Changing families, unchanging attitudes: The effect of family transitions on gender role attitudes in Sweden

Gayle Kaufman[a]

and

Eva Bernhardt[b]

Paper presented at the European Population Conference in June 2012

[a] Department of Sociology, Davidson College, Davidson, NC 28035 USA;

gakaufman@davidson.edu; 17048942485 (telephone); 17048942881 (fax)

[b] Department of Sociology, Stockholm University, SE-106 91, Stockholm, Sweden;

eva.bernhardt@sociology.su.se

ABSTRACT

Sweden is a society known for its emphasis on gender equality. Yet, previous research finds that attitudes are affected by life course transitions. Given the prevalence of cohabitation and later marriage and childbearing, this study examines the effect of family transitions on changes in gender role attitudes. We ask whether egalitarian attitudes can withstand changing family dynamics in Sweden. Using longitudinal data from the Young Adult Panel Study, we find few effects of family transitions on changes in gender role attitudes in Sweden. Across seven different transitions and three measures of gender role attitudes, there are only two significant findings. We conclude that the gender roles of Swedish young adults are fairly immune to union and parenthood transitions.

Keywords: Gender role attitudes; marriage; divorce; childbearing; Sweden

1. Introduction

It is well known that Western countries have experienced rapid changes in family patterns over the past decades, with postponement of childbearing, more cohabitation and less marriage, and higher risks of separation or divorce. Billari and Liefbroer (2010) propose a "new European pattern" that features late, protracted, and complex transitions to adulthood, including high rates of cohabitation and late entry to marriage and childbirth. This process of family change has spread from Northern Europe to the rest of the developed world (Lesthaeghe, 2010; Lesthaeghe & Neidert, 2006). The concept of the Second Demographic Transition relates these changes in family formation behavior to ideational changes which emphasize the importance of individual autonomy, self-actualization and independence. But the central concepts of autonomy and self-realisation are not gender-neutral, but have markedly different meanings – and implications – for men and women (Bernhardt, 2004). Taking into account norms and attitudes about gender equality – in the public and in the private sphere – would therefore seem to be very useful for understanding recent family trends in industrialized countries.

It has been argued that there is a "coming reconfiguration of the value system to give higher priority to caregiving in relation to productive work" (Giele & Holst, 2004, p. 19), which moves gender ideology more and more towards equality. More specifically, changing family patterns such as increases in cohabitation along with delayed marriage and childbearing may contribute to the decline in traditional values, prompting greater acceptance of gender equality (Bumpass, 1990). Even among Western countries, Sweden is notable in its emphasis on gender equality. Sweden provides a unique context given specific government efforts to promote gender equality (Oláh & Bernhardt, 2008). Specific family policies related to childcare and parental

leave encourage women's greater participation in employment and men's greater participation in childrearing, goals that promote gender equality (Earles, 2011). In addition, Swedish men and women hold generally positive attitudes toward gender equality at home (Bernhardt, Noack, & Lyngstad, 2008). Moreover, Sweden is often regarded as a forerunner in the Second Demographic Transition, with high frequency of cohabitation, late childbearing, and high breakup rates (Sobotka, 2008, Oláh & Bernhardt, 2008). Thus, on a societal level there seems to be a clear relationship between 'modern family patterns' and gender equality, both in the structural and normative sense of the word. However, it is less obvious that the same relationship holds on the individual level. In this paper we focus the analysis on how the individual's attitudes to gender equality are influenced by different types of life-course transitions, in a society where gender equality both in the public and the private sphere is strongly normative.

Several individual-level studies have found that family transitions such as entering (or leaving) a co-residential relationship, getting married, or having children are strongly related to attitudes and ideals (Axinn & Thornton, 2000; Surkyn & Lesthaeghe, 2002). Most existing studies of the relationship between attitudes and demographic behavior examine the effect of attitudes on behavior. Fewer studies consider the effect of behavior on attitudes. Of course, as Moors (1997, 2003) argues, there is a reciprocal relationship between what he calls 'value orientations' and family transitions. This study examines the influence of family transitions, including marriage, divorce, and childbearing, on changes in gender role attitudes. Thus it contributes to the underresearched area of the influence of life-course transitions on attitudes.

While much of the previous research utilizes cross-sectional data and examines a limited set of transitions and gender role attitudes, our use of the Swedish Young Adult Panel Survey allows us to address these issues on a longitudinal basis. First, we have survey data from two

waves, spanning six years during young adulthood, in which individuals are undergoing various family transitions. We are thus able to directly test whether changes in family status result in changing gender role attitudes. Second, this study goes beyond previous research in considering multiple measures of gender role attitudes. We consider gender equality across three dimensions: work, family, and work-family intersections. We also have detailed data on union formation and dissolution as well as childbearing. Finally, our focus on Sweden allows us to determine whether gender role attitudes are stable or not in a highly egalitarian country. To the best of our knowledge, there is no previous study of this kind.

2. Background and hypotheses

A common definition of an *attitude* is the one formulated by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), namely a pre-disposition to respond to a particular object in a generally favorable or unfavorable way. Attitudes, or value orientations, can be more or less stable over time. Schwarz (2007) discusses whether people 'have' enduring attitudes or construct automatic and deliberate evaluative judgments on the spot. According to Moors (1997, p. 3) "important transitions in the life-course imply re-socialization of value orientations." In this paper we focus on attitudes to gender equality, and to what extent individuals become more or less egalitarian in their attitudes, following different changes in family status, but there is a fairly extensive literature on changes over time in other types of attitudes, mostly by psychologists or social psychologists (for reviews of this research area, see Eagly & Chaiken, 2005; Petty, Wegener, & Fabrigar, 1997; Tesser & Shaffer, 1990).

