

American culture, evangelical subculture and women in the sciences

Gwen L. Schmidt
ASA annual meeting
symposium: gender issues in the sciences
August 2008



approach

- experimental psychologist, cognitive neuroscientist
 - neural basis of language
- a personal perspective
 - 22 years “music pastor’s wife”, now single
- lay observer and participant in modern life
- presenting a viewpoint outside my expertise/ scholarly work



a starting point

“As we cannot afford to squander our natural resources of minerals, food, and beauty, so we cannot afford to discard any human resources of brains, skills, and initiative, even though it is women who possess them.”

--Mary McDermott Shideler

the ladder to success as a scientist

- elementary school
 - high school
 - college
 - graduate school
 - postdoc
 - assistant professor/industry
 - tenured/senior position in industry
 - administration/management
- 



evangelicalism and gender

- two related views:
 - **patriarchal domestic authority:**
husbands have been ordained by God to exercise ultimate decision-making authority in the home.
 - **essentialism:**
masculinity and femininity are irrevocably distinct from one another

(Ellison & Bartowski, 2002)



patriarchal domestic authority

- **power:** who makes the decisions?
- study: 265 in-depth interviews in 23 states with self-identified evangelicals (Gallagher & Smith, 1999)
- pragmatic egalitarianism
 - in reality, decisions are made jointly
- symbolic traditionalism
 - transformation of headship from authority-breadwinner to symbolic spiritual head and protector
 - 5% of respondents adhered to the idea of mutual submission
 - women working (outside home) is not ideal but necessary economically



essentialism

- distinctively “masculine” traits—including logic, strength, and assertiveness—uniquely equip men to function as leaders in the domestic realm (Cooper, 1974; Dobson, 1991; T. LaHaye, 1977; Weber, 1993).
- women’s apparent psychological responsiveness, desire for relational stability, and innate vulnerability are thought to predispose them to defer (or “submit”) willingly to their husband’s household leadership (Dillow, 1986; Elliot, 1976; B. LaHaye, 1976).

(Ellison & Bartowski, 2002)

biblical?

- “God-ordained” **role**

- child rearing

- household chores

- need to be protected and cared for

- man is protector, breadwinner

- woman is the weaker vessel

- biblically supported from

- Genesis 2 & 3, Proverbs 31

- Ephesians, Timothy, Titus



a woman's place

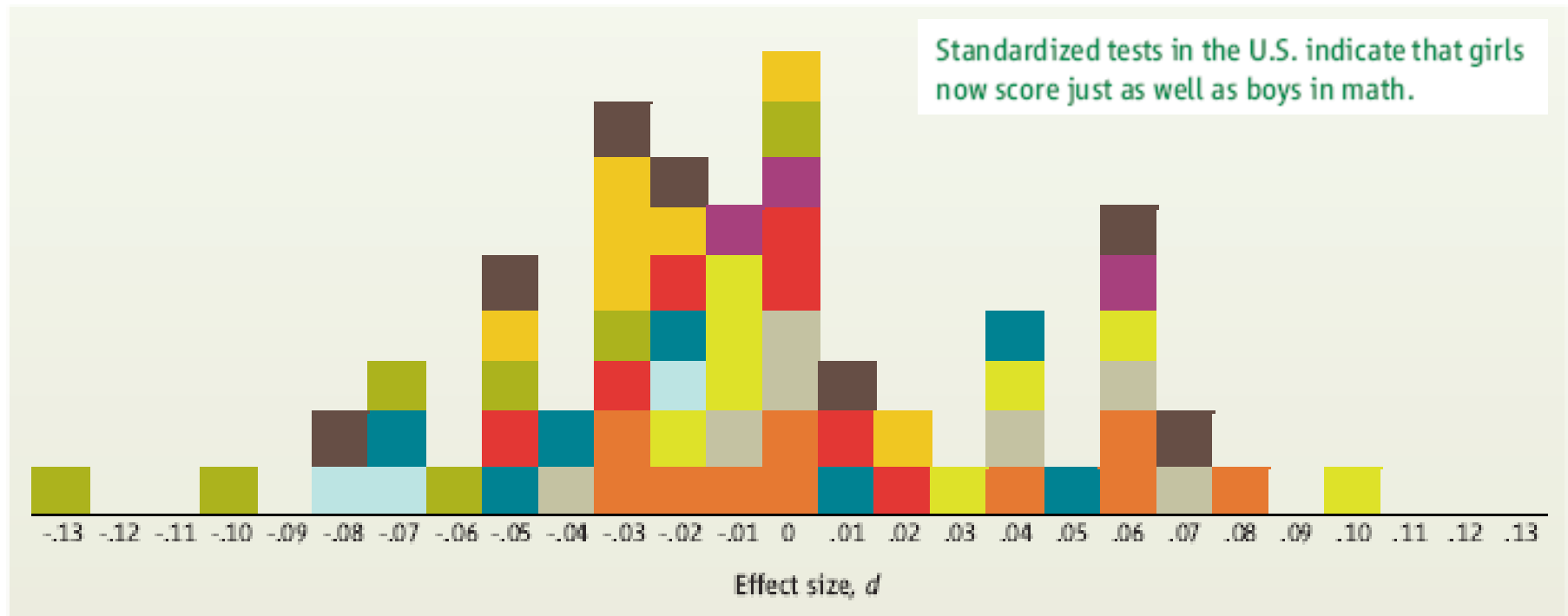
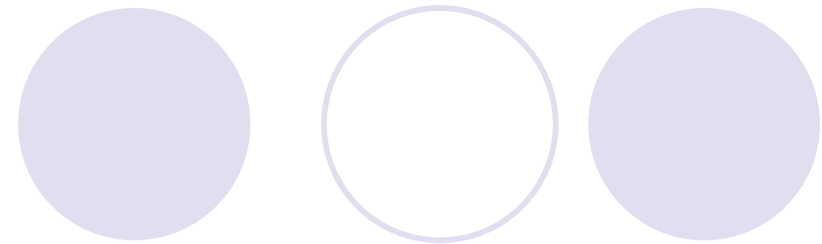
- “A woman's primary, God-given function is to take care of the family, so getting a good education is not important”
- “Since you are going to be a pastor's wife, maybe a career is not what you want or will have time for”



