

6. Changing gender role attitudes¹

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In their introduction to the 1980 Women and Employment Survey, Martin and Roberts (1984) state that the previous 20 years had seen an explosion of interest in, and writings about, the changing roles of women. The changes are well known. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s there had been a significant rise in the level of economic activity among women. Most of the rise was accounted for by increasing proportions of mothers returning to work after having children, and having less time out of the labour market. In Britain many mothers throughout the latter part of the twentieth century have worked part-time, although whether part-time work was a matter of choice, or a matter of constraint, or some mixture of the two is disputed.

Writing at the start of the 1990s, Witherspoon and Prior (1991) suggest that there is clear evidence that women are the key advocates for change in the gender division of labour. It seems hardly surprising that there is a sex divide in terms of whether or not people favour a traditional gender division of labour. It clearly works in men's favour if women are both contributing to the household income and maintaining their primary role for care of the home and children. Yet, although the main focus of Witherspoon and Prior is the attitudes of working-age women, they conclude that, without changes in men's attitudes to care work, occupational segregation based on gender is likely to continue.

There is no denying, however, that the male breadwinner system has been in decline for at least half a century, not just in Britain but throughout Europe. Between 1960 and 2003 women's activity rates, relative to men's activity rates, increased from 44 to 79 per cent in the then 15 member countries of the European Union (EU) (McInnes 2006) whereas, as we illustrate below, in Britain, between 1961 and 2001, the comparable increase is even larger 43 to 84 per cent. The shift from male breadwinner and female carer model to double-income and single-parent households have transformed the established ways of distributing work between men and women. In policy terms at least, women are no longer seen as being solely responsible for family work and care. The expectation on the part of policy-makers today is increasingly that women will be fully 'individualised', in the sense

of economically autonomous, although policies are often ambiguous on this score (see Lewis, this volume). Social reality is more mixed; women are still disproportionately in part-time work and still do the bulk of unpaid care. Yet by the start of the twenty first century the notion of work–life balance (WLB) is firmly established in policy rhetoric. Why might this be?

One possible explanation lies in the recent acceleration of attitudinal changes regarding gender roles and the related shifts in the domestic division of labour. A second explanation may lie in the concern that increased employment participation of women may further negatively affect fertility rates in Europe where the population is rapidly ageing. There are also concerns that the welfare of children themselves may suffer if mothers, like fathers, spend increasing amounts of time at work. These practical concerns play out against a strong ethos of gender equality, as represented in equal opportunities legislation and practical progress in provision of parental leave (including paternal leave) and childcare.

In this chapter I examine 25 year of attitudinal change in gender roles. We know from previous research that attitudes have become steadily more supportive of women's dual work and family roles (Scott 1990; Scott et al. 1996). However, there is suggestion of a more recent backlash (for example, Scott 1999). This might be triggered by rising unemployment, as in Germany in the wake of reunification (Braun et al. 1994), but it is also conceivable that opinions may shift as the shine of the 'super-mum' syndrome wears off, and the idea of women juggling high-powered careers while also baking cookies and reading bedtime stories is increasingly seen to be unrelaisable by ordinary mortals.

In Britain and cross-nationally there are time-series studies of representative population samples that allow us to examine attitude trends at the aggregate level. Unfortunately, the interpretation of such trend data is problematic because it is impossible empirically to disentangle whether change is due to what are called 'period' effects, or to the ageing process, or to cohort effects (Alwin and Scott 1996). However, strong theoretical considerations can guide interpretation. Cohort effects can change the overall structure of attitudes as older generations, whose views were formed in a different era, die off and are replaced by younger ones with perhaps more 'modern' (egalitarian) attitudes. At the population level there have been significant changes over the past 25 years in employment behaviour and in education, and both are likely to have a profound effect on attitudinal shifts across time.

The notion of a 'rising tide' of support for gender equality was coined by Ingelhart and Norris (2003) who claim that the move towards greater equality between men and women is part of a much broader dimension of cultural change. However they also suggest that tides can ebb and flow, and

that government policies need the support of public opinion if they are not to prove transient or even provoke a backlash. To what extent do people in Britain and Europe support gender equality? Are there continuing concerns about the impact of mother's employment on the well-being of children and family? Examining how Britain compares with other countries in Europe, where policy initiatives for supporting motherhood and employment vary greatly, helps us identify in what ways Britain is distinctive.

CHANGES IN LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND FAMILY LIFE

Just over half a century ago the 1949 Royal Commission on Population report was concerned that the then existing employment bars against married women working were harmful all round, to women, the family and the community. True, the Commission was hardly giving a ringing endorsement to working mothers. For example it observes that 'there is often a real conflict between motherhood and a whole-time career' (ibid.: 160). Nevertheless it went on to acknowledge that, at least in part, the conflict is due to artificial barriers that restrict the contribution that women can make to the cultural and economic life of the nation. The report urged that a 'deliberate effort should be made to devise adjustments that would render it easier for women to combine motherhood and the care of a home with outside activities' (ibid.: 160).

