

# **Men's and Women's Gender Role Attitudes following Union Dissolution and Repartnering: A Life-Course Approach**

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The potential role of gender role attitudes (hereafter GRA) in family change has been garnering increased research attention in recent years (e.g. Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015; Goldscheider et al. 2015; Kaufman et al. 2017; Okun and Raz-Yurovich Forthcoming). Theoretical and empirical research suggest that GRA play a significant role in driving family transitions (Barber & Axinn 1998; Brandén et al. 2018; Cunningham et al. 2005; Kaufman 2000; Lendon & Silverstein 2012; Lyngstad & Jalovaara 2010; Moors 2003; Oláh & Gähler 2014). In addition, some new theories of family change propose that as partners share more gender egalitarian attitudes, they may enjoy greater satisfaction from unions and experience greater union stability. In turn, these changes may lead to increases in fertility levels (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015; Goldscheider et al. 2015; Sullivan et al. 2014).

Considering these issues from a life course perspective, we investigate the possibility that in addition to GRA impacting family behavior, it may be the case that changes in union status, specifically union dissolution and repartnering, further affect GRA. While much research has examined effects on GRA of transitions such as first marriage or first union (Barber & Axinn 1998; Kaufman et al. 2017; Moors 2003; Vespa 2009) and parenthood (Baxter et al. 2014; Buchler et al. 2017; Endendijk et al. 2018; Grinza et al. 2017; Kaufman et al. 2017; Lendon & Silverstein 2012; Morgan & Waite 1987; Vespa 2009; Zhou 2017), we expand on previous literature by analyzing the effects of union dissolution and repartnering on subsequent changes in GRA. Relatively little research attention has been paid to these issues (but see Amato & Booth, 1991; Kaufman et al. 2017; Lucier-Greer & Adler-Baeder 2011, 2016) and findings from the studies which have been conducted are not consistent in terms of the direction or significance of effects. This lack of consistency may be explained in part by differing gender regimes in the contexts examined (Gubernskaya 2010).

Effects of union dissolution and repartnering on GRA are important as they may contribute to possible feedback mechanisms in which union dissolution leads to changes in GRA, and in turn, changing GRA may affect further union transitions as well as fertility. For example, changing GRA may impact the timing and probability of repartnering, which are important determinants of fertility (Ivanova et al. 2014; Thomson et al. 2012; Van Bavel et al. 2012), and may also impact fertility directly either within or outside of unions (Arpino et al. 2015). In addition, variation in GRA by union status may contribute to macro-level changes in the social and political climate, as the composition of the population by union-status changes (Brinton & Lee 2016; Lendon & Silverstein 2012). More broadly, as union dissolution and repartnering have become common occurrences in the life course of individuals in societies characterized by Second Demographic Transition, it is important to understand the implications of these life events for GRA.

In this paper, we ask whether individuals' GRA change following union dissolution, compared to the time when they were in union; and whether they change again following re-partnering and subsequent dissolution. Moreover, we ask whether the change in GRA depends on the duration of each partnership status, and whether effects vary by gender. We add to the few studies that have examined the effects of union dissolution and re-partnering on GRA by (1) examining a long panel which allows for multiple transitions, and which provides observations of respondents who experienced both dissolution and re-partnering; (2) performing separate analyses of transitions for men and for women, which allows for a consideration of gender differences in the effects of transitions on GRA; (3) examining the life course with detailed histories that include information on past cohabitations as well as marriages, and allows for explicit consideration of duration in union status.

In order to address our research questions, we use two related longitudinal micro-level datasets from the U.K. -- British Household Panel Survey and its follow-up study Understanding Society -- covering a period from the early 1990s to 2016. Advantages of the datasets at hand are numerous and include (1) a long and up-to-date panel, which allows for the study of multiple life course events through recent periods; (2) information on GRA in periods before and after union dissolution and re-partnering; and (3) detailed, full family histories which allow for an understanding of duration in various union statuses.

