

ARTICLES

Gender Equality, Parenthood Attitudes, and First Births in Sweden

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Abstract

We analyse Swedish survey data on attitudes about parenthood among young adults aged 22-30 in 1999, and examine who became parents over the next four years. Our results show that while both men and women perceive more benefits to parenthood than costs, men are more likely than women to perceive both negative and positive consequences of parenthood. Further, gender role attitudes shape parental attitudes differentially for men and women. More egalitarian men perceive fewer costs and more egalitarian women perceive fewer benefits than those with more traditional gender role attitudes.

Our analyses of the transition to parenthood indicate that, even controlling assessments of the costs and benefits of children, men with more traditional attitudes were more likely to become fathers at an early age, while gender role attitudes had no effect on women's transition to parenthood. In contrast, there were no gender differentials in the effects of costs and benefits, each of which strongly affected the transition to parenthood, but, of course, in opposite directions. We interpret these findings to indicate that even in a country as far into the Second Demographic Transition as Sweden, negotiating shared parenthood is still sufficiently difficult that it depresses fertility, but now because of its impact on men.

1 Introduction

Sweden is perhaps the furthest along among the countries that have entered the Second Demographic Transition (Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004). This transition, marked by increased individualism, delayed family formation, and gender

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equality in education and the labour market (Lesthaeghe 1995), has been sweeping industrialised countries in the last decades of the twentieth century not only in Europe but also in the Americas, as well as the developed countries in the Pacific/East Asian regions. As more countries begin this transition, the most dramatic consequence has been the emergence of very low fertility (Kohler et al. 2002), far below replacement levels. This decline in childbearing is likely to be related to women's increased need to prepare themselves for employment. This suggests that gender roles that place the major burden of children's care on women as they strive for equality in the labour market might be contributing to low fertility. As a country that has emphasised the importance of men's sharing in child raising and domestic tasks, Sweden may be also leading the way towards the resumption of replacement fertility.

Clearly, gender role changes and attitudes are unlikely to account for all the recent delays in parenthood. Structural circumstances such as longer education, the increasing difficulties young people face in establishing themselves in the labour market and hence achieving a secure economic foundation for parenthood, as well as later transitions into more committed couple relationships, have contributed to the postponement of childbearing that has occurred in Sweden as well as in other European societies. However, Second Demographic Transition Theory also predicts that ideational factors and changing goals and priorities in the lives of young people, especially in terms of the timing of life course events, are crucial in explaining the postponement of family formation observed in recent years (Lesthaeghe 1995). Surkyn and Lesthaeghe (2004), using the European Values Study, demonstrated a close relationship between value orientations and the life course choices concerning living arrangements and family formation, including the presence of children. Hence we focus in this paper on the determinants of attitudes towards the values and costs of children and the relationship between these attitudes, gender role attitudes, and the transition to early parenthood in Sweden.

2 Background

One of the strongest findings in the literature on gender roles and fertility is that when women hold attitudes that reinforce less "traditional" roles for themselves, roles that go beyond home and family to include more public activities such as paid employment, they have fewer children and have them later in their lives. Their new roles require more preparation than does a life focused on childbearing, all of which greatly increases the age at motherhood. Such roles can also raise the "costs" of children in many ways, from the need for child care to the alternative cost of women's time, and reduce the "benefits" of children by making motherhood a less central element of women's adult roles. If so, then the early years of the gender revolution have contributed to lower fertility.

But what about the relationship between gender roles and fertility for men? Does the same relationship hold for them, because less traditional gender roles are part of a package that makes marriage and parenthood less central in adults' lives (Lesthaeghe 2002), and hence, presumably, in men's lives as in women's? Would holding more egalitarian attitudes increase the costs of parenthood for men as well since they invest more time and energy in children, making them also less willing to have children for this reason (Bumpass 1988)? Or might it be that as women take on more of the support burden in young families, men feel less pressure to establish a well-paying career before becoming a father, thus reducing the costs of children for men. Further, with men sharing more in the care of children, they may appreciate the benefits of becoming fathers. If so, then more egalitarian men might be more rather than less likely to want to become fathers than men with more traditional gender role attitudes, which would increase fertility. In this case, has the maturing of the gender role revolution that is so closely linked with the Second Demographic Transition contributed to an increase in fertility or at least offset its decline? Or does negotiating shared parenting early in the gender revolution produce high costs in time and confusion, making delay a likely outcome of gender equality, at least until it becomes more fully institutionalised, even in Sweden?