Some 50 years later the BBC documentary series *Panorama* broadcast a programme called 'Back to the Kitchen' (Powell 2000). Using analysis based on data from the British Household Panel Study, a longitudinal study that follows over 5000 households across time, the report stated that, within just two years, one-third of women who had gone back to work full-time following the birth of their first child, had given up their full-time jobs, with 17 per cent switching to part-time work and 19 per cent giving up work altogether. The report concludes with the assertion that British women feel somewhat disillusioned and the promises to make work and motherhood reconcilable have not materialised.

A premise that is shared by both the Royal Commission and the BBC report is that there are distinctive sex- or gender-roles. In this chapter we use the term gender-roles to acknowledge that existing norms concerning male and female division of labour has as much or more to do with socio-cultural influences, as biological differences. The traditional gender-role divide is for the husband to be the breadwinner while the wife's role is to look after the home and children. This traditional gendered division of labour was temporarily suspended during the Second World War when

there were large-scale efforts to make the mobilisation of married women for the war effort practicable on a national scale. War factories were moved into areas where labour reserves were available; day nurseries were set up and canteen services were organised; the provision of part-time jobs was encouraged; the marriage bar for women in non-industrial occupations including the civil service, the teaching profession, the police and the London County Council was removed. The removal of the marriage bar was enormously influential in opening up working opportunities for women. But after the war many married women returned home, in part due to the widespread sentiment that jobs ought to be 'kept for the boys' as things got 'back to normal' (Myrdal and Kline 1956).

At the start of the new millennium, there was an understandable tendency to focus on change. Duncan Gallie (2000), writing on labour force change, notes that, while the overall labour force participation rate has been remarkably stable across the twentieth century, this is because the declining trend of men's participation has been balanced by the increasing participation rates for women – especially married women. Here we update Gallie's table of labour force participation rates (in which figures are adjusted to take account of the changes in mandatory school leaving age) to include data from the 2001 Census (see Figure 6.1).

It can be seen that men's participation rates have declined from 94 per cent in 1911 through to 76 per cent in 2001. In contrast, women's participation rates are continuing to rise. In 1911 just over a third of women (35 per cent) were in the labour force; by 2001 this had risen to 64 per cent.

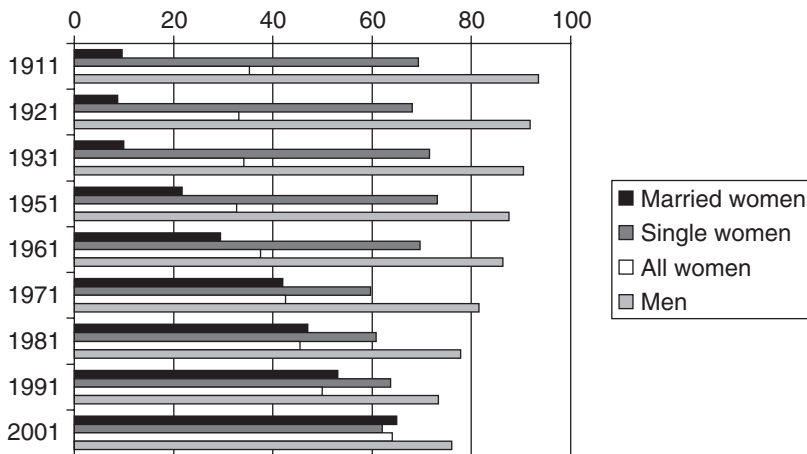
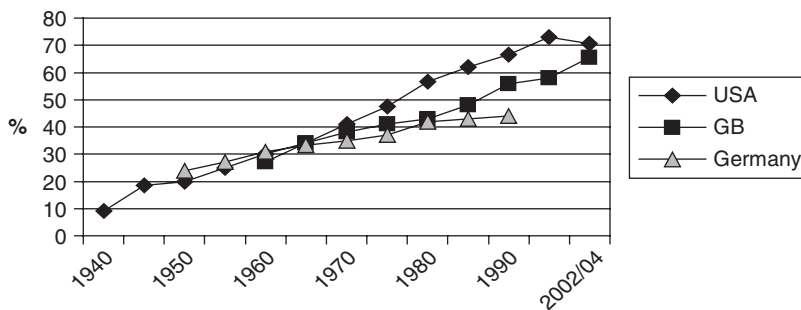


Figure 6.1 Labour force participation rates in Great Britain, 1911–2001 (percentage)

Whereas at the beginning of the century there was a 58 per cent difference in the participation rates for men and women, by 2001 the difference is only 12 per cent.

The huge increase in women's participation in the labour market is largely reflected in the changes in the activity of married women. It can be seen that participation rates for single women have been consistently high over the twentieth century. In 1911, 69 per cent of all single women over compulsory school age were economically active, whereas by 2001 this was the case for 62 per cent. In contrast, there has been a striking growth in the participation rates of married women. The 10 per cent jump between 1931 and 1951 is likely to reflect the war-time impact referred to above that legitimated a role for women in employment. Facilitated by the collapse of the marriage bar, the trend moved steadily upwards. Whereas in 1951 less than a quarter of married women were in the work force, by 1991 this was the case for half of all married women, and the proportion continued to rise in 2001 to 65 per cent, with the participation rate of married women, surpassing the rate for single women. As Martin and Roberts (1984) noted about the early 1980s, marital status serves, in part, as a proxy for motherhood, and the presence and age of children were crucial determinants of whether or not women were employed.

