

## Have it all? Couples' Gender Ideological Pairings and Their Fertility

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### Introduction and Background

Linkages between gender equality or gender norms and fertility levels have been much discussed in demography (for a recent review see Raybould and Sear 2021). When the 'gender revolution' stalls, so that women's participation in the public sphere advances, while responsibilities in the private sphere remain highly gendered and domestic work is mainly done by women, fertility is hypothesized to fall (Goldscheider et al. 2015). In extension, it's been argued that fertility in this 'double burden scenario' will continue to decline until gender norms flexibilize, too. Such a normative shift would allow men to permeate into the private sphere, share domestic workloads, and would enable women to share their double burdens, making childrearing more feasible again (ibid.).

Extended to the couple-level, this argument implies that women with egalitarian gender attitudes, meaning they believe in and strive for women's and men's equal work-sharing both in the public and private sphere, will make faster transitions into motherhood when they are coupled with a partner who shares these gender egalitarian attitudes. An egalitarian partner can be assumed to not only share domestic workloads more evenly after a child is born, but also to encourage his female partner to stay engaged in the labor market and other public life pursuits (including leisurely and social activities) after the birth of a joint child. It is well known that the division of housework is relatively equal among couples as long as they are childless (Nitsche and Grunow 2016, Baxter et al. 2023), but becomes highly gendered after the birth of a first child. While various studies have tested the gender revolution argument on the couple-level, they investigated the link between actual gendered housework division and subsequent fertility among couples. This research design, however, likely yields biased results for investigations into first birth transitions, because it fails to account for this dynamic of change in work divisions over the course of a couple's joint life and family formation process. Indeed, the studies that have investigated the link between domestic work divisions and first birth transitions have offered mixed results (Schober 2013, Aassve et al. 2015, Dommermuth et al. 2017). Gender attitudes or ideology is known to be a strong predictor of both the gendered division of housework as well as changes in work divisions after the first birth (Schober 2013b, Nitsche and Grunow 2016). Examining couples gender attitudinal or ideological pairings may therefore be advantageous examining how gendered domestic dynamics may predict first birth transitions among couples. Few studies to date investigated gender ideology and first birth transitions, and those that did used either cross sectional data (Holton et al 2009), or attitudes / ideology of one partner or partner's individual (not combined) ideology only (Bernhardt and Goldscheider 2006, Bernhardt et al. 2016). Hudde and Engelhard (2020) investigated whether partners' matched versus discordant attitudes predicted first birth transitions in a German sample. While they show that attitudinal homogenous/concordant couples have faster first birth transitions, they have just measured the degree of matching but not the direction, i.e. not differentiated between egalitarian and traditional gender attitudes (Hudde and Engelhard 2020). Our study closes this research gap.

### Hypotheses

Against this background, we test the following hypotheses:

*H1: Homogamous gender traditional couples will make the transition to first birth the soonest. Germany is still adhering to the male breadwinner model, incentivizing specialized work divisions in couples. Also,*

*the educational training period for women who plan to specialize in domestic work and childbearing may be shorter, and first birth sooner.*

*H2: Homogamous gender egalitarian couples will have faster transitions to first births than couples with mismatched gender attitudes.*

*H3: Couples with conflicting gender attitudes will have the latest transition to first birth, due to a variety of factors (discord in aspired family model, higher change of union dissolution).*

**Data and methods**

We draw on data from the Pairfam study, release 12 (Brüderl et al. 2019), a panel data set from Germany, containing representative of men and women of birth cohorts 1991-93, 1981-83, 1971-73, and living in Germany from 2008 to 2018. This dataset offers the opportunity of having longitudinal panel information on couples, given that the sampling strategy includes not only the so-called “anchor” respondents but their partners as well when those are willing to be interviewed, including their fertility history and information on the gender attitudes of both partners. Our final analysis sample consists of about 2260 heterosexual couples who are childless at the time of their first interview, with about 650 first births observed in the period of observation, from 2008-2018.

We measure gender attitudes using four items provided in the PAIRFAM survey. Those items measure agreement or disagreement with the statements “Women should prioritize family over their career”, “Men should participate in housework the same extent as women”, “Children <6 suffer with a working mother”, and “Children suffer when their fathers work too much”. Our main independent variable consists in the combination of the first gender role attitudes expressed at the first couple interview. The variable can assume five values: Concordance respectively in agreeing, disagreeing or being neutral with respect to the questionnaire statement; small disagreement (for example, one partner neutral, one partner agreeing with the statement), or “big disagreement (one partner agreeing, the other disagreeing with the questionnaire statement).

	Item 1		Item 2		Item 3		Item 4	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
Concordant (Disagree)	517	22,90	5	0,22	575	25,47	89	3,94
Concordant (Neutral)	366	16,21	55	2,44	237	10,50	306	13,55
Concordant (Agree)	131	5,80	1582	70,06	208	9,21	501	22,19
Small disagreement	1013	44,86	487	21,57	896	39,68	1019	45,13
Big disagreement	231	10,23	128	5,67	339	15,01	338	14,97

We model the “risk” of transitioning into parenthood using piecewise constant exponential models, to account for the irregular shape of our hazard function over time. We ran our models separately for each attitude indicator we considered, stepwise adding our control variables to our main variable of interest (i.e. concordance in gender role attitudes). Our couples enter the risk pool when their union start – regardless of the type of union. The independent variable is the time in months from the anchor respondent’s 16<sup>th</sup> birthday until the first childbirth is experienced by the couple or until the last interview if no childbirth is experienced.