Men's orientations towards, and transitions to, fatherhood is an under-researched field, although growing rapidly in recent years (e.g., Coltrane 1996; Goldscheider and Kaufman 1996; Hobson, ed. 2002; Marsiglio 1998). We contribute to this literature by examining the effects of gender role attitudes and attitudes towards the costs and benefits of parenthood in a sample of young adults in Sweden, the country with arguably the most egalitarian gender roles in the world. Among the fifteen countries in the European Union, Sweden ranks at the top with 40 per cent of the women answering that they share household tasks equally with their partner (European Commission 1998; Knudsen and Waerness 2006).

This paper will explore factors related to initiating childbearing in Sweden. We will present analyses of parenthood attitudes (costs and benefits of childbearing) and the effects of these attitudes on making an early transition to parenthood, distinguishing the effects for men and women.

2.1 Gender Role Attitudes and the Costs and Benefits of Children

There are many studies of the costs and benefits of parenthood, although most have focused on changes in these assessments in the course of the decline in fertility of the first demographic transition. Pre-Second Demographic Transition analyses have shown that first-born children are valued for their emotional benefits, as persons to love and a joy to watch grow; later-born children tend to be

valued for their practical contributions to parents' well-being, such as help around the house and/or in old age (Bulatao 1981). Hence, it seems plausible that the decline in agricultural pursuits and the growth in public and private pensions reduced the need for such practical help and hence reduced interest in larger families. Scholars who focus on the practical benefits and undoubted costs of children and ignore the social and emotional benefits of parenthood often argue that there is no reason to have children at all in a modern economy (Rindfuss and Brewster 1996).

There have been few studies of the perceived costs and benefits of children for the countries undergoing the second demographic transition (but see Liefbroer 2005). Even fewer have linked these attitudes to gender role attitudes, despite the fact that changing gender roles affect men very differently than they do women. There is also a problem with the measurement of gender role attitudes, in that most measures have focused far more on nonfamilial roles for women than on familial roles for men. Studies of fertility, however, suggest that gender roles which place the major burden of child care on women and the major burden of child support on men might be contributing to low fertility, as discussed below.

The primary focus of analyses of fertility in the second demographic transition, however, has been on variation in state support for families with children (Brewster and Rindfuss 2000; McDonald 2000; Sleebos 2003). The approach appears to be saying that the burden of children for women needs to be eased by the community, by providing alternatives to her income via family leave benefits, and by providing inexpensive alternatives to a mother's care via the institutional provision of child care centres. This approach is what Hochschild (1998) terms "cold modern care," in that the focus is on institutional alternatives to women's caregiving roles rather than on family alternatives. Hochschild's "warm modern care" focuses much more on the potential for fathers sharing working mothers' "second shift" (Hochschild 1989), which, coupled with institutional support, reinforces family care and facilitates more equal care by both parents.

This approach, however, requires a substantial change in the attitudes and behaviours of men, a change which—while undoubtedly underway—has been so slow in most countries that it can be called the "stalled revolution." In this context, Sweden becomes an important site for studying the relationship between gender role attitudes and parenthood for men and women, as Swedish family policy has, in fact, reinforced both types of support for mothers who work, by not only providing money and child care, but also by reinforcing men's contributions to children that go beyond the financial. The "daddy" months of paid family leave, for example, if not taken by men, are lost to the family (Oláh and Bernhardt forthcoming).

Some evidence has already appeared to suggest that men's participation in child care has a positive effect on fertility. Families in which men take family leave for children are more likely to have another child (Berinde 1999; Oláh

2003, Duvander and Andersson 2006). There is also some evidence that increased male involvement in child care increases fertility. This is the case in Germany (Cooke 2004), Italy and Spain (Cooke 2006) and in the United States (Cooke 2004; Torr and Short 2004). What is less clear is how more egalitarian men's attitudes and behaviours affect the powerful, negative effects of the reduction in family centrality that seems to have accompanied the gender revolution. Is it that men become more similar to women in their assessment of the benefits of children? Or does the simple gain in financial stability that a dual worker family allows provide the increased insurance and assurance that the costs of a family will be met (Oppenheimer 2003)?

2.2 Gender Role Attitudes and Parenthood

Gender role equality in both the workplace and at home has made parenthood problematic. Nearly all young women have been socialised to be intensive caregivers for young children; the so-called "mother role" is central to most young women's feminine identity and at least more egalitarian young men increasingly feel pressure to participate intensively as parents—pressure from their partners and even, at least among the many who experienced or observed disengaged fathering, from their own attitudes and aspirations. But young adulthood is the time for massive investments in career preparation and development as well, and has also been linked with high expectations for leisure experiences, such as travel and just being young and not-yet-responsible (Bergnéhr 2006). This makes adding children to the young adult life course even more problematic.

