

Changing Gender Relations, Changing Families: Tracing the Pace of Change Over Time, by Oriel Sullivan. NY: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2006. 152pp. ISBN: 978-0-7425-4623-3.

Jen Giesecking
The Graduate Center, City University of New York

jgieseking@gmail.com

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Various backlashes against feminism and feminist thought have argued that it has failed because there is not yet full social gender equity, while feminists and other gender equity advocates and activists argue that change has not occurred fast enough. Oriel Sullivan has drafted a different and important theorization of slow, incremental, and meaningful change toward gender equity based upon her multinational, multilayered study of heterosexual couples' domestic gender relations in *Changing Gender Relations, Changing Families: Tracing the Pace of Change Over Time*. Sullivan takes a new approach to analyzing the large National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) data sets and her work intertwines findings in the discursive literature to posit a multilayered recursive framework for analyzing recent historical shifts in gender equality, or what the author terms "embedded interactions." This book is a significant sociological study of the process of change in domestic gender relations and, through evidence of reciprocal causality, in the larger social sphere.

Sullivan divides the book into three parts. Part I outlines the author's approach to theorizing change in "doing gender" that develops not only from shifts at the macrolevel of social institutions, but also at the individual level of social interactions and gender consciousness. Sullivan develops a model of change through a multilayered approach—analysis

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of both various quantitative data sets and qualitative literature—that is cognizant of the complexity of interactions, institutions, and individuals involved in doing gender.

Part II provides the “Evidence for Change” and it is split into three chapters examining the discursive arguments, and cross-national and national trends of heterosexual couples and differences between those couples for “slow” change or incremental change over time in domestic gender relations. The “slice” of the examined discursive literature—gender attitudes and attitudes toward gender (values or ideals), language regarding gender, and images of masculinities—indicates that these larger social elements are both intimately and reciprocally connected to gender relations inside (and outside of) the home. Sullivan’s argument would have been strengthened by including a wider variety of topics, such as motherhood and femininities, to parallel the analysis of masculinities. The consistency of her findings for change toward gender equality in the analysis of this literature as well as the large-scale, multinational NSFH time-use diaries indicates that slow change in domestic gender relations has occurred and can be measured.

The findings from the empirical analysis deserve considerable attention. While holding socioeconomic and familial variables constant in ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis using multinational data sets from as early as 1961, one of Sullivan’s findings was an overall effect of a trend toward some convergence in men and women’s domestic work hours as men’s hours increased and women’s decreased. In analyzing a subset of time-use diaries from one country spanning 22 years, changing differences between couples over time in the literature indicate a more equitable pattern of sharing domestic labor. Taken together with other findings, these trends suggest a substantial increase in gender equity in the performance of routine domestic chores traditionally seen as normatively feminine-associated tasks.

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The last section includes two chapters that theorize the necessary conditions for the changes in ideologies and values evidenced in both the discursive literature and empirical analyses. Sullivan argues for the theoretically complex yet well-supported “embedded interactions,” or changes that occur in the pivotal dialectic of day-to-day interactions and gender consciousness in the microlevel processes and practices of the home. Changing gender relations are not only altered by gender consciousness—an awareness of gender issues linked to an awareness of rights in specific gender locations—but are also formed by the discursive context of improved “relational resources” for both women and men. Therapeutic discourses have shifted in recent years with the popularization of psychoanalysis and self-help literature. The weak link in Sullivan’s argument is that her discussion of “relational resources” does not build as directly from her findings as the rest of the pieces of her theory.

While research has yet to be done to determine the responsibility of and management behind domestic chores, Sullivan’s well articulated and convincing research of the historic and incremental shifts in domestic work demonstrate substantial strides toward gender equity in North America, western Europe, and Australia. Overall, *Changing Gender Relations, Changing Families* presents interesting and intelligent connections between research and theory that are useful to the study and process of change. The book is important for all gender scholars across the social sciences and those scholars and activists who seek to make and understand the processes of large-scale social change.