male and female brains?

- women and men may differ on various dimensions
 - spatial abilities
 - verbal abilities
 - empathizing
 - systematizing
- BUT
- overlapping bell curves
- “What is repugnant to every human being is to be reckoned always as a member of a class and not as an individual person.” --Dorothy Sayers 10

girls can do math



Effect sizes across grades and U.S. states. The weighted mean is 0.0065, consistent with no gender difference. Each square represents the effect size for one grade within one state. New Mexico (pea green), Kentucky (pink), Wyoming (dark brown), Minnesota (teal), Missouri (red), West Virginia (gold), Connecticut (tan), California (orange), Indiana (yellow), New Jersey (purple).



impact of essentialism

- women's work is not valued
 - work for economic necessity, not to contribute to society
 - second priority after husband's work



a woman's place

- “We pay our pastors enough so that their wives don't have to work”

impact of essentialism



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 - work for economic necessity, not to contribute to society
 - second priority after husband's work
- women do more of the housework
 - most housework is traditionally female



household work

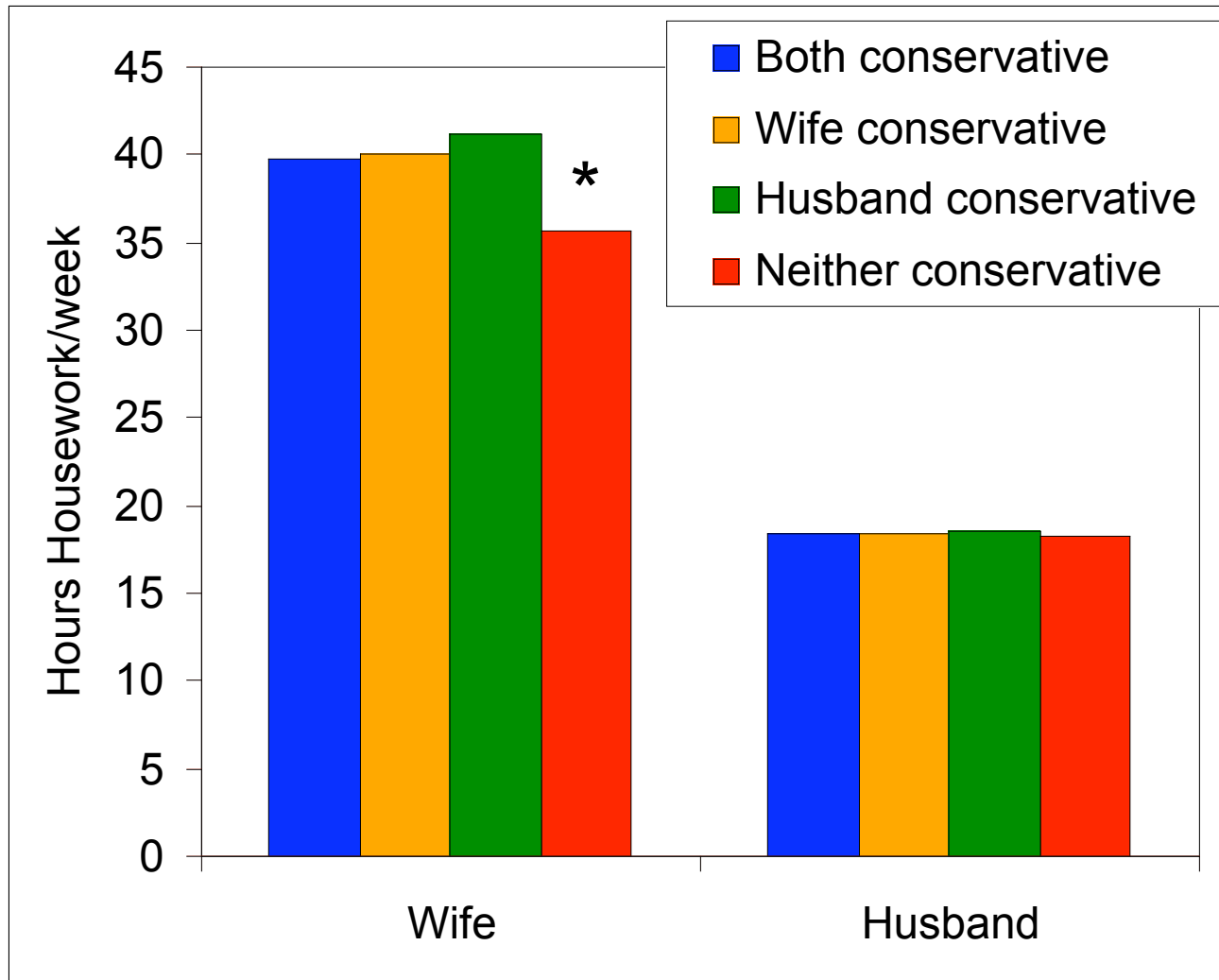
- even among dual-earner couples, wives often assume the bulk of household responsibilities

(Berardo, Shehan, & Leslie, 1987; Blair & Lichter, 1991; Shelton, 1990).

- Ellison & Bartowski, 2002

- cross-sectional national probability sample of 13,017 adult respondents

Ellison & Bartowski, 2002



if employed:

husband's
employment
hours = 45.01

wife's
employment
hours = 34.45

54% of couples
had both spouses
working
(45%
conservative,
62%
nonconservative)

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 - unconscious bias that men are smarter