Swedish survey data have shown that about one third of still childless young adults had completed their education and had a partner, suitable housing, and a sufficient income to support a child, thus having fulfilled what Hobcraft and Kiernan (1995) have called the necessary pre-conditions for the transition to parenthood. The survey results also indicate a high degree of tolerance for childlessness among young adults in Sweden. Nevertheless, very few of those still childless say definitely "no" when asked if they plan to have children later in life. Nearly all think they will become parents eventually, although a substantial proportion expresses doubts: their plans are vague and the time horizon for childbearing is far in the future.

There is a major problem, however, with existing survey research on gender role attitudes and family roles, which is that the measures themselves are highly problematic. Historically, most such measures have focused primarily on women's employment, either as a right or in terms of its effects on children. They do not encourage respondents to reflect on men's family roles, and particularly on men's involvement with children rather than, say, housework. Many use questions on the costs for pre-school children if mothers work, with at most, global questions such as "it's better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the

woman takes care of the home and family” to tap the male dimension. Few respondents addressing this question are likely to think much about men’s involvement in children at all. In contrast, the question asked in Sweden focused on the home, asking whether men and women should share equally in the responsibilities for children and home or whether women should take the main responsibility.

Based on the Swedish case and the family-focused gender role attitudes measure available in our data, we address the following questions:

1. What factors affect men’s and women’s views of the costs and benefits of children, with a particular focus on the impact of gender role attitudes? In particular, does holding more egalitarian gender role attitudes raise the perceived costs of children, reduce the perceived benefits of children, or some combination?
2. How do gender role attitudes, together with assessments of perceived costs and benefits of children, affect the likelihood of early parenthood?

2.3 Data

We analyse Swedish panel survey data on attitudes toward parenthood among young adults aged 22-30 in 1999, many of whom had become parents by the second wave of data collection in 2003. The survey "Family and Working Life in the 21st Century" was carried out by Statistics Sweden. Based on a nationally representative sample, 3,408 individuals aged 22, 26, and 30 were asked to respond to a mail questionnaire that included questions about their plans, expectations and attitudes regarding family and working life. Factual information about their current situation and background characteristics was also included. The response rate was 67 per cent: 2,273 respondents returned their questionnaires. The first part of our analysis in this paper is based on the sub-sample of the 1,560 respondents who were still childless at the time of the first survey in 1999 (77 per cent of the male respondents and 62 per cent of the females).

Out of the 2,273 respondents in the 1999 survey, 78 per cent also participated in the second wave of the survey, which took place in May-June 2003. Thus, 1,761 young men and women, born in 1968, 1972, and 1976, participated in both waves of the survey. For the childless, the response rate was 76 per cent. The second part of our analysis in this paper is based on a sub-sample of the 1,162 respondents who participated in both waves of the survey and who were childless in 1999.

2.4 Variables

Among the many attitudinal questions that were included in the two waves, one was intended to measure parenthood attitudes. The wording of the question was: *Becoming a parent can influence one's life in many ways. What is your view of the following?*

- If (when) I have children 1) I can no longer do what I want*
 2) *I (we) will have economic problems*
 3) *I will have little time for my friends*
 4) *my relationship to my partner will improve*
 5) *my life will become more meaningful*

The questions could be answered on a scale from 1 (disagree completely) to 5 (agree completely). Items 1, 2, and 3 refer to possible negative consequences of becoming a parent. They identified one dimension of parenthood attitudes (reliability = 0.67), which we have called *costs of parenthood*. Items 4 and 5 refer to possible positive consequences of becoming a parent, and identified a second dimension of the parenthood attitudes (reliability = 0.57), which we have called *benefits of parenthood*. The reliability of these two scales (measured by Cronbach's alpha) may appear modest, but these values refer to composite scales that include only two or three items. We therefore regard the reliability of these two scales as fair (Bernhardt and Moors 2003). The distribution of these attitudes varies by gender, with men both more concerned about the costs of children and more appreciative of their benefits.

The outcome variable for the second part of our analysis (effects of attitudes on becoming a parent) is a dichotomous variable, measuring whether or not the respondent had a first birth in the period between November 1999 and the time of the second survey in May-June 2003 (thus we excluded those already pregnant at the time of the first survey). This can be considered relatively early parenthood in Sweden, particularly for men, as only 24% of male respondents who were still childless in 1999 made the transition to fatherhood in between surveys. The corresponding figure for female respondents was 30 per cent. Mean age at first birth (for women) in Sweden is 29.0 years, for men 31.5 (Oláh and Bernhardt forthcoming).

