



Attitudes to work and parenthood:

Adaptation to family transitions

Eva Bernhardt and Maggie Switek



Attitudes to work and parenthood:

Adaptation to family transitions

Eva Bernhardt^a and Maggie Switek^b

^a *Demography unit, Department of Sociology, Stockholm University*

^b *University of Southern California*

Abstract: While there is extensive research on the selection process, i.e. how attitudes affect family transitions such as marriage and childbearing, this paper focuses on the other dimension of the reciprocal relationship between attitudes and behavior, namely the adaptation process, thereby contributing to the small but growing research area on the connection between demographic behavior and attitude change. Such research has been limited by the fact that it requires longitudinal data on attitudes which are still relatively rare.

Our study benefits from the existence of the longitudinal data base YAPS (Young Adult Panel Study), a three-wave survey of Swedish young adults. Survey questions were used to construct two attitude indices that capture respondents' attitudes to work and career and to parenthood, respectively. Running OLS regressions on changing attitudes as explained by life-course transitions such as union formation and childbearing, separately for men and women, we could conclude that family transitions do influence attitudes to parenthood as well as to work and career, but in opposite directions. Overall, family transitions make attitudes to parenthood become stronger and work attitudes weaker, and childbearing seems more influential than union formation.

Our results align well with the observed increase in positive attitudes to parenthood and the declining attitudes to work and career over the life course, which suggests that family transitions could be largely responsible for the attitudinal changes to work and parenthood that people experience throughout their lives.

Keywords: attitude change, life course, Sweden, gender differences, differences by education



Introduction

In recent decades, there has been increasing research regarding the selection process, i.e. how the attitudes of an individual, in particular those towards family, work, and gender equality, affect family transitions such as marriage and childbearing (Leete 1999, Kaufman 2000, Barber 2001, Thomson 2002, Lesthaeghe and Moors 2002, Bumpass 2002, Thomson and Bernhardt 2010). Most studies that explore the selection process are, explicitly or implicitly, based on the theories of reasoned action and planned behavior, developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980).

Much less attention has been given so far to the other dimension of the reciprocal relationship between attitudes and demographic behavior, namely the adaptation process. It seems reasonable to assume that the attitudes that individuals hold are influenced by experiences and circumstances in their lives, and that important life-course transitions therefore may cause re-socialization of such attitudes (or value orientations). However, research of how attitudes change within individuals over the life course following family transitions is limited by the fact that it requires longitudinal data on attitudes, which are still relatively rare. Hitlin and Piliavin (2004) have argued that much more work is needed to understand the longitudinal nature of values. Attitudes and attitude change have for a long time been the focus of research primarily by psychologists (see Petty et al 1997 for an overview).

This paper aims to contribute to the small but growing research area of attitude change related to demographic behavior. Our study benefits from the existence of the longitudinal data base YAPS (Young Adult Panel Survey), the central aim of which was to enable studies of the mutual relationship between value orientations and demographic behavior in the early adult life phases in Sweden. The YAPS has been the basis of several studies of the selection process, for example Bernhardt and Goldscheider (2006), Moors and Bernhardt (2009), Olàh and Gähler (2009), and Goldscheider et al (2013), but also studies of the adaptation process: Evertsson (2012), Kaufman et al (2016), and Andersson (2015).

Background

Attitudes and attitude change

Our paper analyzes how life-course transitions affect attitudes to work and parenthood throughout young adulthood for women and men separately. Attitudes are individual or micro characteristics reflecting predisposed situation-specific responses to specific social objects (Moors 1997). Values, attitudes, and norms manifest themselves at different levels (Maio et al 2003). Norms prevail at the societal level as a product of cultural inheritance, while attitudes are characteristics of the individual, and values bridge the gap between the two. Empirically, value dimensions can be constructed by combining different attitude scales (sets of attitude questions in a survey).