Not surprisingly, the labour force participation of mothers varies greatly with country, where policies differ markedly in their support of working mothers. Figure 6.2 shows the trends in labour force participations rates of mother with children under 18 for Britain, West Germany, and the USA (Alwin et al. 1996, updated). Britain is now very close to the USA in



Source: The US data are from the US Department of Labor; the German data are from Statistisches Bundesamt; the British figures come from ONS Social Trends, updated in 2004 using data from the British Household Panel Study.

Figure 6.2 Labour force participation rates of mothers with children under 18, by country 1940–2004

participation rates, albeit with much higher rates of part-time work. West Germany, prior to reunification, had a strong male-breadwinner culture that is now coming under question, with increasing concerns that the popularity of marriage and motherhood are being eroded.

There is a close association between the remarkable changes in labour force participation and the dramatic changes in family life. In Britain, in just one generation, the numbers marrying have halved, the numbers divorcing have trebled and the proportion of children born outside marriage has quadrupled (Pullinger and Summerfield 1997). People are marrying later and having fewer children than was the case in previous generations. The average number of children in a family has declined from 2.0 in 1971 to 1.8 in 2004. In 2004 one in four dependent children lived with a lone parent; whereas in 1972 it was only one child in 14. The rapid increase in unmarried cohabitation is one of the most spectacular ways in which traditional family life is changing in Britain (see Ermisch, this volume). Living together before marriage is now the norm. Among women, the proportion of those who cohabited with their future spouse prior to marriage has risen from less than 4 per cent of those whose first marriage was in 1966 to 68 per cent of those who were married in 1993. By the 1990, the vast majority of newly formed partnerships (over 70 per cent) were cohabiting rather than legally married, although many of those in partnerships do go on to marry.

These changes in partnerships are likely to reflect and reinforce a fundamental shift in family values. It is not only perspectives on marriage and the desirability of parenthood that have shifted but also attitudes concerning appropriate gender-roles. While second-wave feminism, has undoubtedly influenced both male and female conceptions of gender equality, the timing is wrong for the 1970s feminist movement to be credited with the marked changes in women's roles at work and in the home. As we saw in Figure 6.1, women's move into employment pre-dates second-wave feminism. Women's marked increase in labour force participation throughout the second part of the twentieth century is not unique to Britain. Throughout most industrial nations of the West, there has been a huge rise in demand for labour, especially in service sectors where women have traditionally been concentrated. As we saw, in the 1960s, most men and a very substantial proportion of single women were already employed. Thus increased labour market demands associated with expanding economies helped draw married women, including those with dependent children into the labour force.

The economic pressures on married women and mothers to be in paid work have, if anything, increased. In Lisbon in March 2000 the heads of government of the European Union subscribed to the very ambitious goal of raising

the employment rate of both men and women by almost 10 percentage points in less than 10 years. Across Europe as a whole, this goal can only be achieved by the greater participation of women, with a target set for 60 per cent participation by 2010 (Boeri et al. 2005). However, there is also some concern that the increased labour force participation of women may further reduce fertility rates in a Continent where the population is rapidly ageing (Esping-Andersen 2005). More children are needed to ensure there are sufficient workers to underwrite the growing welfare provision required for older people. There is also concern about the welfare of children, and worries about whether public childcare provision can substitute adequately for parental (primarily maternal) care.

The UK has already surpassed the Lisbon target for a female labour force participation rate of 60 per cent by 2010. However, there is little to be complacent about. In Britain women's participation in full-time employment has risen quite slowly. In 1951, 30 per cent of women aged 20–59 were in full-time employment (Joshi 1989); 40 years later in 1991 this figure has risen only slightly to 34 per cent. In the same period part-time work has quintupled (from 5 per cent in 1951 to 26 per cent in 1991). In 2002, 70 per cent of working age women were economically active with 42 per cent of those in employment working part-time (WEU 2004). Whether women chose to work part-time in order to juggle family and work roles, or whether lack of childcare alternatives and a traditional gender-role division of labour within the home leaves them no choice, is something that is far from clear. What is clear is that part-time work still has disadvantages in pay and promotion trajectories. How much impact the part-time work imperatives that have attempted to reduce inequities in pay and conditions will have remains to be seen but, as the Women and Work Commission Report (2006) emphasised and the Equal Opportunities Commission survey on sex and power (2007) highlights, there is little indication that, given current rates of progress, gender inequalities in either pay or in representation in top management positions will be eradicated in our lifetime.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF ATTITUDINAL CHANGE

In this section I look at three aspects of gender-role change. First, I examine the direction and extent of attitudinal change within the UK and I examine whether there is any indication of a backlash. Second, I compare what is known about attitudinal trends cross-nationally, in order to identify what is distinctive about Britain and whether there has been a convergence towards greater egalitarianism in attitudes across Europe and the USA. Third, I explore how far the different theoretical explanations of social

change in attitudes towards gender egalitarianism are or are not supported, in Great Britain, West Germany, and the USA.