In the analysis of factors affecting attitudes towards the costs and benefits of parenthood, our two main explanatory variables are sex (men vs. women) and gender role attitudes. Gender role attitudes were measured by using the answers to the question: "What do you think would be the best arrangement for a family with preschool children?" with the following response alternatives:

- 1) *Only the man works and the woman takes the main responsibility for home and children*
 2) *Both work, but the woman works part-time and takes the main responsibility for home and children*

3) Both parents work roughly the same hours and share the responsibility for home and children equally

We label the third alternative “egalitarian”, and combine the first two, indicating a “traditional” gender role attitude towards work-family balance.

In the analysis we also control for age in 1999 (22, 26, 30), partnership commitment status (no partner, steady partner, cohabiting partner, or married), educational level (basic, upper secondary, lower post-secondary, and upper post-secondary), metropolitan residence (whether or not the respondent lives in one of the three largest cities in Sweden: Stockholm, Gothenburg, or Malmö), and, finally, why the respondent left the parental home (to live with a partner, for some form of non-family living, or still living at home). Many of these variables have been found to have significant effects on measures of the costs and benefits of parenthood either for men or for women (Kaufman 1997; Seccombe 1991). All the variables used in the analysis of attitudes about the costs and benefits of parenthood are measured at the time of the 1999 survey, and their distributions are presented in Table 1.

In the analysis of the effect of attitudes on becoming a parent, attitudes towards the costs and benefits of parenthood are the main explanatory variables, together with sex (in the pooled regression) and gender role attitudes. As in the first analysis, we also include the same measures of educational level, metropolitan residence, why the respondent left the parental home, and age, all measured in 1999. We have added two variables, one indicating whether the respondent was employed in 1999 (at the time of the first survey), and one that takes advantage of the information in the second survey on how many months the respondent had spent between the surveys on various activities (e.g., working full- or part-time and studying). We constructed a variable, called studying between surveys, with three categories: 0 months, 1-23 months, and 24-48 months. Information on these variables also appears in Table 1.

Table 1:
Descriptive statistics

Variables		Men	Women	Total
Dependent variables				
1) Costs scale				
1=disagreeing completely	1	13.2	25.7	19.2
5=agreeing completely	2	25.7	27.6	26.6
	3	21.4	18.7	20.1
	4	31.4	23.6	27.6
<i>n=1560</i>	5	8.4	4.4	6.5
2) Benefits scale				
1=disagreeing completely	1	7.3	14.9	10.9
5=agreeing completely	2	8.2	12.2	10.1
	3	28.0	24.8	26.5
	4	43.4	38.7	41.2
<i>n=1560</i>	5	13.0	9.5	11.4
3) Per cent with first birth between surveys		24.1	29.8	27.1
<i>n=1190</i>				
Independent variables				
% traditional gender role attitude		23.3	14.1	18.9
Partnership status				
No partner		39.1	25.4	32.5
Steady relationship		24.7	26.0	25.3
Cohabiting		32.5	44.9	38.4
Married		3.8	3.8	3.8
Educational level				
Basic		20.1	11.7	16.1
Upper secondary		28.9	28.0	28.5
Lower post-secondary		27.0	31.9	29.3
Upper post-secondary		24.0	28.4	26.1
% living in metropolitan areas		35.7	42.0	38.7
Reason leaving parental home				
Partnering		16.3	25.3	20.6
Nonfamily living		73.3	69.6	71.5
Still living at home		10.4	5.0	7.8
Age (in 1999)				
22		44.4	48.8	46.5
26		34.4	34.5	34.5
30		21.2	16.7	19.0
% employed in 1999		67.6	62.5	65.2
% studying between surveys				
0 months		69.2	61.6	65.3
1-23 months		14.7	18.0	16.4
24-48 months		16.1	20.4	18.3

2.5 Methods

For the first part of the analysis, in which we analyse factors that influence attitudes about the costs and benefits of parenthood among still childless young men and women, we used ordered logit, to allow for the possibility that the perceived intervals between response categories were not equal. These were analysed separately for men and women, with tests of gender interactions. We also analysed the separate cost and benefit items, which we discuss where appropriate.

For the second part of the analysis, we analyse what factors influence the likelihood of having a first birth in the interval between the two surveys (early parenthood). For this analysis, we used hazard regression. The outcome variable was whether or not the respondent had a first birth during the period from November 1999 to the time of the second survey in May-June 2003. To test for the selectivity of continuing to be childless, in each analysis we examine relationships separately for each cohort (age 22, 26, and 30 in 1999).

3 Results

What is the relationship between gender role attitudes that emphasise men's participation in the home and men's and women's views of the costs and benefits of becoming parents? Is it the same for men and women? And do attitudes about the costs and benefits of children affect whether these young adults become parents? We address these questions in the next sections.