**Preliminary Results and Conclusion**

Across the four items considered, the ones concerning division of labor have the strongest, most significant effects. Across the potential value combination for the first item (tab. 1), we can observe than

couples where both partners share “Traditionalist” values and align with a male breadwinner-female homemaker division of labor have the strongest positive effect, i.e. they are more likely to experience a transition to parenthood than their egalitarian (disagreeing) counterparts are. Couple with opposite attitudes seem to be less likely than concordant couples to transition to parenthood, but their coefficients are not statistically different from that of egalitarian duos.

Table 1: Exponentiated coefficients (haz. Ratios) for main variable of interest. Item 1: "Women should care more about family than about career".					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Concordant (Disagree) - reference category					
Concordant (Neutral)	1,60*** (00,19)	1,45** (00,18)	1,47** (00,18)	01,27 (00,16)	1,29* (00,16)
Concordant (Agree)	1,88*** (00,29)	2,18*** (00,34)	2,22*** (00,35)	1,65** (00,27)	1,65** (00,28)
Small disagreement	1,41*** (00,14)	01,18 (00,12)	01,20 (00,12)	01,15 (00,12)	01,16 (00,12)
Big disagreement	01,18 (00,18)	01,00 (00,15)	01,00 (00,16)	00,79 (00,12)	00,78 (00,12)
<i>Model 2 includes controls for cohort and age (anchor), Model 3 adds education (both partners), model 4 adds Labor force participation (both partners), model 5 adds place of birth (both partners). Standard significance stars (* = 90%, ** = 95%, *** = 99%)</i>					

The attitudes towards domestic labor (tab. 2) show a similar effect with the more egalitarian respondents being significantly less likely than concordant traditionalist partners to experience transition to parenthood. Disagreement with respect to this item also has a strong negative effect, which is statistically significant as well although to a weaker degree.

Table 2: Exponentiated coefficients (haz. Ratios) for main variable of interest. Item 2: "Men should participate in the household the same extent as women".					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Concordant (Disagree) - reference category					
Concordant (Neutral)	0,35 (0,27)	0,25 (0,19)	0,24 (0,18)	0,22* (0,17)	0,22* (0,17)
Concordant (Agree)	0,22* (0,15)	0,15** (0,11)	0,14** (0,10)	0,14** (0,10)	0,15** (0,10)
Small disagreement	0,24* (0,17)	0,17* (0,12)	0,16* (0,11)	0,16* (0,12)	0,16* (0,12)
Big disagreement	0,30 (0,22)	0,21* (0,15)	0,19* (0,14)	0,18* (0,13)	0,19* (0,14)
<i>Model 2 includes controls for cohort and age (anchor), Model 3 adds education (both partners), model 4 adds Labor force participation (both partners), model 5 adds place of birth (both partners). Standard significance stars (* = 90%, ** = 95%, *** = 99%)</i>					

Interestingly, the results for the items focusing on the parent-child relationship (tab. 3, tab. 4) are not significant across all the models. Focusing on the mother-child relationship, there seems to be small positive effect of concordance especially on traditional values. Disagreement however does not significantly impact on the likelihood of experiencing the birth of the first child. The same can be said for the item focusing on the father-child relationship, where disagreeing couples seem even drastically

more likely to transition to parenthood. However, none of the coefficients for our variable of interest is statistically significant.

Table 3: Exponentiated coefficients (haz. Ratios) for main variable of interest. Item 3: "Children under 6 suffer with a working mother".					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Concordant (Disagree) - reference category					
Concordant (Neutral)	0,90 (0,13)	0,89 (0,13)	0,87 (0,13)	0,88 (0,13)	0,93 (0,15)
Concordant (Agree)	1,31 (0,22)	1,28 (0,21)	1,26 (0,21)	1,13 (0,19)	1,13 (0,20)
Small disagreement	1,14 (0,12)	1,11 (0,12)	1,09 (0,12)	1,07 (0,12)	1,10 (0,12)
Big disagreement	1,01 (0,14)	1,01 (0,14)	0,99 (0,14)	1,03 (0,14)	1,05 (0,15)

*Model 2 includes controls for cohort and age (anchor), Model 3 adds education (both partners), model 4 adds Labor force participation (both partners), model 5 adds place of birth (both partners). Standard significance stars (\* = 90%, \*\* = 95%, \*\*\* = 99%)*

Table 4: Exponentiated coefficients (haz. Ratios) for main variable of interest. Item 4: "Children suffer when their father works too much".					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Concordant (Disagree) - reference category					
Concordant (Neutral)	1,23 (0,36)	1,22 (0,36)	1,21 (0,35)	1,17 (0,34)	1,21 (0,36)
Concordant (Agree)	1,47 (0,42)	1,55 (0,44)	1,61 (0,46)	1,41 (0,40)	1,47 (0,42)
Small disagreement	1,40 (0,38)	1,42 (0,39)	1,46 (0,40)	1,31 (0,36)	1,33 (0,37)
Big disagreement	1,29 (0,38)	1,34 (0,39)	1,40 (0,41)	1,33 (0,39)	1,37 (0,41)

*Model 2 includes controls for cohort and age (anchor), Model 3 adds education (both partners), model 4 adds Labor force participation (both partners), model 5 adds place of birth (both partners). Standard significance stars (\* = 90%, \*\* = 95%, \*\*\* = 99%)*

In conclusion, we find support for H1, but need to reject H2 and H3. While gender traditional homogamous couples (with respect to work family models for women) make the transition to first birth the fastest, followed by homogamous moderate couples, egalitarian duos and mismatched gender attitudinal couples delay the transition to first birth the most. Future research is needed investigate whether this is a timing or translates into a quantum effect, also calling for extensions of the gender revolution argument to consider variation in the timing of parenthood between couples of different types of gender ideology.

## Literature

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