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CC/NUMBER 7
FEBRUARY 13, 1989

Gove W R. The relationship between sex roles, marital status, and mental illness. *Soc. Forces* 51:34-44, 1972.
[Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN]

Married women have higher rates of mental illness than men, while among the never married, divorced, and widowed, males have as high or higher rates of mental illness than women. The higher rates of mental illness among women can thus be plausibly attributed to the roles of married women. [The *SSCI*[®] indicates that this paper has been cited in over 260 publications.]

Gender and Marriage in Mental Disorder

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October 4, 1988

At the time period in which this paper was published, most social scientists assumed that women did not have higher rates of mental illness than men. It was recognized that in some community surveys women reported more symptoms of psychological distress than men and that some studies showed women to have higher rates of treatment for mental illness than did men. However, it was generally believed that the higher rates of reported symptoms and higher rates of treatment among women did not reflect gender differences in mental illness but, instead, that women were more willing than men to report symptoms and seek treatment because it was less stigmatizing for them to do so. Based on the experience of personally interviewing 458 mental patients, I had concluded that women did have higher rates of mental illness and that this difference was due to the roles of *married* men and women.

As reported in this paper, all studies conducted in the US since World War II showed married women to have higher rates of mental illness than married men. In contrast, among the never married, the divorced, and the widowed, males had as high or higher rates of mental illness. Thus, the higher rates of mental illness among women¹ cannot be attributed to a generalized gender characteristic, such as the expectations women confront, as the gender difference is limited to married men and women. This paper also focused on the problematic role of married women.

Getting this paper accepted by a good journal was difficult. I thought at the time that the negative critiques of some reviewers primarily reflected the beliefs of the reviewers and not the quality of the paper. The paper was eventually published with virtually no revisions. Following publication, a number of specific questions were addressed, and the position taken in the paper is now largely accepted by the social-science community.^{2,3}

I attribute the frequent citation of the paper to three things. First, at the time the paper was published, it ran counter to the accepted notions in the social-science community. Second, the position taken in the paper has been fairly consistently supported by subsequent research. Third, it focused on a topic, the position of women in our society, that has a large audience. Thus, the paper is frequently cited because it was an early statement of a then-provocative position that has withstood the test of time and for which there is a large audience. I attribute my willingness to challenge generally accepted notions to the "hands-on" experience of personally interviewing mental patients. There is, however, no reference to this experience in the paper.

1. Gove W R & Tudor J F. Adult sex roles and mental illness. *Amer. J. Sociol.* 78:812-35, 1973. (Cited 315 times.)
[See also: Gove W R. Citation Classic. *Current Contents/Social & Behavioral Sciences* 17(51-52):24, 23-30 December 1985.]

2. Gove W R. Sex differences in mental illness among adult men and women: an examination of four questions raised regarding whether or not women actually have higher rates. *Soc. Sci. Med.* 12:187-98, 1978. (Cited 75 times.)

3. ———. Gender differences in mental and physical illness: the effect of fixed rates and nurturant rates. *Soc. Sci. Med.* 19:77-91, 1984. (Cited 20 times.)