 1.38 |
| 3.  To Think for Self | 4.14 | 4.24 | 4.40 |
| 4.  To Work Hard | 2.73 | 2.92 | 3.21 |
| 5.  To Help Others | 3.15 | 3.26 | 3.20 |
| Sample size | (34£) | (1,084) | (511) |

SOURCE: D.F. Alwin (1984),"Trends in Parental Socialization Values:
Detroit, 1958-1983."  American Journal of Sociology 90:359-82.

Table 4

Average Rankings Given Five Child Qualities, by Class:  Detroit Metropolitan Area, 1958, 1971, and 1983.

| Trait | Working Class | | | Business Class | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1958 | 1971 | 1983 | 1958 | 1971 | 1983 |
| 1.  To Obey | 3.43 | 3.25 | 2.97 | 2.81 | 2.77 | 2.62 |
| 2.  To Be Well-liked | 1.78 | 1.68 | 1.44 | 1.71 | 1.48 | 1.34 |
| 3.  To Think for Self | 3.89 | 3.97 | 4.26 | 4.57 | 4.45 | 4.55 |
| 4.  To Work Hard | 2.70 | 2.80 | 3.19 | 2.75 | 3.05 | 3.23 |
| 5.  To Help Others | 3.18 | 3.29 | 3.13 | 3.13 | 3.25 | 3.26 |
| Sample size | (202) | (453) | (234) | (122) | (572) | (249) |

SOURCE:LENSKI.53oc/71oc/87oc

Table 5

Average Rankings Given Five Child Qualities, by Age:  GSS 1986

| Trait | Age Bracket | | | | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 18-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | |
| 1.  To Obey | 2.91 | 2.85 | 2.91 | 2.92 | 3.44 | 3.40 | 3.31 | 3.04 |
| 2.  To Be Well-liked | 1.51 | 1.34 | 1.32 | 1.45 | 1.41 | 1.51 | 1.79 | 1.42 |
| 3.  To Think for Self | 3.87 | 3.95 | 4.31 | 4.20 | 3.75 | 3.85 | 3.45 | 3.99 |
| 4.  To Work Hard | 3.40 | 3.38 | 3.29 | 3.39 | 3.13 | 2.94 | 3.14 | 3.27 |
| 5.  To Help Others | 3.31 | 3.49 | 3.18 | 3.04 | 3.28 | 3.29 | 3.31 | 3.29 |
| N | 68 | 193 | 151 | 100 | 87 | 88 | 42 | 729 |

SOURCE: Lenski.86A

Table 6

Percentage Selecting Characteristics As One of the Three Most Important for
Children to Have:  NORC National Surveys, 1964, 1973-75 and 1983-84

| Characteristic | Year | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1964 | 1973-75 | 1983-84 |
| **Conformity** | | | |
| Obedience | 42.4 | 29.8 | 32.8 |
| Good Manners | 27.3 | 23.9 | 25.4 |
| Being Neat and Clean | 13.3 | 7.4 | 6.6 |
| Role Conformity | 19.1 | 4.2 | 2.9 |
| **Autonomy** | | | |
| Good Judgement | 20.7 | 36.7 | 37.5 |
| Curiosity | 17.1 | 17.2 | 15.0 |
| Considerate | 20.3 | 29.0 | 28.7 |
| Responsible | 12.0 | 32.4 | 35.3 |
| Sample Size | (1,602) | (2,718) | (2,378) |

Table 7

Percentage Selecting Characteristics As One of the Three Most Important for Children to Have, by Age:  NORC National Surveys, 1973-75 and 1983-84

| Characteristic | 1973-75 | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 16-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | Total |

Conformity

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Obedience | 22.1 | 27.2 | 28.0 | 26.8 | 38.7 | 38.8 | 50.0 | 29.8 |
| Good Manners | 22.7 | 21.4 | 21.0 | 24.2 | 25.7 | 31.2 | 33.7 | 24.0 |
| Being Neat and Clean | 6.6 | 5.8 | 5.1 | 8.2 | 10.6 | 11.0 | 5.8 | 7.4 |
| Role Conformity | 3.2 | 2.6 | 4.5 | 3.5 | 6.2 | 5.7 | 8.1 | 4.2 |

Autonomy

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Good Judgement | 37.1 | 38.7 | 38.8 | 38.6 | 37.9 | 28.1 | 25.6 | 36.9 |
| Curiosity | 20.1 | 21.1 | 19.6 | 16.5 | 13.8 | 8.4 | 7.0 | 17.2 |
| Considerate | 35.7 | 31.6 | 34.9 | 27.1 | 21.3 | 18.3 | 16.3 | 29.0 |
| Responsible | 33.5 | 34.8 | 36.3 | 35.8 | 28.3 | 22.8 | 17.4 | 32.4 |
| Sample Size | (498) | (569) | (490) | (425) | (385) | (263) | (86) | (2716) |

| Characteristic | 1983-84 | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 17-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | Total |