The "object" or "preferred end-state" (Moors, 1997) in our study is the individual's notion about how a cohabiting couple ought to share housework, childcare and/or providing roles. Egalitarian attitudes imply that the man and the woman in a couple are equally involved in paid work outside the home, and that they share housework and childcare. McDonald (2000) refers to this as "gender equity," while Esping-Andersen (2009) talks about "gender equalization." We prefer to think of this as the result of the second, or familistic, half of the gender revolution (Goldscheider, 2012), where in the first stage women joined men in the new opportunities for self and family support in the labor market, and the second half, just beginning, involves men's joining women in the tasks of making a home and raising children. Giele (2004) refers to gender role innovators, with women valuing career achievement and men valuing children and families.

Gender role attitudes have been the focus of substantial research, primarily among sociologists, for the past fifty years or so (Kiecolt, 1988; Mason & Lu, 1988; Scott et al., 1996; Tallichet & Willits, 1986; Zuo & Tang, 2000). However, there seems to be relatively few studies of how changes in family status, such as childbearing and partnership formation/dissolution, affect gender role attitudes. One important reason for this is of course the relative scarcity of longitudinal data, which include information on attitudes for at least two occasions, as well as information on intervening demographic events.

This is important, since analyses of cross-sectional data do not permit the distinguishing of *selection* and *adaptation* effects (Lesthaeghe & Moors, 2002). To study the dual process of selection and adaptation it is necessary to have access to panel data, which is "the most appropriate design for capturing the dynamics of recursive causation over time" (op.cit. p. 2). Values and norms are predictive of later behaviour, and studies of the selection process (how

values affect later family transitions) are relatively frequent (Barber et al., 2002; Bernhardt & Goldscheider, 2006; Clarkberg et al., 1995; Kaufman, 2000; Torr & Short, 2004). But values also change as behaviour changes. The reverse causal effect, namely the issue of values adaptation (either reinforcement or negation) has been less frequently documented.

There are, however, a number of studies using cross-sectional data to investigate the relationship between family status at a specific point in time, on the one hand, and gender role attitudes, on the other. For example, married men and women are less supportive of equality in gender roles and family responsibilities (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004) and instead tend to be more supportive of traditional family roles (Gubernskaya, 2010). Moreover, divorced women hold more egalitarian attitudes than married women (Forste & Heaton, 2004). But the causality here is unclear – are women with more egalitarian attitudes more likely to get divorced, or is it the experience of getting divorced that makes women more egalitarian in their attitudes?

Other cross-sectional studies of family status and attitudes, focusing on unmarried individuals, generally find that this status is associated with more liberal attitudes (Pitt & Borland, 2008; Waite, Goldscheider, & Witsberger, 1986). These researchers argue that living independently creates an opportunity to move away from traditional roles and therefore develop more egalitarian attitudes. Unmarried women experience increasing non-traditionalism (Waite et al., 1986). While Waite et al. (1986) find no effect of living independently on men's gender role attitudes, and they suggest that men are expected to be more independent. However, almost twenty years later, Pitt and Borland (2008) find that living independently does have a liberalizing influence on men's gender role attitudes.

Several studies find a relationship between having children and more traditional attitudes (Cunningham et al., 2005; Davis, 2007; Fan & Marini, 2000). Indeed, married parents tend to

hold the least egalitarian attitudes (Davis & Greenstein, 2009). Nevertheless, there is some suggestion that the relationship between children and feminist attitudes is changing, at least among women. Bolzendahl and Myers (2004) find that American women with children in the late 1990s held more liberal attitudes toward gender roles and family responsibilities than childless women. They suggest that this finding supports interest-based explanations in that women with children would benefit from a more equal division of labor.

Moving to studies using panel data, Moors (1998) found that women transitioning out of cohabitation and into marriage readjust their views on economic autonomy and personal freedom of choice while those who continued to live in cohabitational relationships reinforced those attitudes. Likewise, getting married and/or having children resulted in a return to classic family values, but continued cohabitation made women less family oriented. Thus, there is some evidence that individuals adapt their attitudes to changes in family status. For example, Cunningham and Thornton (2005a, 2005b) find that union formation and dissolution can affect attitudes towards these family roles. Lesthaeghe and Moors (2002) find that those who cohabit and those who have experienced the dissolution of a cohabiting or marital partnership hold value orientations that are less conformist while those who are married hold more conformist attitudes. Cunningham et al. (2005) also find a negative relationship between egalitarian attitudes and early marriage and parenthood. While it is not always clear what the mechanisms are behind behaviour's influence on attitudes, there seems to be considerable empirical support for an important effect in this direction (Clarkberg, 2002).

We have found very few studies that use panel data to study the relationship between changes in family status and attitudes to gender roles. Two recent exceptions are the papers by Corrigall and Konrad (2007) and Cunningham et al. (2005). The former examines the impact of

early gender role attitudes on later career outcomes for women and men, as well as the impact of marriage, children and labor market outcomes on changes in gender role attitudes. Finding that children were negatively associated with later gender egalitarianism for both women and men, they concluded that gender role attitudes are adjusted to accommodate situational constraints. Cunningham et. al. (2005), using data from a 31-year panel study, investigate the reciprocal relationship between individuals' gender role attitudes and, for example, entry into marriage and marital parenthood. They found little evidence that factors shaping men's and women's attitudes differed. Neither did their results support a hypothesis that entry into marriage should influence individuals' gender role attitudes. This is contrary to the findings of Barber and Axinn (1998) and Moors (2003), also based on longitudinal data, that women become more traditional when they get married.