3.1 Costs and Benefits of Children

There is a strong relationship for both men and women between holding more egalitarian attitudes and views about the costs and benefits of children, but the patterns differ by gender (Table 2). Among men, those holding more egalitarian, home-centred attitudes are less concerned with the costs of parenthood than are men with less traditional views about men's and women's roles in the home and family, but gender role attitudes have no effect on men's perceptions of the benefits of parenthood. These effects are particularly marked among men who were older at the original survey (data not presented).

Among women, in contrast, holding egalitarian views does not have a significant effect on their perceived costs of parenthood (an effect significantly different from that for men), but significantly reduces their appreciation of the benefits of parenthood (which is also significantly different from the effect for men). Among women, this effect is most marked among women who were in their early to mid-twenties at the original survey (data not presented).

Table 2:
Factors affecting attitudes towards the costs and benefits of children

Predictor variables	Costs of parenthood		Benefits of parenthood	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Men (pooled regression)	0.55*		0.45*	
Egalitarian gender attitudes	-0.50 *	0.03 #	0.02	-0.66* ##
Partnership status (ref=no partner)				
steady partner	-0.11	-0.14	-0.13	-0.09
cohabiting partner	-0.43 *	-0.09	0.18	0.22
Married	-0.45	-0.16	0.37	-0.04
Educational level (ref=basic)				
Upper secondary	0.27	-0.27#	-0.02	-0.11
Lower post-secondary	0.14	0.05	-0.23	-0.25
Upper post-secondary	-0.09	0.02	-0.18	-0.33
Metropolitan residence	-0.09	0.11	0.04	0.03
Why left home (ref=live with partner)				
Nonfamily living	0.10	0.25	0.04	-0.09
Still at home in 1999	0.07	-0.12	0.41	0.22
Age (ref=22)				
26	0.02	0.15	-0.40*	-0.28^
30	0.13	0.33 ^	-0.32^	-0.44*

* p < 0.05

p < 0.05 for gender interaction

^ 0.10 > p > 0.05

0.05 < p < 0.01 for gender interaction

One interpretation of the reduced costs perceived by more egalitarian men is that they are less concerned about being the good provider. An examination of the components of the costs scale, however, reveals that this is not the case; men's gender role attitudes have no effect on their economic concerns. Instead, the result reflects the fact that it is men with more traditional gender role attitudes in Sweden rather than men who expect to be actively involved fathers who are concerned that children will limit their personal freedom and reduce their time with friends. Earlier analysis of the 1999 survey data (Bernhardt 2001) indicates that there is a clear relationship between attitudes towards family and work, on the one hand, and the attitude to shared responsibility for home and children, on the other. Men with career ambitions prefer a family situation where the woman takes the greatest responsibility for home and children, and either does not work at all outside the home or works part-time. For women, on the other hand, a pronounced work ambition leads to a very strong preference for the gender equality model. So career ambition, perhaps in combination with an unwillingness to be tied down too early with major family responsibilities, makes young men

with less egalitarian attitudes perceive greater costs from a possible transition to fatherhood.

Among women, the results are more straightforward, as both components of the benefits scale are affected similarly by holding more egalitarian attitudes. Women who think that men should share equally in the care of the home and children are less likely to think that having a child will make their lives more meaningful. They also do not expect that it would improve the relationship with their partner. The result for “meaningful life” indicates that motherhood is clearly less central in the role constellation of more egalitarian women than Lesthaeghe and others who interpret gender role egalitarianism as part of individualism and weakened family centrality expect. The result for improving relationship quality with the partner suggests that even in Sweden, with its many egalitarian men, it is the case that men’s new roles in the home are not fully institutionalised, so that egalitarian women are likely to recognise that the addition of a child to their relationship on balance will stress their partner relationship more than improve it.

Beyond these patterns, there are relatively few effects of the control variables on the costs and benefits of children, unlike in the United States. Men with cohabiting partners are significantly less concerned about the costs of parenthood than those without a partner, and the coefficient is of similar size among the few married men. As with gender role attitudes, these effects are entirely the result of concerns about having less freedom and less time, rather than about money. It is interesting to note that when we consider costs, there are also some similar, although only weakly significant, effects for women. Apparently, those who are already cohabiting sense that they have enough personal freedom, compared with those not in a partnership, so that adding a child does not seem to be problematic (data not presented).