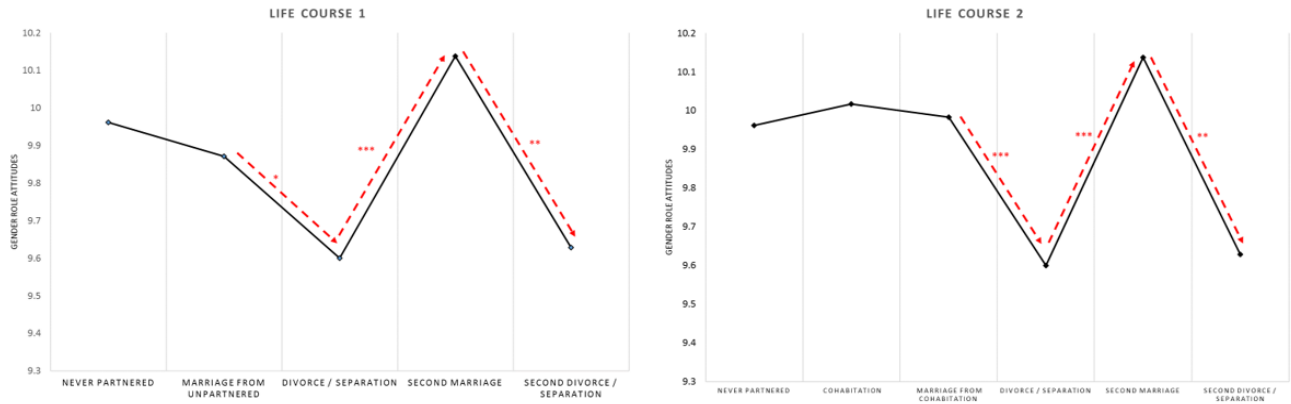
We employ a life-course approach and analyze changes in GRA, among men and women separately, using linear fixed-effects models. GRA are measured primarily by a summated scale of responses to three Likert-style items: "A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works"; "All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full time job"; and "A husband's job is to earn money; a wife's job is to look after the home and family". We interpret this summated measure as capturing respondent's attitudes towards women's primary role as caregivers. These items were selected based on exploratory factor-analysis, which showed that the factors load together significantly. The answers to each question ranged from (1) "strongly agree" to (5) "strongly disagree", and the range of scores on this summated scale is from 3 (the value which is most supportive of women's primary role as caregivers -- i.e. most traditional in outlook) to 15 (the value least supportive -- i.e. most liberal in outlook).

### **Summary of Preliminary Results**

Preliminary results indicate that men experiencing union dissolution express reduced levels of gender egalitarianism. Following subsequent re-partnering, there is a recovery in their levels of gender egalitarianism. Subsequent to men's re-partnering, their GRA plunge again. The effects of these transitions are illustrated in Graph 1 below, which presents simulations of life course changes in men's GRA. The graph suggests a pattern of "zig-zag" effects, such that GRA declines, recovers and declines again following divorce, re-partnering, and second divorce. With re-partnering, there is to a large degree recovery in gender egalitarian attitudes to levels similar to those prior to divorce, but only until the next dissolution. The decline in men's gender egalitarianism following divorce holds when divorce follows direct marriage from singlehood (left panel) as well as when divorce follows marriage from cohabitation (right panel). While Graph 1 refers to transitions from marriage to divorce, divorce to remarriage, and from remarriage to second divorce, the "zig-zag" effect evident is consistent with other transition

types not shown here (e.g. from cohabitation to separation from cohabitation, to second cohabitation, and separation from second cohabitation).<sup>1</sup>

**Graph 1: Changes in Men’s Gender Role Attitudes across Union Transitions.**



\*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

Due to space constraints, we do not present other preliminary results here. We report briefly that for men, the effects of union dissolution and repartnering on GRA are not functions of the duration in status. For women, there are no significant effects associated with union dissolution or with repartnering of any kind.<sup>2</sup> However, there are duration effects in that divorced women become more egalitarian the longer they have been divorced. In contrast, women who have been separated from cohabitation for the second time become less gender egalitarian the longer they have been in that status.

## Conclusions

Given that union dissolution and repartnering are common occurrences in the life course of many people in societies characterized by Second Demographic Transition, it is important to understand the impact of these life events on GRA. Reduced gender egalitarianism among men following union dissolution is perhaps an unexpected consequence of growing union instability and dissolution. This finding may shed light on slowing trends in gender egalitarianism found in some recent research (Cotter et al. 2011). We suggest that our research will add to understanding of the interrelationships between union stability and dissolution, repartnering and GRA.

<sup>1</sup> Every type of union dissolution is associated with reduced egalitarianism among men, although effects do not always reach statistical significance (however, always significant for div./sep. from first marriage).

<sup>2</sup> What is more relevant for women is the reduction in gra associated with entrance into any type of partnership from the never-married state.

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