

Gender Ideology and Fertility Intentions across Europe

Trude Lappegård, Statistics Norway, Research Department, NORWAY

Gerda Neyer, University of Stockholm, Dept. of Sociology, Demography Unit, SWEDEN

Daniele Vignoli, University of Florence, Department of Statistics —G. Parenti, ITALY

Submission for the 2012 meetings of the Population Association of America

There is an ongoing discussion about the relationship between gender attitudes and fertility intentions. A recent study shows that men's egalitarian attitudes are associated with higher fertility (Puur, Oláh, Tazi-Preve, and Dorbritz 2008), while another study, investigating the same countries, shows that egalitarian attitudes are linked with lower fertility (Westoff and Higgins 2009). However, the two studies capture different aspects of gender ideology, i.e. attitudes towards gender equality in the public sphere and in the private sphere respectively (Goldscheider, Oláh and Puur 2010).

Many researchers maintain that most industrialized countries are going through a two-step process towards more gender equality (e.g., Goldscheider 2000; Goldscheider and Waite 1991). The first step of the "gender revolution" concerns the increase in gender equality in the public sphere, in politics, in employment, and in education. Women become integrated into political processes; women's labor force participation increases as does their participation in higher education (Goldscheider et al. 2010). This first step of the gender revolution is then followed by the "second gender revolution", that is, by more gender equality in the private sphere, in the division of household-, family- and dependent-care work (Goldscheider et al. 2010). The first and the second gender revolution are assumed to have different effects on fertility. In the first stage, fertility will fall. For, as Goldscheider et al (2010) argue, when women participate more in the labor force but are still doing most of the household and care work, families are under pressure to limit fertility. When, as in the second stage, men are more involved in domestic duties, families are strengthened and fertility may increase. These processes may also affect the relation between gender ideology and fertility intentions. During the first stage of the gender revolution one can expect a negative relationship between egalitarian gender role attitudes related to the public sphere activities and fertility intentions, while attitudes towards gender role in the family can turn out positively (Goldscheider et al. 2010).

This calls for research that carefully investigates how different aspects of gender ideology are related to fertility in different contexts and from different gender perspectives. In this paper we extend the existing research and focus on three dimensions of gender ideology which are related to the different parts of the gender revolution: gender roles in the public sphere, mothers' role in the family, and fathers' role in the family. We make use of the first Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) of eight Eastern and Western European countries, namely Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Russia, France and Norway. These countries capture different gender contexts and statuses in the "gender revolution" and this enables us to investigate whether the relationship of gender ideology and fertility intentions varies in different contexts.

First, we take a parity-specific and a gender-specific approach, estimating the likelihood of planning for a child during the next three years among childless, one and two (or plus) parents for women and men separately. Whether one has not yet become a parent or how many children one has might influence how gender ideology affects intentions of having a child and it is likely that men and women respond differently to it. Second, we consider whether there is cross-national variations of the relationship between gender ideology and fertility intentions. The three groups of countries which we investigate differ considerably in their general gender attitudes and how much they support different aspects of gender equality. The Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Russia) formerly supported gender equality in the labor market, but maintained gender segregation in family work. After the collapse of the state-socialist regime, there have been considerable setbacks for women in these countries, leading to generally little gender equality in society and in the family (Funk and Müller 1993; Gal and Kligman 2000a, 2000b). Among the Western Europe we distinguish between two groups: countries which have put little emphasis on gender equality and are considered as conservative welfare states (Austria and Germany) versus countries which have promoted gender equality and are regarded as more egalitarian in their (gender- and family-related) welfare-state policies (Norway and France).