On each of these issues, there is a considerable amount of previous research that informs our understanding about gender role change. However, what is new in this chapter is, first, that I extend the information about attitudinal change in the UK through into the new millennium. Second, new data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) on gender-role changes allow us to compare the speed and direction of attitudinal change across time for seven different countries (West Germany, Great Britain, the USA, the Netherlands, Italy, Ireland and Spain). Third, the ISSP data provides a sufficient time span (14 years, with surveys in 1988, 1994 and 2002) for the systematic investigation of the underlying causes of attitudinal change.

Attitudinal Changes in Great Britain

Trend data from Britain are available from the early 1980s. In 1980, the Women and Employment Survey asked a series of questions about women's roles and some items have been replicated later in the British Social Attitudes Surveys through to 2002. Table 6.1 shows the percentage of men and women taking an egalitarian stance on each of several questions which are grouped together as concerning various nurturant or instrumental roles for women. These labels come from the influential book of Parsons and Bales (1955), where they suggested that the differentiation of sex-roles within the family along the instrumental-expressive lines embodies the social, as distinct from the purely reproductive, differentiation of sex-roles. Here I am mainly concerned to trace how far there remains support for the notion of a distinctive gender division of labour whereby women are seen as mainly responsible for family care and men for the breadwinning role. The use of the term 'egalitarian' signifies support for the feminist position that favours women's economic independence.

Nurturant items include measures that raise the issue of whether maternal employment is harmful to children or families. These consist of four items asking for people's views about whether a woman and her family will be happier if she goes out to work; whether family life suffers if the woman works full-time; whether a pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works; and whether a working mother can establish as warm and secure a relationship with her children, as a mother who does not work. Instrumental items tap agreement with traditional gender-role ideology and attitudes about women's jobs, and asks about whether a job is all right, but what most women really want is a home and children; whether a husband's job is to earn the money and a wife's job is to take care of the children; whether having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent

Table 6.1 Percentage egalitarian responses to gender-role attitude questions in Britain, WES and BSA Surveys 1980-2002

	WOMEN						MEN										
	1980	1984	1987	1988/9	1991	1994	1998	2002	1980	1984	1987	1988/9	1991	1994	1998	2002	
<i>Nurturant roles - sample N in brackets</i>																	
Woman & family happier if she goes out to work ¹	29.2 (5213)		12.9 (651)	22.9 (676)	14.1 (604)	14.2 (483)					14.5 (586)	14.7 (547)	15.9 (548)	15.7 (466)			
Pre-school child likely to suffer if mother works ²				40.5 (691)	35.6 (624)	48.1 (493)	49.7 (1060)				29.4 (555)	27.5 (560)	38.1 (474)	37.3 (865)			
Working mother can establish as warm and secure relationship ¹				65.0 (686)	69.8 (501)	70.9 (1064)					51.8 (558)	50.0 (473)	60.4 (864)				
Family life suffers if woman works full-time ²				43.4 (694)	49.2 (626)	50.7 (493)	51.0 (449)	46.5 (1052)			37.6 (561)	40.1 (561)	51.8 (477)	45.9 (318)	42.2 (874)		
<i>Instrumental roles - sample N in brackets</i>																	
Job all right but what most women want is home and children ²	33.7 (5222)		48.7 (651)	52.4 (686)	55.0 (620)	53.7 (497)	54.0 (1042)				34.3 (584)	42.3 (545)	45.6 (553)	53.7 (497)	43.6 (848)		

Table 6.1 (continued)

	WOMEN										MEN									
	1980	1984	1987	1988/9	1991	1994	1998	2002	1980	1984	1987	1988/9	1991	1994	1998	2002				
Husband's job to earn income; wife's to take care of children ²	31.5 (5221)	40.8 (823)	37.0 (651)	58.0 (699)	48.3 (636)	61.1 (499)	68.9 (1064)	68.9 (1064)	34.5 (708)	28.3 (586)	47.1 (562)	41.8 (567)	57.2 (481)	58.9 (880)						
Job is best way for woman to be independent ¹	67.0 (5215)	69.4 (798)	62.5 (651)	65.7 (698)	64.3 (622)	60.8 (497)	54.9 (1057)	54.9 (1057)	69.5 (820)	62.8 (676)	60.3 (553)	56.7 (557)	60.6 (479)	54.1 (859)						
Both husband & wife should contribute to house income ¹				57.0 (690)		59.2 (498)	59.2 (1059)	59.2 (1059)			51.3 (552)		64.4 (482)	62.0 (867)						

Notes:

Blank cells for years where question not asked.

1 Agree with question statement.

2 Disagree with question statement.

person; and whether both the husband and wife should contribute to the household income.

We can see from the top half of Table 6.1, which shows the items concerned with women's nurturant role, that there is very low support for the notion that a woman and family will all be happier if she goes out to work. However, this item is clearly ambiguous and the respondent has no adequate response option if they feel that women and family interests may be different. Regarding whether pre-school children suffer if mothers work, there is a quite pronounced gender difference with the time trend showing more people rejecting this through to the mid-1990s and then little or no change. A similar pattern holds true for views as to whether family life suffers if women go out to work, with the same slowing down or even reversal of egalitarian positions. The view that working mothers can achieve as good a relationship with children as mums who are not employed is endorsed more by women than men (71 per cent v. 60 per cent in 2002), with both male and female views moving in a more egalitarian direction, over time.