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- women still making "traditional" choices and buying into a destructive viewpoint

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**Women don't
become scientists!**



the solution?

- for women:
- consider that women have ultimate responsibility before God to follow their calling when making decisions
- be bold and ask for what you need in terms of household and emotional support
- say NO more often!
- check out your local AWIS chapter (Association of Women in Science)



the solution?

- for men:
- learn about women's issues
- support the women and girls in your life
 - consider whether your wife serves you more than you serve her
 - encourage your daughters to be independent and think for themselves
 - call women "women" not "girls"
- let others know why you are doing this
- support AWIS



the solution?

- for families:
- make charts of household chores
 - how long does something take?
 - how could children contribute?



resources

- **Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry**
by Aida Besancon Spencer
- **Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life**
by Sally K. Gallagher
 - sociological and historical analysis of gender, family, and work among evangelical Protestants
- **Remaking the Godly Marriage: Gender Negotiation in Evangelical Families**
by John P. Bartkowski

what women want



“I do not know that women, as women, want anything in particular, but as human beings they want, my good men, exactly what you want yourselves: interesting occupation, reasonable freedom for their pleasures, and a sufficient emotional outlet. What form the occupation, the pleasures, and the emotion may take, depends entirely on the individual.”

--Dorothy Sayers, *Are Women Human* (1938)