Conformity

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Obedience | 34.8 | 32.3 | 25.1 | 27.9 | 37.5 | 40.6 | 43.7 | 32.8 |
| Good Manners | 26.3 | 27.5 | 19.2 | 24.4 | 21.3 | 27.9 | 41.2 | 25.3 |
| Being Neat and Clean | 8.9 | 5.9 | 4.1 | 4.4 | 7.3 | 8.6 | 12.6 | 6.5 |
| Role Conformity | 1.7 | 2.4 | 2.0 | 1.9 | 5.6 | 4.9 | 3.4 | 2.9 |

Autonomy

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Good Judgement | 32.4 | 35.8 | 44.0 | 41.0 | 38.5 | 35.2 | 27.7 | 37.5 |
| Curiosity | 16.7 | 16.9 | 16.9 | 14.9 | 13.3 | 9.8 | 7.6 | 15.0 |
| Considerate | 24.6 | 31.7 | 34.8 | 30.5 | 25.9 | 20.9 | 19.3 | 28.8 |
| Responsible | 32.8 | 33.9 | 41.1 | 41.6 | 34.9 | 28.3 | 23.5 | 35.2 |
| Sample Size | (293) | (657) | (443) | (315) | (301) | (244) | (119) | (2372) |

Source KOHN.16x

Table 8

Percentage Selecting Characteristics As One of the Three Most Important for
Children to Have, by Class:  NORC National Surveys, 1964, 1973-75 and 1983-84

| Characteristic | Working Class | | | Business Class | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1964 | 1970s | 1980s | 1964 | 1970s | 1980s |
| Conformity | | | | | | |
| Obedience | 51.9 | 37.4 | 38.1 | 43.6 | 21.9 | 27.4 |
| Good Manners | 39.0 | 29.9 | 32.5 | 23.1 | 17.5 | 18.5 |
| Being Neat and Clean | 20.1 | 8.9 | 9.1 | 10.1 | 5.3 | 4.2 |
| Role Conformity | 20.9 | 5.7 | 4.6 | 22.6 | 2.9 | 1.4 |
| Autonomy | | | | | | |
| Good Judgement | 20.7 | 32.7 | 35.0 | 26.3 | 42.4 | 40.5 |
| Curiosity | 15.7 | 13.1 | 11.9 | 23.0 | 21.3 | 18.1 |
| Considerate | 17.1 | 22.5 | 21.4 | 29.5 | 34.8 | 35.0 |
| Responsible | 9.6 | 26.6 | 29.2 | 17.9 | 38.4 | 41.2 |
| Sample Size | (705) | (1209) | (983) | (702) | (1228) | (1250) |

Source KOHN.20,NIH.6

Table 9

Average Ratings of Importance For What Schools Should Teach
By Age Category: 1985 ISSP, Federal Republic of Germany,
Great Britain, Italy, and United States.

| Quality/Topic | Age Category | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 18-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65-74 |
| **Respect for Authority** | | | | | | |
| Germany | 1.75 | 1.80 | 1.90 | 1.87 | 2.22 | 2.41 |
| Great Britain | 2.76 | 3.01 | 3.16 | 3.30 | 3.52 | 3.45 |
| Italy | 2.32 | 2.57 | 2.91 | 2.92 | 3.08 | 3.24 |
| United States | 3.23 | 3.06 | 3.10 | 3.31 | 3.45 | 3.45 |
| **Discipline/Orderliness** | | | | | | |
| Germany | 2.34 | 2.36 | 2.72 | 2.75 | 2.94 | 3.16 |
| Great Britain | 2.93 | 3.13 | 3.31 | 3.49 | 3.61 | 3.63 |
| Italy | 2.83 | 2.94 | 3.21 | 3.24 | 3.40 | 3.45 |
| United States | 3.33 | 3.21 | 3.24 | 3.36 | 3.30 | 3.38 |
| **Sex Education** | | | | | | |
| Germany | 2.48 | 2.40 | 2.07 | 2.01 | 1.88 | 1.76 |
| Great Britain | 2.73 | 2.59 | 2.50 | 2.28 | 2.18 | 1.66 |
| Italy | 2.33 | 2.47 | 2.29 | 2.14 | 1.96 | 1.64 |
| United States | 2.74 | 2.42 | 2.60 | 2.49 | 2.25 | 2.08 |
| **Ability To Make One's Own Judgements** | | | | | | |
| Germany | 3.30 | 3.25 | 3.05 | 3.00 | 2.97 | 2.82 |
| Great Britain | 3.07 | 3.20 | 3.30 | 3.32 | 3.26 | 3.16 |
| Italy | 3.51 | 3.49 | 3.55 | 3.51 | 3.51 | 3.50 |
| United States | 3.37 | 3.40 | 3.38 | 3.46 | 3.13 | 3.23 |