Regarding instrumental roles, the notion that what women really want is a home and children is rejected more by women than men. While only a third of women rejected this view in 1980 this rose to almost half the population taking the egalitarian stance by the end of the 1980s and attitudes remained quite stable through the 1990s. Women are also more likely to reject the notion there should be a gender-role divide and there has been a clear increase in both men and women's egalitarianism over time. The notion that a job is a best way to achieve independence shows very little gender difference, and both men and women's agreement with this view has declined over time. Support for dual-earners started out with women more in favour than men but, since the mid-1990s, men are as likely or even more likely to support two-earner households as are women.

It is not an exciting story. We find that the British, in the early 1980s are fairly conservative. There is one exception – the quite high proportion who believed that a job is the best way for a woman to be independent. There has been some shift towards greater egalitarianism on both nurturant and instrumental roles. However, there is also some evidence of a retreat with mounting concerns about whether family life suffers and increasing doubts about whether jobs allow women to be independent. It is only a small minority who are sanguine about whether women and families are happier if the woman has a job. As expected, we find that women tend to be more egalitarian than men on most items, with the one exception being support for dual-earners where men are marginally more in favour than women. The change over two decades has been much slower and more uneven than those who represent the story as one of revolutionary change followed by

backlash would like us to believe. Of course, there may have been a marked change in gender-role attitudes before 1980. Nevertheless attitudinal change on most items over the past two decades has been surprisingly modest. In the next section we examine how far Britain is distinctive in this respect, in comparison other Western industrial countries.

Attitudinal change across nations and time

Seven of the eight attitudinal items shown in Table 6.1 have also been carried in the International Social Survey Programme modules on family and gender-role change that took place in 1988 (or 1989 in Great Britain), 1994 and 2002. The ambiguous question about women and families all being happier was dropped. In Table 6.2 we can see the attitudinal changes across time in seven countries: West Germany, Great Britain, the USA,² Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands and Spain. Unfortunately, in both Italy and Spain survey participation was only for two of the three waves, with Italy not participating in 2002 and Spain not participating in 1988. The percentages reflect the combined attitudes of men and women, although separate analysis (not shown) shows that in all countries women tend to be somewhat more egalitarian than men on most items.

Regarding people's views about whether pre-school children suffer if their mother works, it can be seen that Ireland is the most egalitarian of these countries, with Great Britain next. Opinion in the USA is becoming more concerned about the negative consequences that women's work may have on the children. By contrast, the relatively positive views about the warmth of the working mother's maternal relationship have levelled off in both Ireland and the Netherlands, whereas in Great Britain and the USA attitudes have become more positive over time. However, there is some evidence of a retreat from egalitarianism in terms of rising concern that family life suffers if the woman has a full-time job, in both the USA and Great Britain. In views concerning the instrumental role of women, the West Germans are now the most egalitarian of these countries in rejecting the notion that what women really want is a home and job. However, there has been some reversal of sentiment in the UA, Great Britain and the Netherlands. On the item that taps support for traditional gender-role ideology, it is only in the UA that there is any indication of a fall in support for gender egalitarianism. West Germany is moving in a markedly more egalitarian direction across time, with shifts towards greater egalitarianism in both Ireland and Spain. It is interesting that two predominantly Catholic countries are among the least traditional of these seven countries on this measure. There is a very substantial cross-national difference in attitudes regarding whether both men and women should contribute to the household income with Spain

being the most in favour of dual-earner households and the Netherlands the least.

So what does this cross-national comparison reveal? Gender-role attitudes differ considerably, depending on the issue, but the notion that there has been a steady increase in favour of women's instrumental roles and a move away from positions that endorse women's primary nurturant responsibilities is a myth. Particularly on those issues that best tap mounting concerns about work-family balance there is clear indication that women's changing role is viewed as having costs both for the woman and for family.

Nevertheless there is little evidence to support those who talk of gender-role backlash. Although, it could be argued that countries are at a different point in a cycle of attitudinal change. For most countries, attitudes were more conservative in the 1980s than in the subsequent decades. However, it may be that the shift from a conservative to a more egalitarian position reaches a peak followed by a retreat. The USA may be more advanced in the cycle than other countries, in showing retreat or greater awareness of potential conflicts between women's labour force participation and family life. By contrast, West Germany shows an increase in egalitarianism on most items, albeit starting from a rather traditional stance. In Great Britain, change over time has been relatively modest on most items.

The different trajectories and speed of change in the different countries begs for further analysis of the underlying drivers of social change. There has been a wealth of theoretical and empirical work, particularly in the USA, which has highlighted potential factors that influence social change in this area, including generational or birth cohort effects, educational advances, changes in women's labour force participation, changes in partnership formation, different religious traditions, and increasing secularisation (for example, Bumpass 1990; Mason and Lu 1988; Thornton et al. 1983). In the next section we put some of the competing explanations of social change in gender role attitudes to the test, by analysing the predictors of such change in Great Britain, the USA and West Germany.

What are the Drivers of Attitudinal Change?