There is extensive research regarding attitudes to work and family (Amato 1988, Thornton 1989, Lincoln and Kalleberg 1992, Barber 2001, Kalleberg and Mastekaasa 2001, Bernhardt and Goldscheider 2006, Svanberg et al 2006). Work attitudes have frequently been analyzed using the concept of ‘work commitment’ (Bielby and Bielby 1989, Crompton and Harris 1998, Evertsson 2012). Research connecting attitudes to work and family include studies of attitudes to maternal employment (Scott 1999, Bianchi 2000). Attitudes regarding the appropriate roles, rights and responsibilities of women and men have been analyzed using the concept of ‘gender ideology’ (Davis and Greenstein 2009). Both women and men can occupy roles such as partner, parent and worker, but the relative importance (or value) attached to these respective roles may differ, depending on age, gender, and societal context.

Liao and Cai (1995) studied differences in gender-role attitudes among white American women and concluded that socialization only has an indirect effect on attitudes via women’s life situations, while life situations were found to have direct effects on family-related gender-role attitudes. While these findings were based on cross-sectional data, Thornton et al (1983) had access to data from a panel study of women and their children, and thus were able to study both sex-role attitudes and attitude change between 1960 and 1980. Female labor force participation was found to both influence and be influenced by attitudes to the appropriate roles of men and women, while the relationship between sex-

role attitudes and fertility seemed to be asymmetrical, i.e. traditional sex-role attitudes led to above average fertility, but having a large family did not strengthen traditional attitudes. Thus, there was a selection effect, but no adaptation effect.

Earlier assumptions that values tend to be relatively stable across the life-course after being shaped through late adolescence, or, in other words, that socialization is more important than current life situations or life-course transitions, have been questioned in recent years (Hitlin and Piliavin 2004, Schwarz and Bohner 2001, Lesthaeghe and Moors 2002). But this is no doubt an empirical question, and the limited research on this issue has given different results. For example, using YAPS data, Evertsson (2012) found that women's work commitment decreased following the transition to motherhood, but this effect seemed to be transitory. Kaufman et al (2016) found mostly enduring attitudes to gender equality among young adults in Sweden, and Andersson's study of attitudes to divorce (2015) suggested a prevalent, albeit small, influence of family life-course events.

Buchler et al (2017) found that the transition to parenthood was associated with a shift towards more family-oriented values in Australia. In another study, Baxter et al (2014) demonstrated that while gender ideology affected behavior, behavior also reshaped attitudes, concluding that gender ideology does not seem to be stable among individuals over time. In other words, individuals adjust their attitudes to their life circumstances.

Thus, we can formulate our first hypothesis: (1) *Life-course transitions such as union formation and childbearing influence the attitudes that individuals hold with regard to work and parenthood.*

Life-course transitions

The life course concept has been defined as “a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individuals enact over time” (Giele and Elder 1998). From a demographic point of view, these events could be life-course transitions such as marriage, childbearing and divorce. There is substantial research on the effects of such family-related life-course transitions on, for example, employment and income levels and the gendered division of paid and unpaid work (Sanchez and Thomson 1997, Sigle-Rushton and Waldfogel 1998,

Joshi 1998, Ellingsaeter and Leira 2006, Baxter et al 2008, Dribe and Stanfors 2009)

With respect to the psychological effects of life-course transitions, a considerable amount of research has been done on the influence of specific life events on subjective well-being. Partnership formation (both cohabitation and marriage) has been found to increase well-being through its positive influence on life satisfaction, health, self-esteem, labor force outcomes, and social ties (Waite 1995, Zimmermann and Easterlin 2006, Musick and Bumpass 2012). On the converse, partnership dissolution has been documented as having the opposite effect, negatively impacting well-being (Waite et al. 2009, Clark et al. 2008).