Three dimensions of gender ideology

The GGS offers the opportunity to distinguish between three dimensions of gender ideology that are related to different parts of the gender revolution. First, gender equality in the public sphere is measured through the following statement: “On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do”. This is a clear statement about the positioning of women and men in the public sphere. Second, we capture gender equality in the private sphere, described as the second stage of the gender revolution, by distinguishing between attitudes towards mothers’ role in the family and fathers’ role in the family, measured through the following statements: “A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his/her mother works” and “If parents divorce it is better for the child to stay with the mother than with the father”. The first item concerns gender assumptions about caregiving in the family, but also the acceptance of mothers as breadwinners. It also indicates whether women’s participation in the public sphere is accompanied by a shift in gender expectations regarding mothers’ work in the family. Fathers’ role in the family is often regarded as the last step in the gender-equality puzzle. The last item thus addresses fathering, i.e., the acceptance of men/fathers as caregivers, and also men’s rights as fathers. For each statement the respondent could answer 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree'. We classified the answers as “traditional gender attitudes” ('strongly agree' and 'agree'), “intermediate” ('neither agree nor disagree') and “egalitarian” ('disagree', and 'strongly disagree').

Looking at the distribution of the three dimensions of gender ideology across Europe we find different patterns for men and women living in different parts of Europe (Table 1). First, there are generally more egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles in the public sphere than in the private sphere. Second, women are generally more egalitarian than men, except with regard to fathers’ role in the family. Third, men and women have more egalitarian attitudes in France and Norway than in Eastern Europe and in Germany and Austria. Men and women in Eastern Europe have the most traditional attitudes.

Table 1 Gender ideology by gender and country. Percent

	Eastern Europe		Conservative Western Europe (Germany and Austria)		Egalitarian Western Europe (France and Norway)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Gender roles in the public sphere						
Traditional	49,4	29,6	23,9	12,2	16,9	9,0
Intermediate	28,7	29,0	29,8	19,3	30,7	19,5
Egalitarian	21,9	41,3	46,3	68,5	52,3	71,5
Mothers’ role in the family						
Traditional	64,0	64,9	49,3	34,3	32,6	25,0
Intermediate	19,1	18,1	20,2	20,3	24,7	17,8
Egalitarian	16,9	17,0	30,4	45,4	42,7	57,2
Fathers’ role in the family						
Traditional	44,7	65,5	27,5	29,2	21,7	21,7
Intermediate	40,0	28,3	45,1	46,3	37,7	42,9
Egalitarian	15,2	6,1	27,4	24,5	40,7	35,3

Gender Attitudes and Fertility Intentions: Results

Focusing on the relation between the three dimensions of gender ideology and childbearing intentions we have separate models for each dimension. In addition we have separate models for parities and by gender. In each model we control for respondent’s age, marital status, educational attainment and activity status. For parents we control for age of the youngest child and for two (or plus) parents we control for number of children.

Starting with the attitudes towards “gender roles in the public sphere” (Table 2), the main pattern is that there is a negative relationship between egalitarian attitudes and childbearing intentions. However, there are differences by gender, parity and within different contexts. The negative relationship is more evident among women. It is also more evident among one-child parents. Surprisingly, the results do not differ systematically for conservative and egalitarian Western European countries. In particular, in France and Norway there is no positive relationship between egalitarian attitudes and childbearing intentions. This contradicts the argument by Goldscheider et al. (2010) who expect that there is a negative relationship of egalitarian attitudes related to the public sphere as long societies are in the first stage of the gender revolution where women work but still do most in the families, while societies that are closer to the second revolution, i.e. have moved in the direction of more gender equality in the family could be expected to have a positive relationship between egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles in the public

sphere and childbearing intentions. This could be an indication that none of these countries have reached complete gender equality and that the families/women are still under pressure.

Table 2 Attitudes towards gender roles in the public sphere and childbearing intentions

	Eastern Europe				Conservative Western Europe (Germany and Austria)				Egalitarian Western Europe (France and Norway)			
	Women		Men		Women		Men		Women		Men	
	OR	p.v.	OR	p.v.	OR	p.v.	OR	p.v.	OR	p.v.	OR	p.v.
Childless												
Intermediate	0.99	0.957	1.07	0.429	0.82	0.298	1.05	0.738	1.13	0.551	0.90	0.475
Egalitarian	0.88	0.411	1.14	0.179	0.78	0.133	1.15	0.255	0.91	0.631	0.84	0.209
One-child												
Intermediate	0.87	0.160	1.04	0.698	0.81	0.453	0.50	0.014	0.82	0.587	1.18	0.537
Egalitarian	0.93	0.413	0.96	0.715	0.80	0.359	0.62	0.076	0.57	0.076	0.81	0.421
Two+child												
Intermediate	0.88	0.395	0.85	0.221	1.25	0.420	0.94	0.835	0.98	0.941	0.96	0.846
Egalitarian	1.08	0.591	1.28	0.063	1.00	0.996	0.86	0.565	0.95	0.812	0.89	0.565