Advancing age increases women’s concerns about the costs of parenthood and reduces both men’s and women’s appreciation of the benefits of parenthood. These effects, however, are most likely due to selection, as those still childless at age 26, and even more so at 30, will be a select group of those least enthusiastic about the benefits of parenthood. Among women, what is growing with age vis-à-vis cost issues is concern over the financial costs of children, rather than the time costs, suggesting that either a more realistic assessment of children’s true costs is increasing or else alternative goods such as space, vacations, and personal possessions might be increasingly competing with children’s projected costs. Among both men and women, what is reduced with age vis-à-vis appreciation of the benefits of children is the view that the partner relationship would improve, with no correlation between age and the centrality of parenthood. This suggests that it would be good to know the attitudes of the partner, as young adult Swedes who are cohabiting by their mid-20s are likely to be in relatively stable relationships, and are answering questions on the partnership relationship in terms of their specific partner rather than some more general view of how children might cement relationships.

Given these strong gender differences in the effects of gender role attitudes on young adults' assessments of the costs and benefits of children, we wondered whether the growth of more egalitarian attitudes had led to convergence in men's and women's views; hence we interacted gender and egalitarian attitudes in a pooled model. We found that this is the case for the costs of children. For benefits, however, there was greater divergence in men's and women's views among the more egalitarian (Figure 1a and 1b).

Figure 1a:

Gender differences in views of the costs of children by gender role attitudes

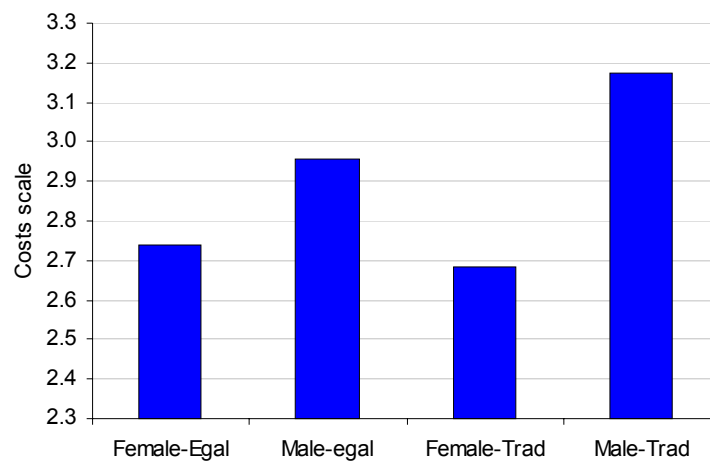
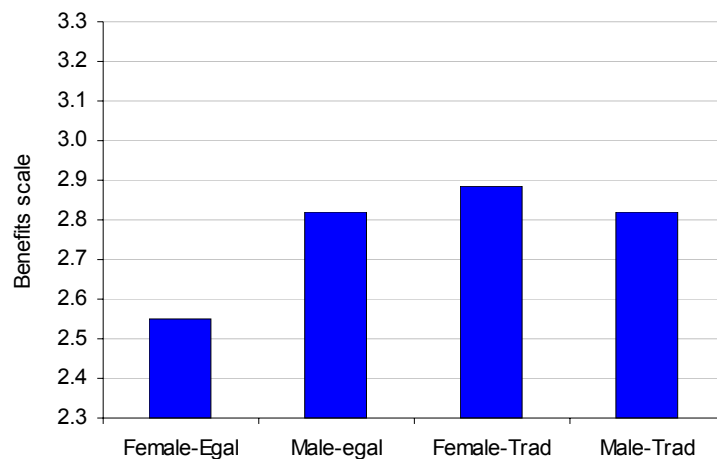


Figure 1b:

Gender differences in views of the benefits of children by gender role attitudes



Men with traditional attitudes toward gender roles, evaluated at the means of the other variables in the model, are considerably more concerned about the costs of children than otherwise comparable women, with a predicted value of nearly 3.2 on the costs scale, while women's predicted value is less than 2.7, a difference of about five tenths on the scale. Young adults with more egalitarian views show considerably smaller differences, just slightly more than two tenths, with men's predicted value dropping to 2.95 and women's increasing slightly to 2.74. Apparently men and women who expect to share the costs of parenthood assess those costs more similarly than those who do not.

This pattern does not appear, however, for assessments of the benefits of children. Rather than leading to convergence, more egalitarian attitudes increase differences between young men and women in their assessments of the benefits of children. Among traditional young adults, both men and women share a high appreciation of the benefits of children, with a difference in predicted values of less than one tenth on the benefits scale score (2.82 for men; 2.89 for women). Among egalitarian young adults, however, while young men have about the same assessments of the benefits of children, young women have a much more negative view, which drops them far below the score predicted for otherwise comparable young men, with a difference of nearly three tenths on the benefits scale (2.55 for women vs. 2.82 for men).