In this paper we are able to study change (or stability) in gender role attitudes among young adults in Sweden, arguably one of the most gender-equal societies in the world (Esping-Andersen, 2009; Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2008). Since we have longitudinal data, we can study change over time for the same individuals. We focus on family transitions as the main explanatory variable, i.e. union formation and dissolution, as well as the transition to parenthood. As these transitions are of fundamental importance in the lives of individuals, we expect that there will be some impact on their value orientations with regard to gender equality, in particular in the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, countries with more liberal welfare regimes experience a smaller effect of family change on attitudes than more conservative gender regimes (Gubernskaya, 2010) and thus the effects might be rather weak in a gender-equal society like contemporary Sweden. Based on earlier research findings we are thus able to formulate the following hypotheses:

H1: The transition from single to cohabiting or married weakens the support for egalitarian attitudes, more so for marriage than for cohabitation.

H2: The transition to parenthood likewise tends to change gender role attitudes in a more traditional direction.

H3: Union dissolution, on the other hand, will strengthen support for egalitarian attitudes.

H4: These effects are relatively weak in Sweden where gender equality is strongly normative.

3. Data and methods

3.1 Data

Data for this research come from the Young Adult Panel Study (www.suda.su.se/yaps). This study concentrates on young adults in the prime ages for cohabitation, marriage, and childbearing. Data were collected by Statistics Sweden via both mail and web surveys conducted in 1999, 2003, and 2009. The first survey was conducted in spring 1999 with a sampling frame based on three cohorts, at the time aged 22, 26, and 30 years old. The response rate was 65% for a total of 2820 respondents. In spring 2003, a second survey was sent to the original participants as well as a new cohort of 22 years old, which resulted in a total of four cohorts (born in 1968, 1972, 1976, and 1980). With the additional cohort and a response rate of 72%, the total number of respondents in 2003 was 2816. In spring 2009, a third survey was sent to all those who had

participated in one or both of the previous surveys. The response rate was 56%, resulting in 1986 respondents. The sample for the current study consists of all those who participated in both the second and third waves, and the sample size is 1794 participants, with 1042 females and 752 males. Particularly relevant to this study, in 2003, there were 688 single individuals, 736 cohabiting individuals, and 370 married individuals, and 1137 had no children.

3.2 Variables

Our focus is on change in gender role attitudes among young adults experiencing union and child transitions. As such, our dependent variable is gender role attitudes in 2009, controlling for gender role attitudes in 2003. We have three measures of gender role attitudes that focus on work, family, and work-family related dimensions. First, we consider gender role attitudes related to work life. We measure *job equality* with a two-item scale: "Men can do as well as women in caring jobs" and "Women can do as well as men in technical jobs." Cronbach's Alpha is .858. The scale ranges from 2 to 10, with higher values indicating more egalitarian attitudes. Second, we consider gender role attitudes related to family roles. We measure *division of labor* with a two-item scale: "The woman should take the main responsibility for housework" (reverse coded) and "The man should be the main supporter of the family" (reverse coded). Cronbach's Alpha is .835. Again, the scale ranges from 2 to 10, with higher values indicating more egalitarian attitudes. Third, we consider gender role attitudes related to work-family issues. We measure this with a single-item scale called *family leave*, based on the statement: "Parents should share parental leave equally." Responses range from 'don't agree at all' (1) to 'agree completely'(5). It is important to note that young adults in Sweden tend to have highly

egalitarian attitudes though there tends to be more support for gender equality in the separate realms of work and family than regarding shared parental leave.

This study seeks to understand the influence of union and family transitions on changes in gender role attitudes. As such, our main independent variables are measured as transitions between 2003 and 2009. Union formation and dissolution is measured by starting with the respondent's union status in 2003. Those who were single in 2003 could make the following transitions: cohabiting in 2009, married in 2009, cohabited and broke up by 2009 (and any other multiple transitions). Those who remained single throughout the time period were placed in the reference category. Those who were cohabiting in 2003 could make the following transitions: married their partner by 2009 or broke up with their partner by 2009 (including those who broke up and entered other unions, which may themselves have broken up). Those who remained cohabiting with their same partner from 2003 were placed in the reference category. Finally, those who were married in 2003 could have divorced or separated from their spouse. Since there were so few divorces, all respondents who split with their spouse regardless of subsequent transitions were placed together. Those who remained married were placed in the reference category. Therefore, the reference category consists of those respondents who did not experience any union transition between 2003 and 2009. Transition to parenthood was measured using information on the timing of the birth of children. Those respondents who were childless in 2003 and had a first child between 2003 and 2009 were coded as having a child.

We control for gender, cohort (1972, 1976, and 1980, with 1968 as the reference category), college degree, and income (logged). We also control for gender role attitudes as measured in 2003 (using the same questions and scales as those used in 2009). Table 1 provides descriptive statistics on the independent variables.