The effects of parenting on well-being have also been widely discussed, partially due to the possibly unexpected finding that parents report lower well-being than non-parents in cross-sectional studies (Di Tella et al. 2003, Stanca 2012, Herbst and Ifcher 2016). Although this finding has sometimes been interpreted as suggesting that parenting decreases well-being, more recent longitudinal studies have shown that having children can have positive effects on subjective well-being by, for example, decreasing depression and increasing happiness, , but these effects vary greatly by age, gender, and socio-economic status (Nomaguchi and Milkie, 2003, Myrskylä and Margolis 2014, Baranowska and Matysiak 2011). These studies also revealed that the positive impact of becoming a parent is stronger and longer lasting for women than for men (Nomaguchi and Milkie, 2003 and Baranowska and Matysiak 2011).

Inspired by the psychological effects of individual life-course events, a complementary series of research has explored the relevance of successive life transitions in shaping the evolution of well-being over the life course (Morgan and O'Connor 2017, Switek and Easterlin 2018). Using the YAPS data to study young adults in Sweden, Switek and Easterlin found that life satisfaction follows a slight hill-shaped pattern during young adulthood, increasing until around age 30 and subsequently decreasing over the next ten years of life. The authors also found that this pattern is well explained by the young adult life transitions, with the increase in well-being stemming from partnership formation and the birth of the first child, and the decrease driven by the financial pressures of parenting older children and partnership dissolution.

With a broader international focus on 17 European countries, Morgan and O'Connor confirmed the existence of the slight well-being hill-shape during young adulthood, followed by another increase and decrease later in life (Morgan and O'Connor 2017). This wavy "M-shaped" pattern differs slightly for men and women, with women experiencing more pronounced life satisfaction changes early in life, and men experiencing a more pronounced (positive) change in well-being after the age of 50. As suggested by the authors, these differing patterns may be due to varying effects of family and labor market transitions on the two genders.

To summarize, life transitions have been found to have significant and lasting effects on psychological aspects of a person's life. To the extent that attitudes change over the life course and are affected by other psychological factors, the subjective effects of life transitions could be reflected in attitudinal changes. As noted above, the effects of individual life events and transitions often differ by gender. Therefore, it is plausible that, to the extent that changes in attitudes are observed, the patterns may differ for men and women. To the best of our knowledge, there is no previous study of life transitions and changing attitudes to work and parenthood which has involved both men and women.

We can then formulate our second hypothesis: (2) *There are noticeable gender differences in the effect of life-course transitions on attitudes to work and parenthood.*

Motherhood, fatherhood and societal context

The specific context of our study is Sweden early in the 21st century (2000). This is a country where combining childbearing and gender equality is a social norm, i.e. both expected and facilitated by state policies (Olàh and Bernhardt 2008). Following Barber (2001), however, in a study of mother-child pairs in the US, attitudes to work and parenthood can be regarded as attitudes to competing behaviors (or *competing attitudes*) because work and career compete with childbearing and childrearing for women's time and attention. Presumably, this applies to a lesser extent to men in most societies, as there is evidence that marriage (co-residential unions) and parenthood can be regarded as qualitatively different experiences for men and women (Andersson 2015).

There is, however, evidence which contradicts this claim. McQuillan and her co-authors

(2008) asked whether mothers could simultaneously value work and motherhood, and found in their study of the importance of motherhood among mothers and non-mothers in the US that educational level was not associated with the importance of motherhood for either group and that valuing work success was positively associated with motherhood among mothers. Regarding Sweden, Elvin-Nowak and Thomson (2001) conducted qualitative interviews with working mothers and concluded that “the reality of motherhood for Swedish mothers means constantly balancing care for the child with working outside the home” (op.cit. p.425), implying that mothers’ professional life should not take place at the expense of the child since both are important. Moreover, nowadays active, involved fatherhood is a central aspect of the father role in many countries (Kaufman 2000, Townsend 2010, Coltrane 1996, Kaufman 2013). This would seem to be particularly true in Sweden (Hwang and Lamb 1997, Evertsson and Boye 2015).