This suggests to us that when egalitarian couples decide to have children, the decisive factor might be the greater enthusiasm of young men, and their willingness to share the costs the couple will incur in the process. Among more traditional couples, in contrast, it is the potential mother's enthusiasm for children's benefits that carries the day. Overall, it is clear, this factor has more power to motivate the transition to parenthood than men's positive view of children in the case of more egalitarian couples, given that, as we will show in the next section of the paper, it is more traditional men who make the transition to parenthood more rapidly, not more egalitarian men.

3.2 The Transition to Early Parenthood

How, then, do these measures of perceived costs and benefits of parenthood affect actually becoming a parent in early adulthood? In this section we examine the transition to parenthood among these same young adults, who were not parents in 1999, between 1999 and 2003. We present the results separately for men and women, and test for appropriate gender interactions (Table 3). We also examined these patterns separately by age, to test whether the effects of attitudes change among older respondents, who are increasingly selective of those most likely to remain childless.

Table 3:
Effects of attitudes on becoming a parent, Cox regression (hazard ratios)

Predictor variables	Males	Females
	N=559	N=603
Men (pooled regression)	0.683**	
Costs of parenthood	0.670 **	0.789**
Benefits of parenthood	1.144	1.311**
Traditional gender attitudes	1.613 *	1.176
Studying between surveys		
< 24 months	0.854	0.377**
24-48 months	0.336 *	0.251 **
Educational level (ref= basic)		
Upper secondary	0.909	1.159
Lower post-secondary	0.674	1.359
Upper post-secondary	1.115	1.053
Employed in 1999	1.208	1.433 ^
Metropolitan residence	0.657 *	0.728*
Why left home (ref=live with partner)		
Nonfamily living	0.658 ^	0.798
Still at home in 1999	0.159 **	0.292 ^
Age (ref=22)		
26	1.497 ^	1.402 ^
30	2.073 **	2.344**

** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; ^ 0.10 > p > 0.05

Swedish young adults' attitudes towards the costs and benefits of children have a strong impact on the odds of their transition to parenthood over the next four years. Increased concern about the costs of children reduces the likelihood of becoming a parent substantially, with each increase on the 5-point scale reducing the odds of becoming a parent by about two thirds for men (odds ratio=.67) and over three quarters for women (odds ratio=.79). More positive views about the benefits of children consistently increase the likelihood of young parenthood, although the effect was stronger for women—and significant only for them. Each increase on the 5-point benefits scale increased the odds of becoming a mother by over 30 per cent (hazard ratio=1.31). These effects characterise each of the three cohorts (who were aged 22, 26, and 30 in 1999), suggesting that selectivity was not affecting them.

Interestingly, attitudes towards gender roles that assign the responsibility for home and family to women (traditionalism) increased the likelihood that men became parents over this 4-year period, but had no effect on this transition for

women. Such men had more than 60% greater odds of becoming first-time fathers in the interval, compared with men who feel that men should share the responsibilities of home and family with women (odds ratio = 1.61), with similar results for each cohort. This suggests that the greater gender egalitarianism of Swedish men may be reducing Swedish fertility, or at least contributing to the postponement of childbearing.

We examined several variant models in order to see the extent to which this impact of gender roles on parenthood was influenced by the inclusion of the measures of the costs and benefits of parenthood (data not presented). Omitting measures of costs and/or benefits of parenthood increased the effect of gender role traditionalism for women, but never to the point of significance. For men, when the measure of costs was excluded, the effect of holding traditional gender role attitudes was weaker (odds of 1.37) and, though still substantial, no longer significant. Adding measures of the benefits of parenthood does not change these results. Hence, including measures of the costs of parenthood increases the effect of gender roles on the odds of parenthood for men, but including measures of benefits has no effect.

When we consider the effects of the control variables, few unexpected results appear. About two of five of the young men and women spent much of the intervening time in school, which strongly reduces the odds of becoming a parent for both sexes. Educational attainment has insignificant effects for the group as a whole, but this masks considerable age differences in impact among young men (but not young women). For young men, higher educational attainment leads to a lower likelihood of becoming a father among those who were age 22 in 1999, relative to those with less education, but the relationship is reversed among those age 30 in 1999. Holding a job in 1999 had relatively little impact, likely because this information was not updated.

Those living in large metropolitan areas were less likely than those living in smaller communities to become parents during the 4-year period, and this is not a timing effect, as it appeared for each of the cohorts. Similarly, those still living with their parents at the original survey were less likely to become parents, perhaps reflecting delayed entry into the partner market, or some degree of ill health (as very few young adult Swedes live with their parents after age 22).

Approaching and passing age 30 has a powerful and positive effect on the transition to parenthood, as the coefficients for age indicate. The likelihood of becoming a parent increases dramatically with age, with about equal effects for young men and young women. This is an important indicator of gender equality in the early life course, as in most countries women's childbearing intensity is greater than men's during early adulthood.

