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Title: Family Breakdown, Little Hope for the Future: Restrictive Moralities to the Rescue?

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Abstract. This article reviews the recent text, *Posterity Lost: Progress, Ideology, and the Decline of the American Family* by Richard T. Gill and published (1997) by Rowman & Littlefield. The review highlights recurring political psychological issues of conceptualization, levels of analysis, and causality.

Posterity Lost: Progress, Ideology, and the Decline of the American Family attempts to support several hypotheses concerning political psychological factors within the United States (US). (1) There's been a massive breakdown of the family. (2) There's been a reversal of the significant concepts embodied in the Idea of Progress--from a belief that the future will be better for succeeding generations to the converse. (3) The empirical process of progress--usually defined through science and technology--at first helped strengthen the family and the Idea of Progress, but later contributed to undermining them. (4) The Idea of Progress--if it can be strengthened--can reverse the breakdown of the family. (5) The noxious effects of the empirical process of progress on the family and on the Idea of Progress occur through the process's intermediary consequences of increasing the perceived complexity of life, life choices, and objective and subjective change. (6) To strengthen the family and the Idea of Progress and to protect them from the empirical process of progress, restrictive moralities need to reappear or to increase their salience as social control mechanisms and as internalized standards.

What are we to make of these hypotheses? They certainly have political psychological import, for they involve (1) phenomena related to obtaining finite resources in the context of infinite physical, psychological, and spiritual need (political) and (2) psychological elements comprising interpersonal groupings, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and emotionally and motivationally tinged cognitions and behaviors. However, judging how successfully the author supports these hypotheses forces the reader to confront recurring problems in political psychology and the social sciences.

Conceptualization. The reader can easily infer that the author is only concerned about families with two-parent families--each parent being of the opposite sex. The author does not make the case that this approach as opposed to many other approaches to family--from single-parent to same-sex parents to fantasized linkages with other people and ideas--is more adaptive in the present and in the future for all people. The "massive breakdown" that he cites may suggest that his desired definition of family is anything but adaptive for at least some significant minorities of people.

The author's Idea of Progress suggests some gross estimate of what the future may look like. For some people this approach is indeed ecologically valid. However, for others, a more salient approach are Ideas of Progress: professionally, socially, personally, as well as other dimensions--e.g., nationally, internationally, medically, economically. Individual difference approaches to personality in scientific psychology suggest that there will be a number of different approaches to some attitudinal sense of progress.

In addition, the author does not consider that an Idea of Progress can be nonadaptive. For example, optimism (1) can be illusory, (2) make one less likely to confront political coercion and evil, and (3) increase self-enhancement while decreasing the accuracy of social perceptions. Are people without the

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Idea of Progress sadder but wiser? Psychologists would point out that some subtypes of emotionally depressed people have more accurate self-perceptions than so-called normals.

The author's concept of restrictive morality seems to be imbued with the notion that monogamy is good, as are sexless premarital relationships, God, and country. It's not that the author does not present a coherent argument to support this notion for some people. It's just that there are many other approaches to restrictive morality that may be adaptive for different groupings of people but are not considered.

Levels of analysis. Given that the author is concerned with the welfare of US citizens, can one accept that the author's concepts are more significant or as significant as more macromolecular and micromolecular ones--from a sense of world citizenship on the one hand to the efficacy of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors on the other? And are concepts from other levels of analysis significant as modifying and moderating variables? An explicit rationale for the author's level of analysis would be valuable for the discerning reader.

Causality. A number of statistical techniques exist that get at the question of whether and when, for example, the author's main concepts interact. Although he admirably argues that the same concept--viz., the empirical process of progress--may have different effects on the same concept--e.g., the family--at different points in time, he does not explicitly consider either statistically or through the reasoned analysis of data that there may be other interactions--e.g., family breakdown undermining the empirical process of progress or the Idea of Progress.

Three further concerns may prove helpful in reading the author's text. First, there have been other eras, epochs, cultures, and societies in which family breakdown, ideas of progress, and moral strictures and structures were perceived and analyzed. How can such data better inform the present discourse? For example, as the author labels the present as the Postmodern Era, can one profitably engage in comparative postmodernisms? Second, the author seems to have a preexisting bias for certain social arrangements. He writes in his preface that "With such a wife, how could I not believe in the importance of marriage and the family and the need to do whatever one can to help preserve these ancient and honorable institutions?" (p. xvii). Because the author's personal life appears to be consonant with his analysis, the reader needs to be on guard for at least unconscious propensities for analysis (biases) consonant with such a life. Third, how to effectively implement restrictive moralities to give them a chance to work their magic? Especially, restrictive moralities that have long been sought throughout history by various political authorities to little lasting avail. More vice squads? Turning the US into a theocracy through Constitutional change? Just saying no?

Posterity Lost is a coherently argued text by an author sincerely engaged with the collective welfare. It not only presents an intriguing perspective on what needs to be done, but highlights recurring issues in political psychology and the social sciences that can only be managed, never resolved. (See Edgar, D. (1991). 2001: A gentler world: The family and the future. *Mental Health in Australia*, 3, 43-48; Gill, R.T. (1997). *Posterity lost: Progress, ideology, and the decline of the American family*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.; Jost, J.T. (1995). Negative illusions: Conceptual clarification and psychological evidence concerning false consciousness. *Political Psychology*, 16, 397-424; Kantor, D. (1983). The structural-analytic approach to the treatment of family developmental crisis. *Family Therapy Collections*, 7, 12-34; McWhinney, W. (1984). Alternative realities: Their impact on change and leadership. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 24, 7-38; Nettler, G. (1986). Construing the world. *American Psychologist*, 41, 480; Pilsuk, M., & Parks, S.H. (1983). Social support and family stress. *Marriage & Family Review*, 6, 137-

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