[Table 1 about here]

3.3 Analytical strategy

In order to analyze the effect of family transitions on gender role attitudes, we estimate OLS regression models of gender role attitudes in 2009, controlling for gender role attitudes in 2003, union and parenthood transitions between 2003 and 2009, gender, cohort, education, and income. By controlling for gender role attitudes in 2003, we are able to model *change* in gender role attitudes (Evertsson, 2012). Given our three attitudinal measures, we run three separate models, and we also run models separately for men and women.

4. Results

4.1 Attitudes toward gender roles in 2003 and 2009

Table 2 shows gender role attitudes in 2003 and 2009. Not surprisingly, Swedish young adults hold very egalitarian ideals. On all dimensions of gender role attitudes, a majority favor egalitarianism. Comparing the means of gender role attitudes in 2003 and 2009, we find that attitude change varies depending on the measure. Regarding family roles and the division of labor, young Swedish adults' attitudes became even more egalitarian in this time period. However, belief in sharing parental leave equally became less egalitarian during this period, though the dominant ideology is still one of equality. Finally, attitudes concerning job equality changed little over these six years.

[Table 2 about here]

4.2 Union and parenthood transitions between 2003 and 2009

In 2003, 38.4 percent of our sample was single, 41 percent was cohabiting, and 20.6 percent was married (see Table 1). While there was a good deal of stability in status, there were also transitions, and sometimes multiple transitions. Among those who were single in 2003, 32 percent entered a cohabiting union (and remained in this union), 13 percent got married (mostly via cohabitation first), 14 percent entered a union and broke up at least once, and 41 percent remained single throughout the time period. Among those who were cohabiting in 2003, 36 percent married their partner from 2003, 19 percent split with their partner, and 45 percent remained with their partner. Only 10 percent of those who were married in 2003 split with their partner by 2009. Finally, 48 percent of those who did not have a child in 2003 had their first child by 2009.

4.3 Gender role attitudes by gender, union and parenthood transitions

Table 3 shows gender role attitudes in 2009 by gender, union transitions, and parenthood transition. Females score significantly higher than males on two of the gender role attitudes scales, measuring attitudes toward job equality and division of labor. However, males and females have very similar attitudes regarding parental leave. There are few associations between family transitions and gender role attitudes. Those who separated from their spouse between 2003 and 2009 have significantly more egalitarian attitudes toward parental leave than those who

stayed married. Unexpectedly, those who became parents between 2003 and 2009 score higher on the division of labor attitude scale than those who did not make this transition. There are no significant differences in the gender role attitudes of those who were single or cohabiting in 2003 based on union transitions by 2009.

[Table 3 about here]

4.4 Multivariate results

Tables 4, 5, and 6 show results from OLS regression models of gender role attitudes in 2009, controlling for gender role attitudes in 2003. As such, models indicate *change* in gender role attitudes between 2003 and 2009. Separate models were run for each of the three measures of gender role attitudes. In addition, models were run separately for males and females.

[Tables 4, 5, and 6 about here]

The main finding is that there are surprisingly few significant findings regarding family transitions and changes in gender role attitudes. Looking at the full models, of the 21 coefficients measuring the effects of union and parenthood transitions on change in gender role attitudes, only two coefficients – one union transition and one parenthood transition – were significant. First, those who were cohabiting in 2003 and broke up with their partner by 2009 became more egalitarian in terms of job equality than those who remained cohabiting with their same partner. Those who broke up scored almost one-quarter point higher on this scale than those who remained with their cohabiting partner. Second, becoming a parent had a significant negative effect on attitudes toward parental leave. Those who had their first child between 2003 and 2009

scored .22 point lower on the parental leave attitudes scale than those who did not make this transition.

When we focus on the models for women and men, we see that these two transition effects were limited to either men or women. Specifically, the effect of breaking up with a cohabiting partner was limited to men. Cohabiting men who broke up with their partner by 2009 scored almost four-tenths of a point higher on the job equality scale than cohabiting men who stayed together with their partner. On the other hand, the effect of having a first child was limited to women. Women who became parents between 2003 and 2009 scored almost one-quarter of a point lower on the parental leave scale than women who did not make this transition.

Apart from these two findings all other transition variables were insignificant. There was no effect of entering into a union, regardless of type, on attitudes. In other words, single individuals who entered a cohabiting union or married and cohabiting individuals who married their partners did not experience any change in their gender role attitudes. Furthermore, while all coefficients for those who divorced were in the expected positive direction, none were significant, indicating that separating from one's spouse had no effect on gender role attitudes.

The control variables had some significant effects on changes in gender role attitudes. Gender had some impact on change in attitudes. As in the bivariate tests, women were significantly more likely than men to become more egalitarian in terms of job equality and the division of labor. In the full model, cohort had little effect with one exception. Those born in 1972 became significantly more egalitarian than those born in 1968 regarding attitudes toward job equality. When we consider the models by gender, we see that cohort effects were limited to men. In each case, younger cohorts of men become more egalitarian over time compared to the oldest cohort of men. Education had the most consistent effect, showing a significant positive

relationship in all three full models. In all cases, those who have a college education became significantly more egalitarian than those with less education. These findings generally hold up when we run separate models for women and men. Income logged had no significant effects on changing gender role attitudes in any model. As one would expect, the comparable gender role attitude scale in 2003 was positively associated with attitudes in 2009.

