

The Liberal Underbelly: The Conservative Lifestyle of Modern Liberals

2020

Thomas A. Burns Ph.D.

Klamath Falls, Oregon

The liberal perspective emphasizes social and community values rather than individualistic values which are focal in the conservative perspective. Yes, the perspective, values and ideals of liberals/progressives and conservatives align in this manner. But have a look at the actual social principles that inform the lifestyle of the vast majority of liberals, and what do we find?

How many modern adult liberals live in or very near the families that raised them, much less live in the immediate vicinity of their extended families? Very few! And how many of these liberals live in the same village, town, or city as their parents or close relatives? Very few!! Many do not even live in the same region, state or nation. How many liberals have established stable, long lasting marriages supporting a two parent household in which their children are raised into adulthood? Less than half – to be generous! How many recent generation liberals live for long periods of time as younger adults with a significant other without any intention to marry? Many! Is this foundational social dyad at risk?

How many adult liberals themselves live in situations where they share close relationships with their neighbors, even their immediate neighbors? Few, and many do not even know their surrounding neighbors as acquaintances. How many liberals really participate in the social, cultural, economic and political processes of the communities in which they live? Very few. How many liberals as working adults have moved at least three times to different communities, often involving relocating to different cities, states and even nations? The great majority. Typically, liberals move or anticipate moving too often to get involved in and to really identify with the communities they live in. The suburbs are notorious for their lack of any sense of community for adults. In these suburbs, children are the ones who develop some sense of their own community through the shared school experience over the years, if their parents don't uproot them in the midst of these relationships solidifying. The prevailing mantra among liberal parents to their children – as was announced for them – is that they should be guided by the principles of independence, mobility and freedom to explore, without the need to look back or feel responsibility for their parents.

How many liberals are sitting on their front porches on the summer evenings greeting passersby? Almost none. How many liberals presently live mostly independently in their own homes/apartments spending the great majority of their nights watching TV or reading, or hooked up and exploring some aspect of the internet on their computers or “smart” phones? Most. The vast majority of

liberals – like most other modern day citizens – live in relative social isolation being more and more encouraged through various media connections to live more and more vicariously. Where liberals in later life live in communities for some period of time, they may strive to develop longer term friendship networks that can partially substitute for the kind of commitment that is associated with immediate family, extended family, life-long friends, and a life supported by the system of social relations in the small community. No surprise, like most other citizens, more and more liberals die alone in nursing homes, hospice care facilities, and ICUs.

So, what are the primary characteristics of this modern adult liberal lifestyle? Are social values and community values paramount? Hardly! Just the opposite! Most liberals have led and are leading lives defined by individualistic values: self pursuit, self-realization, self-satisfaction, personal accomplishment, and success defined in terms of occupational prestige and material well-being. This lifestyle exhibits all of the characteristics of individualistic conservative values.

Now we can look at the exceptions! Yes, there are exceptions and they cover perhaps 20-25% of liberals – at least to some degree: 1) 5-10% of liberals elect careers in education, health care, social work, and public service in other forms; and most of the time they do this while accepting reduced pay and little public recognition. These are the liberals who fully participate in living the liberal life. 2) Some liberals, especially those in the latter half of their lives – often living in smaller communities, engage in multiple ways in efforts to benefit their communities and to improve the surrounding ecology. Frequently, this involvement is understood as “pay back” time. 3) Perhaps 20% of liberals, and again often those in the latter half of their lives, make periodic gestures in the direction of community involvement, but these engagements usually involve only “light” volunteerism in some specific area of recognized need, and this effort typically endures for a relatively short time. Admittedly, considering the ongoing urbanization of the world into enormous cities and megalopolises, identifying a specific community to relate to can be difficult for liberals! So, some of the block to involvement for liberals is overcoming scale – as well as the number of pressing global problems which exceed the ability of communities to address.

Allowing for a range of exceptions, 20-25% of liberals live up to their ideological commitment to social values at some credible level. But the great majority that adopt the liberal moniker make little or no effort to connect directly to support their communities. To the extent the majority of liberals are active in promoting their social ideals, they mostly limit themselves to supporting liberal organizations and causes with relatively small financial contributions. In essence, the majority of liberals justify their liberal identity with their credit cards.

So, what about the grand progressive/liberal agendas that are proposed and that receive so much attention? In espousing progressive social, economic and political programs, liberals are in fact attempting to fit an expansive social service umbrella over the top of huge state and national groups whose members are virtually all citizens that they do not know and that they have made very little effort to relate to or interact with in everyday life. Liberals want to declare and have all of these relative strangers treated “as if” they are family and close friends, while most of them live a lifestyle that does not model or support it.

Liberal values and ideals do not match the prevailing lifestyle of modern liberals. This is a fundamental contradiction. Instead, the modern lifestyle for most liberals epitomizes the triumph of a fundamentally conservative perspective: little about social values and mostly about individual self-interest!

Liberals might do well to first recognize the contradiction that they are living. Liberals can then explore how they can do a much better job of bringing the values they exhibit in their lifestyle and that they are encouraging in their children into agreement with the values they express in their ideology and that they support politically. How about seeking a greater correspondence between “What we say and what we do.”

As a liberal myself, I make these observations as much for myself as for anyone else! We all need to have our contradictions exposed. Unfortunately, in my view, this fundamental contradiction does not receive the attention it deserves!