Thus, contrary to the idea of attitudes to work and family as attitudes to competing behaviors, it can be argued that “strong commitment to one role does not preclude strong commitment to the other” (Barnett and Hyde 2001, p. 784). Everything competes for time with everything else, and the more time a given activity takes, the more it competes with other activities. The ability to achieve what has often been referred to as ‘work-life balance’ (Kaufman 2013, Hobson 2014) is no doubt facilitated by a context characterized by social support for mothers who work by providing money and child care, but also by reinforcing men’s contributions to children that go beyond the financial (Olàh and Bernhardt 2008). Therefore, the context is important for both time-use and how individuals evaluate different aspects of their life situations. This in turn will be closely related to their attitudes, for example to parenthood and to work and career.

Finally, we can formulate the following two hypothesis: (3) *Educational differences are small with regard to how life-course transitions influence parenthood attitudes, but greater with regard to attitudes to work and career*, and (4) *Attitudes to work and parenthood should be regarded as competing attitudes*.

Data and methods

As mentioned above, the main source of data is the YAPS, a longitudinal survey of three

cohorts of Swedish young adults (born in 1968, 1972, and 1976) interviewed in 1999, 2003, and 2009. To complement information obtained from the respondents, the YAPS data was linked with the Swedish Register records that provide access to additional socio-demographic information (such as highest attained education level). The final dataset includes a comprehensive set of variables related to a person's family life, attitudes, and various demographic characteristics (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics

	Women	Men	Both
Percent of Total	57.9%	42.1%	100.0%
1968 Cohort	0.3641	0.3654	0.3646
1972 Cohort	0.3616	0.3293	0.348
1976 Cohort	0.2743	0.3053	0.2874
Postsecondary Education	0.6117	0.5009	0.5652
Early Parenting Attitude High	0.5232	0.4258	0.4824
Early Career Attitude High	0.3167	0.3281	0.3215
Average Parenting Attitude 1999	8.16	7.68	7.93
Average Parenting Attitude 2003	8.42	7.94	8.21
Average Parenting Attitude 2009	8.44	8.04	8.26
Average Career Attitude 1999	7.77	7.89	7.83
Average Career Attitude 2003	7.44	7.43	7.43
Average Career Attitude 2009	7.17	7.22	7.19

The main variables of interest consist of two attitude indices constructed by combining questions from the YAPS that capture respondents' attitudes to their careers and to parenthood, respectively. The work and career index is constructed as the sum of the extent to which a person believes a good job is one that provides opportunities for advancement, and the importance of work in a person's life.¹ The parenthood index is constructed as the sum of the extent to which a person believes that children give life meaning, and the importance of having children to a person.² Both these indices result in total scores that range from 2 (if the respondent has a weak general attitude towards career/parenthood) to 10 (if the respondent has a strong general attitude towards career/parenthood). We classify

¹ The exact question wording is: "A good job offers good possibilities to advance" (response scale 1=unimportant to 5=very important), and "How important is work in your life" (response scale 1=one of the least important things to 5=one of the most important things).

² The exact question wording is: "To have children is part of what gives life meaning" (response scale 1=don't agree at all to 5=agree completely), and "how important is it to have children" (response scale 1=unimportant to 5=very important).

people as having a “high” early attitude to either career or parenthood if he or she scored 9 or 10 on the respective attitude index in 1999, during the first survey period.

Given the interest in analyzing the effect of life transitions on attitudes, the main explanatory variables are whether the person has recently (since the last survey) become a part of a co-habiting relationship, has entered the labor market, has had a child (either biological or adoptive) join the household, and/or has gone through union dissolution. Respondents are identified as entering the labor market only after having attained their highest level of education. Those who interrupt their education at any point, either due to spells of employment or inactivity, are considered as entering the labor market only after they re-enter education and graduate with their highest degree attained. This definition was used because of the high rates of young adults in Sweden who interrupt their education soon after high-school to engage in either work or leisure activities before re-entering education at the post-secondary level (Cook and Furstenberg, 2002). In addition, to distinguish between the short-term and long-term influence of becoming a parent on attitudes, recent parents are divided into those who have undergone this transition in the past two years (with children of age 2 and younger), and those for whom the transition took place more than two years prior to the survey (with children above the age of 2).