One final note in looking across the models is that of variation in explanatory power of the three measures of gender role attitudes. The model of change in family attitudes as measured by attitudes toward the division of labor has the highest adjusted R-square value, explaining about 29 percent of variation in the change in attitudes. This is the case even though education is the only significant coefficient apart from earlier attitudes for both men and women. Yet, the men's model explains 31 percent of variation in the change in attitudes compared to 24 percent for the women's model. Along with the higher coefficient for attitudes in 2003, this suggests that men's attitudes concerning family roles are more stable over time than women's attitudes. While the full models for the other two attitudinal variables explain around one-fifth of the variation in change in attitudes, there are some notable gender differences. Concerning changes in attitudes toward work roles, it seems that men's characteristics are more influential in explaining variation. Specifically, cohort, education, and cohabitation dissolution are significantly related to change in men's attitudes while none of these factors significantly affect women's attitudes. On the other hand, women's characteristics, including education and parenthood transition, explain a bit more variation in change in parental leave attitudes than men's characteristics.

5. Conclusion

In this study of how family transitions affect gender role attitudes in gender-equal Sweden, we find little evidence that important life-course transitions, such as marriage, separations and childbirth, cause re-socialization of values orientations, so-called adaptation. While there already exists ample evidence of the prevalence of egalitarian attitudes in Sweden (Baxter & Kane, 1995; Bernhardt, Noack, & Lyngstad, 2008; Motiejunaite & Kravchenko, 2008), our study provides evidence that these egalitarian attitudes are fairly stable.

This is consistent with Gubernskaya's (2010) finding that family change has a smaller effect on the attitudes of those living in countries with more liberal welfare regimes, such as Sweden, than more conservative gender regimes. It may be that the "new European pattern" of adult transitions (Billari & Liefbroer, 2010) has taken root in Sweden to such an extent that these transitions no longer greatly impact broader ideals of gender equality. Indeed, Sweden may have reached what Giele and Holst (2004) refer to as "value generalization" in which cultural priorities value gender equality in caregiving as well as employment. The fact that gender equality is not only the dominant ideology but also practiced 'on the ground' (Hausmann et al., 2008) also helps explain why gender role attitudes are so persistently egalitarian. Bolzendahl and Myers (2004) suggest that mothers may have more liberal attitudes because they would benefit from the enactment of such equality at home. We argue that this same interest-based explanation may apply more generally to young Swedish adults who are looking to live the equality they believe. At this stage then, it would seem that values are less influenced by changes in family status.

There are, however, some exceptions to the generally small and insignificant effects of family transitions on changes in gender role attitudes. In particular, we find only partial support for our third hypothesis, that union dissolution will strengthen support for egalitarian attitudes.

Specifically, men who were cohabiting in 2003 but then broke up with their partner became more in favor of gender equality in terms of work roles than men who remained with their cohabiting partner through 2009. This is consistent with Lesthaeghe and Moors' (2002) finding that those who have experienced the dissolution of a cohabiting union hold value orientations that are less conformist. Nevertheless, on the whole, those who separated from their partners, whether they were single men and women in 2003 who entered and dissolved a union, were cohabiting women in 2003 who broke up with their partner, or were married men and women in 2003 who separated or divorced their spouse, largely did not experience a large shift in attitudes over this time period.

Likewise, we find limited support for our second hypothesis, that the transition to parenthood tends to change gender role attitudes in a more traditional direction. Specifically, women who had their first child between waves became less in favor of sharing parental leave equally. This finding is consistent with several previous studies that find a negative relationship between having children and egalitarian attitudes (Cunningham et al., 2005; Davis, 2007; Fan & Marini, 2000). However, there is some recent evidence that parenthood affects Swedish men's behavior in a similar way as Swedish women, including increasing time on housework (Dribe & Stanfors, 2009). Given this move toward greater equality among mothers and fathers, it seems reasonable that the transition to parenthood among Swedish young adults would have little effect on changes in gender role attitudes. Indeed, men's attitudes are not affected at all by the transition to parenthood and women's attitudes concerning work roles and gender equality as well as broader family roles and the division of labor are likewise unaffected by this transition.

While there is limited support for the effects of union dissolution and transition to parenthood, there is no support for a relationship between union formation and gender role attitudes, our first hypothesis. Neither the entry into cohabitation nor the entry to marriage has a

significant effect on changes in any of our three measures of gender role attitudes. While Lesthaeghe and Moors (2002) suggest that marriage encourages more conformist attitudes, our study confirms the lack of evidence for an effect of entry into marriage found by Cunningham et al.'s (2005) in their longitudinal study. Overall, we find the most support for our fourth hypothesis, that the effects of family transitions on gender role attitudes are relatively weak in Sweden.

There are some limitations to the current study. Perhaps the most important limitation in the data is the lack of variation in gender role attitudes. While this is very likely representative of Swedish young adults, it also makes analysis of change in these already highly egalitarian attitudes more difficult. In addition, while we are able to capture many union transitions, there were a couple of groups that had smaller numbers. The young age of this sample paired with the norm of cohabitation meant that few single individuals married in this time frame. Also, divorce rates are rather low leading to a small number of dissolved marriages during this period. Nevertheless, over half of those who were single or cohabiting in 2003 made some union transition by 2009, and a large number of individuals made the transition to parenthood during this time. Furthermore, the data had several other advantages as well. The longitudinal nature of the data allowed us to examine the effect of transitions (rather than statuses) on *changes* in gender role attitudes. The data also contain a rich set of questions that measure multiple dimensions of gender role attitudes. While there were a couple of significant findings regarding transitions and individual measures of attitudes, no transition had a significant effect on even two dimensions of gender role attitudes, which strengthens our conclusion that these transitions generally have little effect on changes in gender role attitudes.