By comparing the drivers of attitudinal change in Great Britain, West Germany and the USA, we can see whether the underlying factors of change are similar or very different in these three nations. In order to examine gender-role change, we use a summary measure of gender role attitudes. The summary item adds together the three nurturant measures shown in Table 6.2, together with three of the instrumental measures. Thus this summary measures adds six binary scores, giving a range of zero through six, with higher scores indicating greater egalitarian consistency.

Table 6.2 Percentage egalitarian responses to gender role attitudes questions across countries and time (ISSP)

		WG	GB	USA	Italy	IRL	NL	Spain
<i>Nurturant roles</i>								
Pre-school child likely to suffer if mother works ²	1988	16.2	35.6	44.2	19.1	39.4	25.8	—
	1994	18.2	43.2	46.2	18.2	42.4	34.6	36.3
	2002	30.1	44.2	36.8	—	51.1	35.4	36.8
Working mother can establish as warm and secure a relationship ¹	1988	70.1	59.1	65.6	59.4	54.7	57.3	—
	1994	75.3	64.6	70.9	62.2	62.1	71.5	56.2
	2002	79.8	66.3	73.4	—	61.4	68.4	63.2
Family life suffers if woman works full-time ²	1988	26.1	40.8	49.8	22.5	37.4	33.8	—
	1994	23.9	51.2	51.2	21.2	39.0	37.4	30.6
	2002	37.2	44.6	37.6	—	48.6	33.8	33.4
<i>Instrumental roles</i>								
Job is alright but what most women want is a home and children ²	1988	36.6	47.9	38.9	34.9	30.4	41.5	—
	1994	48.1	50.4	43.5	35.8	33.5	43.3	39.6
	2002	62.4	49.4	31.1	—	45.6	39.6	43.9
Husband's job to earn income; wife's to take care of children ²	1988	35.9	53.1	51.5	46.2	45.6	55.2	—
	1994	47.7	59.2	59.4	48.3	53.3	63.9	53.5
	2002	61.1	64.5	52.5	—	69.3	67.5	66.4
Job is best way for women to be Independent ¹	1988	68.4	63.3	44.4	69.2	58.5	45.4	—
	1994	75.8	60.6	45.4	72.8	67.9	50.8	74.9
	2002	77.7	54.5	52.7	—	58.8	56.7	80.5
Both husband and wife should contribute to household income ¹	1988	50.4	54.5	49.7	73.0	65.2	24.0	—
	1994	67.0	61.7	57.6	81.1	77.3	28.5	84.4
	2002	66.1	60.5	58.3	—	69.6	40.1	87.9

Notes:

- 1 Agree with question statement.
- 2 Disagree with question statement.

The item concerning a job being the best way for a woman to be independent is dropped in order to improve the internal reliability of the new summary measure, in all three nations. The cronbach alphas are .70 for Great Britain, .71 for West Germany and .72 for the USA. In our analysis we drop the small number of cases where there are missing data on more than three of the items.

The predictor variables are cohort, year of survey, highest education; employment status of the female respondent or male respondent's female partner/wife; marital status; religion; and church attendance. A form of dummy regression, multiple classification analysis (MCA), is used to show the deviations of each category from the grand mean adjusted for the effects of the other variables included in the model. As Table 6.3 shows clear patterns emerge regarding gender role change in the three countries. First, it is worth noting that women have more egalitarian sympathies than do men in all three countries; respective grand means are 2.66 (female) versus 2.44 (males) in West Germany; 3.32 (females) versus 2.89 (males) in Great Britain, and 3.24 (females) versus 2.71 (males) in the USA. Thus Great Britain is marginally the most egalitarian country on this measure and West Germany the least. The most important predictor of gender-role attitudes in all three countries is cohort (etas, a correlation ratio, shows the strength of relationship) although for men in Great Britain having a partner who works (full-time or part-time), rather than a home-maker is also a strong predictor.

Figure 6.3 shows the adjusted mean scores by cohort on gender role attitudes for men and women in the three nations. Women from Great Britain and the USA tend to be the most egalitarian. The adjusted mean scores associated with the year of survey differ quite substantially between countries, as Figure 6.4 makes clear. In West Germany attitudes have become increasingly egalitarian over time, for both men and women, albeit from a lower base point than the other two countries. In Great Britain, there has been little shift in attitudes over the 14 years, although women's attitudes in 2002 are, if anything, less egalitarian than in 1988 on this summary measure. In the USA there is evidence that egalitarianism had peaked by the end of the 1980s and recent years have seen a retreat, with both men and women's attitudes becoming markedly less egalitarian in the new millennium.

In Table 6.3 it can be seen that education is a significant predictor of gender-role attitudes, except for British men. In addition, women's work status is particularly influential for women's attitudes in all countries. Without panel data that follows the same individuals across time, it is not possible to disentangle whether women with more egalitarian views are more likely to obtain employment, whether employment experience encourages more egalitarian attitudes, or whether both are true.