Note: #Reference group=Traditional. Models controlled for respondent's age, marital status, educational attainment, and activity status; for parents also for age of the youngest child and for two+child parents the number of children.

Looking at the differences between contexts and considering the proportion with egalitarian attitudes presented in Table 1 we find a positive relationship in the contexts with the lowest proportion of egalitarian attitudes, e.g.: in Eastern Europe. This indicates that those having egalitarian attitudes toward gender in the public sphere in Eastern Europe are a special group who might also be special in other aspects such as preferences for children. This might also reflect different processes behind gender ideology as well as behind childbearing intentions in these societies.

As regards attitudes toward “mother’s role in the family” and childbearing intentions (Table 3), the estimates also show a general negative relationship, but there are some distinct differences between the three contexts. In Eastern Europe and in France and Norway there is a diverse pattern. Negative relationships prevail, but there is also some indication of a positive relationship among one-child mothers (and partly fathers, too). In Germany and Austria on the other hand, it is a clearly negative relationship and those with egalitarian attitudes have lower childbearing plans than those with traditional attitudes. Overall, there is no indication that egalitarian gender role attitudes related to mother’s role in the family has a positive relation with childbearing intentions as suggested by Goldscheider et al. (2010). Rather, the relationship might be mediated by the level of gender equality reached in a country – as indicated by the differences in results between conservative and egalitarian welfare states. For, the statement that we used “A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his/her mother works” also expresses attitudes towards mother’s role in the public sphere. Mother’s role in the family and her role in the public sphere are closely intertwined and it is difficult to separate the two. From this we would argue that it is more likely to find a negative relationship between egalitarian attitudes towards mother’s role in the family and childbearing intentions – in the same way the relationship between egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles in the public sphere and childbearing intentions.

Table 3 Attitudes towards mother’s role in the family and childbearing intentions

	Eastern Europe				Conservative Western Europe (Germany and Austria)				Egalitarian Western Europe (France and Norway)			
	Women		Men		Women		Men		Women		Men	
	OR	p.v.	OR	p.v.	OR	p.v.	OR	p.v.	OR	p.v.	OR	p.v.
Childless												
Intermediate	0.76	0.058	1.00	0.965	0.74	0.029	0.93	0.568	0.98	0.905	0.88	0.339
Egalitarian	1.07	0.716	1.03	0.797	0.94	0.602	0.88	0.242	0.84	0.350	0.91	0.447
One-child												
Intermediate	1.13	0.241	0.93	0.495	0.97	0.899	0.59	0.052	1.34	0.275	1.20	0.470
Egalitarian	1.02	0.831	0.91	0.363	0.98	0.904	0.56	0.012	1.04	0.856	1.00	0.991
Two+child												
Intermediate	0.95	0.762	0.62	0.006	0.70	0.114	0.81	0.447	0.76	0.200	0.84	0.384
Egalitarian	0.90	0.555	0.86	0.381	0.62	0.008	0.62	0.080	0.64	0.006	0.75	0.074

Note: #Reference group=Traditional. Models controlled for respondent's age, marital status, educational attainment, and activity status; for parents also for age of the youngest child and for two+child parents the number of children.

Contrary to the two first dimensions of gender ideology the relationship between egalitarian attitudes toward “father’s role in the family” and childbearing intentions (Table 4) are more positive than negative.