In conclusion, there are surprisingly few effects of family transitions on changes in gender role attitudes in Sweden. The lack of significant findings is important in showing the stability of attitudes in a highly egalitarian society. It seems that the gender roles of Swedish young adults are fairly immune to union and parenthood transitions. These findings suggest two possibilities. First, Swedish co-residential partnerships (whether married or not) are more equal, and mothers and fathers share childcare more equally (Dribe & Stanfors, 2009). Second, even in the face of life course transitions that introduce more traditional gender roles, Swedish young adults have "enduring attitudes" (Schwarz, 2007) and remain believers in gender equality.

References

Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Axinn, W. G., & Thornton, A. (2000). The transformation in the meaning of marriage. In Waite, L., Bachrach, C., Hinden, M., Thompson, E., & Thornton, A. (Eds.). *Ties that bind: Perspectives on marriage and cohabitation*. (pp. 147-165). Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

Barber, J. S., & Axinn, W. G. (1998). Gender role attitudes and marriage among young women. *The Sociological Quarterly, 39,* 11-31.

Barber, J. S., Pearce, L. D., Chaudhury, I., & Gurung, S. (2002). Voluntary associations and fertility limitation. *Social Forces, 80,* 1369-1401.

Baxter, J., & Kane, E. W. (1995). Dependence and independence: A cross-national analysis of gender inequality and gender attitudes. *Gender and Society, 9*, 193-215.

Bernhardt, E. (2004). Is the second demographic transition a useful concept for demography? *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research, 2*, 25-28.

Bernhardt, E., & Goldscheider, F. (2006). Gender equality, parenthood attitudes, and first births in Sweden. *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research, 4*, 19-39.

Bernhardt, E., Noack, T., & Lyngstad, T. (2008). Shared housework in Norway and Sweden: advancing the gender revolution. *Journal of European Social Policy, 18*, 275-288.

Billari, F. C., & Liefbroer, A. C. (2010). Towards a new pattern of transition to adulthood? *Advances in Life Course Research, 15,* 59-75.

Bolzendahl, C. I., & Myers, D. J. (2004). Feminist attitudes and support for gender equality: opinion change in women and men, 1974-1998. *Social Forces, 83,* 759-789.

Bumpass, L. L. (1990). What's happening to the family? Interactions between demographic and institutional change. *Demography, 27,* 483-498.

Clarkberg, M. (2002). Family formation experiences and changing values: The effects of cohabitation and marriage on the important things in life. In Lesthaeghe, R. (Ed.). *Meaning and choice: Value orientations and life course decisions*. (pp. 185-215). The Hague: NIDI-CBGS Publications.

Clarkberg, M., Stolzenberg, R. M., & Waite, L. J. (1995). Attitudes, values, and entrance into cohabitational versus marital unions. *Social Forces, 74,* 609-632.

Corrigall, E. A., & Konrad, A. M. (2007). Gender role attitudes and careers: A longitudinal study. *Sex Roles, 56*, 847-855.

Cunningham, M., Beutel, A. M., Barber, J. S., & Thornton, A. (2005). Reciprocal relationships between attitudes about gender and social contexts during young adulthood. *Social Science Research,* 34, 862-892.

Cunningham, M., & Thornton, A. (2005a). The influence of union transitions on white adults' attitudes toward cohabitation. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 67, 710-720.

Cunningham, M., & Thornton, A. (2005b). The influences of parents' and offsprings' experience with cohabitation, marriage, and divorce on attitudes toward divorce in young adulthood. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage,* 44, 119-144.

Davis, S. N. (2007). Gender ideology construction from adolescence to young adulthood. *Social Science Research, 36*, 1021-1041.

Davis, S. N., & Greenstein, T. N. (2009). Gender ideology: Components, predictors, and consequences. *Annual Review of Sociology, 35,* 88-105.

Dribe, M., & Stanfors, M. (2009). Does parenthood strengthen a traditional household division of labor? *Journal of Marriage and Family, 71,* 33-45.

Eagly, A. H., & Chaiken, S. (2005). Attitude research in the 21st century. In Albarracin, D., Johnson, B. T., & Zanna, M. P. (Eds.). *The handbook of attitudes* (pp. 743-768). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Earles, K. (2011). Swedish family policy – continuity and change in the Nordic welfare state model. *Social Policy & Administration, 45,* 180-193.

Esping-Andersen, G. (2009). *The incomplete revolution: Adapting welfare states to women's new roles*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Evertsson, M. (2012). The importance of work: Changing work commitment following the transition to motherhood. *Acta Sociologica*, forthcoming.

Fan, P., & Marini, M. M. (2000). Influences on gender-role attitudes during the transition to adulthood. *Social Science Research, 29,* 258-283.

Forste, R., & Heaton, T. B. (2004). The divorce generation: Well-being, family attitudes, and socioeconomic consequences of marital disruption. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage and Family, 41,* 95-114.

Giele, J. Z. (2004). Women and men as agents of change in their own lives. *Advances in Life Course Research, 8,* 299-317.

Giele, J. Z., & Holst, E. (2004). New life patterns and changing gender roles. *Advances in Life Course Research, 8,* 3-22.

Gubernskaya, Z. (2010). Changing attitudes toward marriage and children in six countries. *Sociological Perspectives, 53,* 179-200.

Hausmann, R., Tyson, L. D., & Zahidi, S. (2008). *The global gender gap report 2008*. Geneva: World Economic Forum.