Changing gender role attitudes

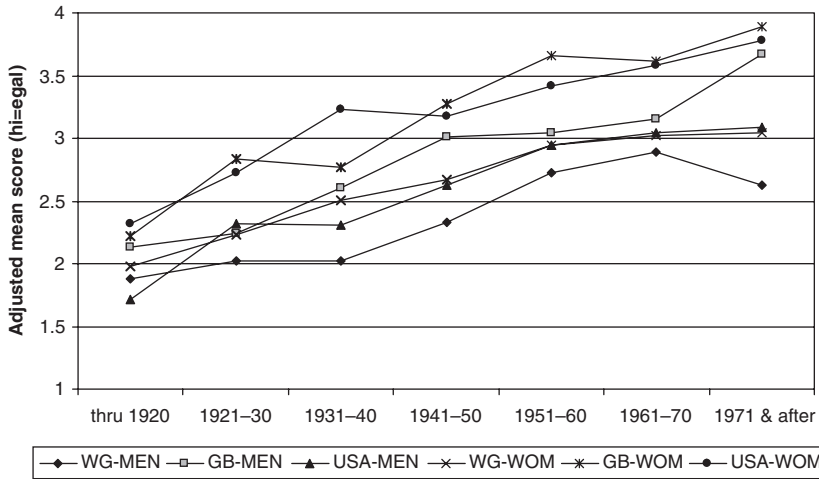


Figure 6.3 Cohort effects on gender-role attitudes, by country and gender

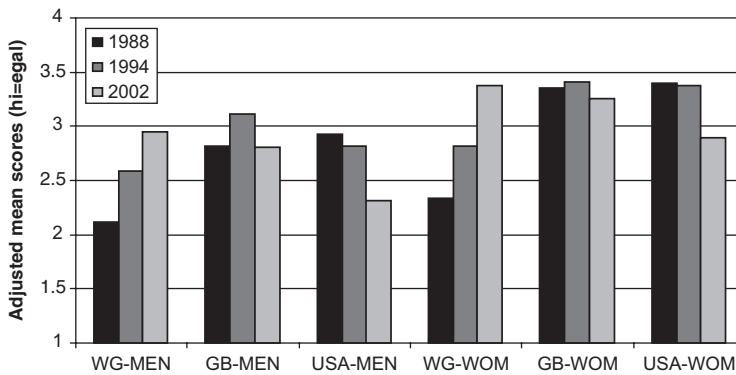


Figure 6.4 Year effects on gender-role attitudes, by country and gender

However, we are able to estimate how far cohort effects can be ‘explained’ by differences in education and work status. In analysis (not shown) we ran three MCA models, the first estimating the effect of cohort and year alone; a second that included cohort, year, education and work status; and a third model, with the additional variables of marital status, religion and church attendance corresponding to Table 6.3. Interestingly, cohort effects are not reduced or ‘explained’ by the introduction of controls for education and labour force participation. Perhaps this is not surprising as, by 1988, the rapid rise of women’s education and labour force participation had already

Table 6.3 Predictors of gender-role attitudinal change: WG, GB and USA

		Women			Men		
		WG	GB	USA	WG	GB	USA
Deviation from mean (adj)							
Cohort	Through 1920	-0.68	-1.1	-0.92	-0.56	-0.76	-1
	1921-30	-0.43	-0.49	-0.51	-0.42	-0.65	-0.39
	1931-40	-0.15	-0.55	-0.01	-0.42	-0.29	-0.4
	1941-50	0.01	-0.05	-0.06	-0.11	0.12	-0.08
	1951-60	0.29	0.34	0.18	0.28	0.15	0.24
	1961-70	0.36	0.3	0.34	0.45	0.26	0.33
	1971& after	0.38	0.57	0.54	0.19	0.78	0.38
	Eta	0.41***	0.31***	0.29***	0.35***	0.27***	0.24***
Year	1988	-0.32	0.03	0.16	-0.32	-0.07	0.22
	1994	0.16	0.09	0.14	0.15	0.22	0.11
	2002	0.72	-0.06	-0.35	0.51	-0.08	-0.4
		Eta	0.25***	0.08ns	0.09***	0.17***	0.12**
Education	Below 2ndry	-0.28	-0.13	-0.38	-0.25	-0.06	-0.22
	2ndry complete	-0.09	0.05	-0.11	-0.03	0.14	-0.13
	High sch dip	0.25	0.03	0.06	-0.12	0.07	0.04
	College	0.64	0.27	0.3	0.42	-0.05	0.23
		Eta	0.24***	0.19***	0.2***	0.16***	0.12ns
Women's work	Workg (ft/pt)	0.442	0.28	0.29	0.53	0.4	0.14
	Home-maker	-0.39	-0.83	-0.66	-0.32	-0.89	-0.73
	Other/no wife	0.04	0.012	-0.06	-0.09	0.05	0.14
		Eta	0.38***	0.3***	0.31***	0.29***	0.29***
Marital status	Married	-0.03	-0.04	-0.14	-0.06	0.1	0.08
	Prev married	-0.05	0.19	0.07	-0.09	-0.19	-0.18
	Never married	0.15	-0.06	0.25	0.16	-0.26	-0.04
		Eta	0.26*	0.11bs	0.17***	0.20**	0.09*
Religion	Cath	-0.05	0	0.08	-0.06	0.26	0.01
	Prots	0.05	-0.08	0.02	0.04	-0.11	-0.03
	Other	-0.31	-0.24	-0.14	-0.67	-0.35	-0.04
	None	0.11	0.14	-0.22	0.24	0.09	0.09
		Eta	0.16***	0.15*	0.07ns	0.17***	0.16***
Church attend	Weekly	-0.26	-0.11	-0.22	-0.26	-0.34	-0.22
	Sev month	-0.04	-0.02	0.19	-0.06	-0.11	0.11
	Less freq	0.14	0.16	0.19	-0.01	-0.13	0.16
	Never	0.23	0.02	0.21	0.24	0.09	0.07
		Eta	0.27***	0.1ns	0.15***	0.21***	0.14*
Grand mean		2.66	3.32	3.24	2.44	2.89	2.71
N		3216	2257	2290	2876	1919	1670
R square		0.29	0.18	0.18	0.22	0.16	0.12