In Table 3 we have not included any information about partnership status (neither in 1999, nor time-varying between the surveys), despite its obvious relevance for childbearing behaviour. We suspected that men with traditional gender attitudes might be more likely to partner early, and that it is the effect of

actually having partnered that we see in Table 3. However, including a partner status variable (not partnered, steady partner, cohabiting partner, or married in 1999) in the hazard regression of becoming a parent (results not shown), one finds that the effect of traditional gender attitudes is virtually unchanged and the effect of benefits becomes significant for males. (In addition, the effect of 'why left home' disappears, and the effect of age 30 weakens.) For women, the changes are even more minor, except that the weakly significant effect of employment in 1999 disappears. We therefore conclude that the positive effect for men of traditional gender attitudes is not an effect of early partnering.

4 Discussion

In this paper, we examined the effects of holding more egalitarian gender role attitudes, which stress the importance of men sharing equally in the care of home and children, on men's and women's attitudes towards the costs and benefits of children, and in turn, how these assessments influenced the transition to parenthood. A survey of young adults living in Sweden provided information about their attitudes toward gender roles and parenthood in 1999 and evidence of making the transition to parenthood by 2003.

We found that gender role attitudes measured in this way had strong effects on assessments of parenthood's costs and benefits, and also on the transition to parenthood, even after controlling for the assessment of costs and benefits. Young men with more egalitarian attitudes saw fewer costs to parenthood, with no effect for women; young women with more egalitarian attitudes saw fewer benefits to parenthood, with no effect for men.

Attitudes about costs and benefits had similar effects on the transition to parenthood for young men and young women, but gender role attitudes continued to differentiate them, with more traditional men making the transition to parenthood more rapidly than egalitarian men, while, contrary to expectations based on conventional wisdom, women's gender role attitudes had little effect on their transition to parenthood.

These findings suggest that it is important to understand the progress of gender role attitude change in the context of modern fertility levels, given the dramatic fertility declines that have occurred in many European countries, particularly in countries marked by strong gender differences in gender roles and gender role attitudes. These results must be interpreted with caution, however, given the limitations of the data. Although the proportions who participated in the original survey are relatively high, as are the proportions who were reinterviewed, cumulatively the sample has become increasingly less representative of Sweden's young adults as they enter the twenty-first century. These respondents are also still relatively young, and have considerably more time to make the transition to parenthood. It is likely that the factors that lead to relatively early parenthood (in

one's 20s and very early 30s) differ from those that lead persons who are closer to the modal ages of parenthood, or even older, to make this transition, although there did not appear to be major differences between those in their early vs. late twenties.

Moreover, lacking partner data on attitudes we are unable to say whether the effects of the attitude variables on the transition to parenthood primarily reflect the view of the respondent. The earlier transition among men with more traditional gender role attitudes may mostly reflect their tendency to partner with traditional women who are enthusiastic about becoming mothers early, and vice versa. Although egalitarian attitudes had no effect on women, it may be that it is the combination of attitudes that matters. Assessing this possibility would require couple data, such as those analysed by Thomson and Hoem (1998).

Nevertheless, the present analysis is more than suggestive. In a country that is arguably furthest along the trajectory of the gender revolution and that provides substantial supports to families and to men who wish to incorporate active fathering more firmly in their lives, it still seems to be the case that egalitarian attitudes, even among men, are delaying the transition to parenthood. Creating new role structures is difficult, even when both partners have the best intentions (Mahony 1995, Björnberg 2004). Further, egalitarian attitudes are much more common than egalitarian behaviour, in Sweden as elsewhere (Bernhardt, Noack and Lyngstad 2006), and it is behaviour (taking parental leave, sharing household tasks) that previous research shows increases childbearing. With only information about attitudes, researchers are in the same position as the women involved, reluctant to trust in men's commitment to sharing child care.

For couples, moving from attitudes to behaviour is likely to encounter the incomplete state of gender role egalitarianism in Sweden, particularly among employers in the private sector (Haas 1992). Although the proportion of fathers taking some parental leave has increased over the years (parental rather than maternal leave was introduced in 1974), they still use less than one-fifth of all parental-leave days during a year (Oláh and Bernhardt forthcoming). Shared parenting might be the ideal for an overwhelming majority of young adults, but when it comes to actual sharing, as much as 36 per cent of the fathers, and 46 per cent of the mothers report that 'she does most' (Bernhardt and Goldscheider 2005). As we found in this paper, Sweden, while being the one of the most gender-equal countries in the world according to the United Nations Empowerment Index in 2004, still has some way to go before the gender revolution is completed, when men share the responsibility for home and children equally with their female partners just as women increasingly share the provider role.

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