Kaufman, G. (2000). Do gender role attitudes matter? Family formation and dissolution among traditional and egalitarian men and women. *Journal of Family Issues, 21,* 128-144.

Kiecolt, K. J. (1988). Recent developments in attitudes and social structure. *Annual Review of Sociology, 14,* 381-403.

Lesthaeghe, R. (2010). The unfolding story of the second demographic transition. *Population and Development Review, 36,* 211-251.

Lesthaeghe, R., & Moors, G. (2002). Life course transitions and value orientations: selection and adaptation. In R. Lesthaeghe (Ed.). *Meaning and choice: Value orientations and life course decisions* (pp. 1-44). The Hague: NIDI/CBGS.

Lesthaeghe, R., & Neidert, L. (2006). The second demographic transition in the United States: Exception or textbook example? *Population and Development Review, 32,* 669-698.

Mason, K. O., & Lu, Y. (1988). Attitudes toward women's familial roles: Changes in the United States, 1977-1985. *Gender & Society, 2,* 39-57.

McDonald, P. (2000). Gender equity, social institutions and the future of fertility. *Journal of Population Research, 17,* 1-16.

Moors, G. (1997). *The dynamics of values-based selection and values adaptation*. IPD Working Paper 1997-4, Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

Moors, G. (2003). Estimating the reciprocal effect of gender role attitudes and family formation: A log-linear path model with latent variables. *European Journal of Population, 19,* 199-221.

Motiejunaite, A., & Kravchenko, Z. (2008). Family policy, employment and gender-role attitudes: a comparative analysis of Russia and Sweden. *Journal of European Social Policy, 18,* 38-49.

Oláh L. Sz., & Bernhardt, E. (2008). Sweden: Combining childbearing and gender equality. In Frejka, T., Sobotka, T., Hoem, J. M., & Toulemon, L. T. (Eds). *Childbearing trends and policies*. (Pp. 1105-1143). Rostock: Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (http://www.demographic-research.org, Special Collections).

Petty, R. E., Wegener, D. T., & Fabrigar, L. R. (1997). Attitudes and attitude change. *Annual Review of Psychology, 48,* 609-647.

Pitt, R. N., & Borland, E. (2008). Bachelorhood and men's attitudes about gender roles. *Journal of Men's Studies, 16,* 140-158.

Schwarz, N. (2007). Attitude construction: Evaluation in context. *Social Cognition, 25,* 638-656.

Scott, J., Alwin, D. F., & Braun, M. (1996). Generational changes in gender-role attitudes: Britain in a cross-national perspective. *Sociology, 30,* 471-492.

Sobotka, T. (2008). The diverse faces of the second demographic transition in Europe. *Demographic Research, 19,* 171-224.

Surkyn, J., & Lesthaeghe, R. (2002). Value orientations and the second demographic transition (SDT) in northern, western and southern Europe: An update. *Demographic Research, Special Collection 3,* 45-86.

Tallichet, S. E., & Willits, P. K. (1986). Gender-role attitude change of young women: Influential factors from a panel study. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 49,* 219-227.

Tesser, A., & Shaffer, D. R. (1990). Attitudes and attitude change. *Annual Review of Psychology, 41,* 479-523.

Torr, B. M., & Short, S. E. (2004). Second births and the second shift: A research note on gender equity and fertility. *Population and Development Review, 30,* 109-130.

Waite, L. J., Goldscheider, F. K., & Witsberger, C. (1986). Nonfamily living and the erosion of traditional family orientations among young adults. *American Sociological Review, 51,* 541-554.

Zuo, J., & Tang, S. (2000). Breadwinner status and gender ideologies of men and women regarding family roles. *Sociological Perspectives, 43,* 29-43.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics on independent variables.	(All numbers are percentages except income)
Gender	
Female	58,1
Male	41,9
Cohort	
1968	22,3
1972	27,0
1976	28,1
1980	22,5
Education	
College degree	42,1
Less than college	57,9
Income (in 100,000 SEK per year)	245,4
Transitions in union status	
Single in 2003	38,4
Cohabited by 2009	32,1
Married by 2009	13,1
Entered and dissolved union by 2009	13,8
Remained single throughout	41,0
Cohabiting in 2003	41,0
Married partner by 2009	36,0
Broke up with partner by 2009	18,9
Remained cohabiting with same partner	45,1
Married in 2003	20,6
Separated/divorced by 2009	9,7
Remained married	90,3
Transition to parenthood	
Had 1st child between 2003 and 2009	27,7
No change in parental status	72,3

Table 2

Gender role attitudes in 2003 and 2009.

	2003	2009	
Gender role attitudes			
Job equality	9,53	9,58	
Division of labor	8,90	9,08	**
Parental leave	3,77	3,65	**

Note: ** p < .01 according to a paired samples t test.

Table 3

Gender role attitudes by gender, union transitions, and parenthood transition.

	Job equality		Division of labor		Parental leave	
Gender						
Female	9,76	**	9,30	**	3,62	
Male	9,31		8,69		3,65	
Transitions in union status by 2009						
Single in 2003						
Cohabited	9,55		9,21		3,92	
Married	9,51		8,99		3,85	
Entered and dissolved union	9,66		9,31		3,89	
Remained single	9,46		8,90		3,87	
Cohabiting in 2003						
Married	9,55		9,23		3,52	
Broke up	9,80		9,17		3,72	
Remained cohabiting	9,58		9,08		3,45	
Married in 2003						
Separated/divorced	9,69		8,86		3,91	*
Remained married	9,60		8,92		3,39	
Transition to parenthood						
Had 1st child	9,58		9,19	*	3,55	
No change	9,56		8,97		3,66	

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01 according to independent samples t test.