Notes:

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001
 ns = not significant. bs = borderline significant p<.10.

occurred. Controlling for other factors (marital status, religion and church attendance) also does not change the basic finding that most of the variation that we can explain is attributable to cohort effects and the amount of such cohort variation that is due to different patterns of education and work or religiosity across cohorts is negligible. Nevertheless, in all countries and for both genders the explained variance does increase as education, marital status and religion are introduced into the models. As Table 6.3 shows, the total variance explained in the summary measure of gender role attitudes is highest in West Germany (22 per cent for men and 29 per cent for women) and markedly lower in both Great Britain and the USA (16 per cent GB men, 12 per cent US men, and 18 per cent for women in both countries). Thus the model works best in West Germany, where attitudinal shifts have been catching up with the egalitarianism that seems to have peaked earlier in other countries.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter we have looked at three aspects of gender role change. First we investigated the extent of attitudinal change within Great Britain and considered whether or not there is evidence of a backlash. Second we compared what is known about attitudinal change cross-nationally to find out what is distinctive about Britain and whether there has been any convergence of attitudes in Europe and the USA. Finally, we explored empirically various explanations of social attitudinal change, in particular we wanted to find out to what extent generational differences are the main drivers of attitudinal change and, if so, whether such differences are reduced once education and labour force participation are taken into account.

We found that gender-role attitudinal change in Britain does not support a story of revolutionary change and backlash. Interestingly, however, we do find that gender attitudes seem to follow a cyclical period of change, showing a move towards greater egalitarianism followed by retreat. Of course, the fact that people's attitudes have changed relatively slowly and inconsistently does not provide any direct evidence about behaviour. However, attitudes do matter and women (and particularly mothers) can experience considerable strain when attitudes reinforce the notion that employment and family interests conflict. There is considerable commitment to the traditional gender-role divide and there remains concern that maternal employment may compromise family and child well-being. (For similar observations regarding trends in USA, see Thornton and De Marco 2001.)

In terms of our cross-national comparison of gender-role change, we

found attitudes differ considerably depending on the issue. However, the idea that there is near universal support for egalitarianism is clearly a myth. Interestingly, there is evidence of mounting concern about work–family balance on items which tap the conflicts that employment and family care raise for women. There is also clear evidence that countries differ markedly in terms of their trajectories and speed of change in a way that begs additional analysis to improve our understanding of what is driving attitudinal change.

In this chapter we limited our exploration of the drivers of attitudinal change to three countries: West Germany, Great Britain and the USA. We found that the dominant predictor of gender-role attitudes is generation or birth cohort. Moreover, the importance of generation remains, even when controlling for differences in education, women's labour force participation and religion. For the most part our societies are moving towards an epoch of equalisation in terms of opportunities and constraints on men and women. However, in gender-role attitudes there is some evidence of egalitarianism reaching a peak and retreat, particularly in the USA. Moreover, there is still a pronounced generational lag in support for more egalitarian gender roles. It is perhaps not surprising that 'old-fashioned' notions of gender difference are proving surprisingly resilient, given that new gender equalities have imposed a double burden on women, whose employment status does little to ease their burden of family care.

Is the new millennium going to bring further progress or retreat in gender-role egalitarianism? To answer this question we need to do a better job in monitoring gender-role attitudinal change than is currently the case. The existing questions are relatively crude indicators for preferences concerning the complex ways men and women can divide up paid and unpaid labour (see Braun 2007). Existing surveys contain little information about men's roles outside of paid work. We need to explore the disjuncture between practice and expectations concerning work and family life, which have challenged both men and women over the last few decades. Are people concerned about the potential negative effects of maternal employment, because caring is seen as predominantly woman's work, or is it because there are no practical alternatives to the woman being the primary carer? Is it primarily men who must change in their contribution to unpaid care or will greater egalitarianism be achieved more readily by the increasing commodification of care? Existing measures are designed to tap support or rejection of the traditional gender-role divide. But the interesting issues are now about how men and women can best work together to achieve a work–family balance that meets the needs of different generations, at different stages of the life course. To make progress in devising egalitarian interventions that the public would support, we need to know

more about what gender-roles people view as practical, as possible, and as fair.

NOTES

1. I gratefully acknowledge support for this research from a grant by the Economic and Social Research Council (RES-225-25-1001).
2. The 2002 data for the USA are not strictly comparable with early time-points because the response categories changed.

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