In Eastern Europe we find a positive relationship for both, women and men, and for all parities. Those with an egalitarian gender role attitude towards father's role in the family have higher childbearing intentions than those with traditional attitudes. In the two other contexts it is more negative than positive relations, while there are some differences by parity and gender in the other two country groups. In Germany and Austria the positive relation is found among childless men and one-child mothers, in France and Norway only among one-child parents. Based on the theoretical assumptions proposed by Goldscheider et al (2010) and by McDonald (2000), namely the second gender revolution with its changes in attitudes about men will lead to higher fertility, we expected to find a positive association in all three contexts and that we do not find this within all the context is somewhat surprisingly. We assume that people with egalitarian attitudes towards fathers' role in the family are a select group who might be (personally and socially) more prone or (economically) more able to have children and this might be more so within Eastern Europe than Western Europe.

Table 4 Attitudes towards father's role in the family and childbearing intentions

	Eastern Europe				Conservative Western Europe (Germany and Austria)				Egalitarian Western Europe (France and Norway)			
	Women		Men		Women		Men		Women		Men	
	OR	p.v.	OR	p.v.	OR	p.v.	OR	p.v.	OR	p.v.	OR	p.v.
Childless												
Intermediate	0.98	0.868	1.05	0.487	0.75	0.026	1.15	0.252	0.85	0.287	0.90	0.451
Egalitarian	1.17	0.534	1.62	0.000	0.92	0.580	1.10	0.500	0.66	0.007	0.95	0.711
One-child												
Intermediate	1.18	0.065	1.09	0.336	1.51	0.022	0.67	0.098	1.32	0.177	1.42	0.152
Egalitarian	1.15	0.422	1.38	0.007	1.38	0.125	0.71	0.205	1.07	0.762	1.24	0.347
Two+child												
Intermediate	1.15	0.278	0.91	0.453	0.69	0.035	0.67	0.092	0.79	0.198	1.00	0.992
Egalitarian	1.84	0.004	1.11	0.483	0.76	0.197	0.58	0.061	0.94	0.723	1.01	0.949

Note: #Reference group=Traditional. Models controlled for respondent's age, marital status, educational attainment, and activity status; for parents also for age of the youngest child and for two+child parents the number of children.

Conclusion

The relationship between gender ideology and childbearing intentions is a complex issue. We maintain that gender ideology includes several dimensions that need to be distinguished, and our analysis supports such an approach. The results show that egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles in the public sphere and mothers' role in the family have generally a negative association with childbearing intentions in the near future, while there is a more positive relationship between egalitarian attitudes towards father's role in the family and childbearing intentions. This positive association is, however, not in the contexts in which we would have expected it, namely France and Norway, but in Eastern Europe, where changes in male norms have not permeated widely within society.

References

- Funk, N. and M. Müller (eds.). 1993. *Gender politics and post-communism. Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*. London: Routledge.
- Gal, S. and G. Kligman. 2000a. Reproduction as politics, In: Gal, S. and G. Kligman: *The politics of gender after socialism* Princeton: Princeton University Press: 15-36.
- (eds.). 2000b. *Reproducing gender*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Goldscheider, F.K. and L.J. Waite. 1991. *New Families, No Families? The Transformation of the American Home*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Goldscheider, F.K. 2000. Men, children and the future of the family in the third millennium. *Futures* 32:527-538.
- Goldscheider, F.K., L.S. Olah, and A. Puur. 2010. Reconciling studies of men's gender attitudes and fertility: Response to Westoff and Higgins. *Demographic Research* 22:189-198.
- McDonald, P. 2000. Gender equity, social institutions and the future of fertility. *Journal of Population Research* 17(1):1-16.
- Puur, A., L.S. Olah, M.I. Tazi-Preve and J. Dorbritz. 2008. Men's childbearing desires and views of the male role in Europe at the dawn of the 21st century. *Demographic Research* 19(56):1883-1912.
- Westoff, C.F. and J. Higgins. 2009. Relationships between men's gender attitudes and fertility: Response to Puur et al.'s "Men's childbearing desires and views of the male role in Europe at the dawn of the 21st century", *Demographic Research* 19:1883-1912. *Demographic Research* 21:65-74.