Table 4

Regression models of change in job equality attitudes by transitions in union and parenthood status.

	Total			Men			Women		
	B	Std. error	Sig.	B	Std. error	Sig.	B	Std. error	Sig.
Gender									
Female	0,190	0,051	**						
Male (ref)									
Cohort									
1968 (ref)									
1972	0,183	0,070	**	0,360	0,130	**	0,066	0,077	
1976	0,118	0,074		0,266	0,135	*	0,013	0,082	
1980	0,136	0,080		0,251	0,151		0,057	0,087	
Education									
College degree	0,138	0,050	**	0,192	0,095	*	0,091	0,055	
Less than college (ref)									
Income (logged)	-0,066	0,036		-0,090	0,067		-0,035	0,039	
Transitions in union status by 2009									
Single in 2003									
Cohabited	-0,035	0,078		-0,110	0,134		0,027	0,091	
Married	-0,144	0,115		-0,201	0,207		-0,115	0,128	
Entered and dissolved union	0,026	0,112		-0,066	0,202		0,083	0,124	
Remained single (ref)									
Cohabiting in 2003									
Married	-0,045	0,072		-0,025	0,137		-0,039	0,078	
Broke up	0,234	0,094	*	0,388	0,184	*	0,148	0,100	
Remained cohabiting (ref)									
Married in 2003									
Separated/divorced	0,207	0,174		0,586	0,337		0,003	0,186	
Remained married (ref)									
Transition to parenthood									
Had 1st child	-0,004	0,058		-0,102	0,109		0,070	0,063	
No change (ref)									
Gender role attitudes in 2003	0,396	0,023	**	0,421	0,033	**	0,337	0,035	**
Adjusted R Square	0,191			0,205			0,087		
n	1715			716			999		

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01.

Table 5
Regression models of change in division of labor attitudes by transitions in union and parenthood status.

	Total			Men			Women		
	B	Std. error	Sig.	B	Std. error	Sig.	B	Std. error	Sig.
Gender									
Female	0,183	0,074	*						
Male (ref)									
Cohort									
1968 (ref)									
1972	0,136	0,101		0,196	0,178		0,085	0,118	
1976	0,123	0,106		0,311	0,185		-0,047	0,126	
1980	0,226	0,117		0,254	0,208		0,189	0,136	
Education									
College degree	0,391	0,073	**	0,314	0,130	*	0,465	0,086	**
Less than college (ref)									
Income (logged)	-0,002	0,051		0,006	0,091		0,001	0,061	
Transitions in union status by 2009									
Single in 2003									
Cohabited	0,135	0,114		0,057	0,187		0,246	0,140	
Married	-0,097	0,168		-0,250	0,284		-0,047	0,202	
Entered and dissolved union	0,210	0,162		0,199	0,281		0,248	0,190	
Remained single (ref)									
Cohabiting in 2003									
Married	0,107	0,104		0,101	0,188		0,154	0,120	
Broke up	0,175	0,135		0,154	0,248		0,213	0,154	
Remained cohabiting (ref)									
Married in 2003									
Separated/divorced	0,139	0,252		-0,110	0,463		0,374	0,288	
Remained married (ref)									
Transition to parenthood									
Had 1st child	0,114	0,083		0,066	0,149		0,163	0,097	
No change (ref)									
Gender role attitudes in 2003	0,468	0,020	***	0,523	0,031	**	0,397	0,027	**
Adjusted R Square	0,293			0,305			0,236		
n	1720			720			1000		

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01.

Table 6. Regression models of change in parental leave attitudes by transitions in union and parenthood status.

		Total			Men			Women		
		B	Std. error	Sig.	B	Std. error	Sig.	B	Std. error	Sig.
Gender	Female	-0,018	0,059							
	Male (ref)									
Cohort	1968 (ref)									
	1972	0,096	0,082		0,262	0,130	*	-0,015	0,106	
	1976	0,045	0,087		0,255	0,136		-0,115	0,114	
	1980	-0,086	0,096		-0,061	0,152		-0,102	0,123	
Education										
	College degree	0,323	0,059	**	0,134	0,095		0,443	0,077	**
	Less than college (ref)									
Income (logged)		-0,039	0,043		-0,054	0,067		-0,015	0,055	
Transitions in union status by 2009										
Single in 2003										
	Cohabited	0,149	0,093		0,223	0,137		0,070	0,128	
	Married	0,152	0,137		0,225	0,206		0,052	0,183	
	Entered and dissolved union	0,055	0,134		0,144	0,207		-0,006	0,175	
	Remained single (ref)									
Cohabiting in 2003										
	Married	-0,029	0,085		-0,218	0,138		0,098	0,108	
	Broke up	0,121	0,111		0,339	0,181		0,013	0,141	
	Remained cohabiting (ref)									
Married in 2003										
	Separated/divorced	0,316	0,206		0,283	0,335		0,365	0,262	
	Remained married (ref)									
Transition to parenthood										
	Had 1st child	-0,217	0,068	**	-0,165	0,109		-0,235	0,088	**
	No change (ref)									
Gender role attitudes in 2003		0,457	0,024	**	0,433	0,038	**	0,470	0,032	**
Adjusted R Square		0,204			0,181			0,228		
n		1658			698			960		