Using data from the YAPS we construct five age groups, ages 22, 26, 30/32, 34/36, and 40, respectively, during the time of the interview. The 22 age group includes respondents born in 1976 interviewed in 1999; the 26 age group includes respondents born in 1976 and 1972 interviewed in 2003 and 1999 respectively; the 30/32 age group includes respondents born in 1976, 1972, and 1968 interviewed in 2009, 2003, and 1999, respectively; the 34/36 age group includes respondents born in 1972 and 1968 interviewed in 2009 and 2003, respectively; and the 40 age group includes respondents born in 1968 interviewed in 2009. We then identify changes in attitudes to career and parenthood over the life cycle, by analyzing changes in these attitudes over the four age intervals covering the life course between these age groups (22 to 26, 26 to 30/32, 30 to 34/36, and 34 to 40). In our analysis we limit the sample to respondents who answered the survey both at the beginning and end of their respective age interval. This methodology was previously used by one of the authors of the present study in Switek and Easterlin 2017.

We use first-difference OLS regression analysis to estimate the partial effect of a life transition on changes in attitudes to career and parenthood. The use of a first-difference OLS regression allows us to control for all individual and cohort-level “fixed effects” that may affect a person’s attitude. The implicit assumption is that the birth-cohort does not affect the *change* in attitudes over the life cycle. Given the close timing in the birth of the three cohorts considered (born in 1976, 1972, and 1968, respectively), this assumption does not seem unreasonable. To avoid confounding the effect of the transition with the effect of aging, we control for the age-period during which a person underwent a transition by including the four age intervals described above into the model. Doing so leads to the following specification:

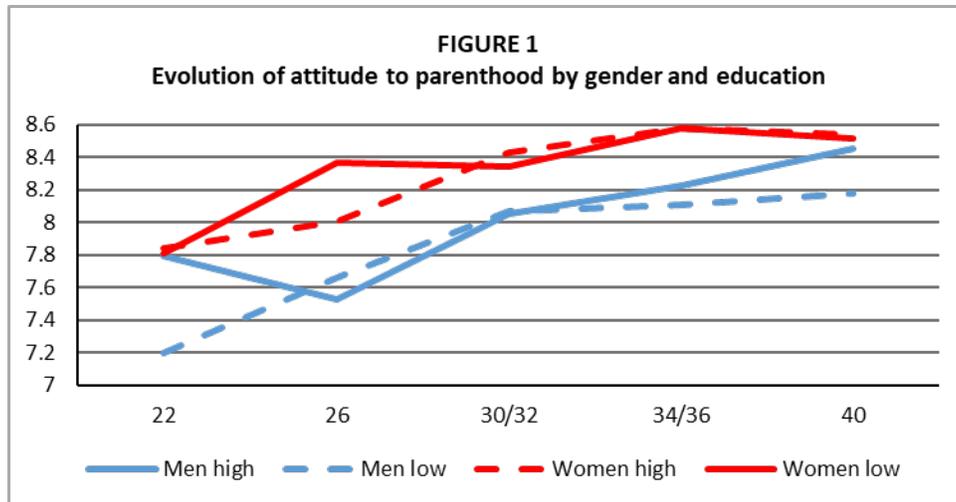
$$(i) \Delta AttIndex_i = \beta_1 * uform + \beta_2 * educ_trans + \beta_3 * parent_yong + \beta_4 * parent_old + \beta_5 * udiss + \beta_6 * notrans + \delta_1 * age22_26 + \delta_2 * age26_32 + \delta_3 * age\ 32_36 + \delta_4 * age\ 36_40$$

Given the inclusion of *notrans* (a binary variable that captures the change in the attitude that takes place irrespective of any of the transitions) the econometric model is run without an intercept. This specification is used to avoid comparison of the effects of the transitions with respect to a reference group, and instead capture the “pure” partial effect of the transition.

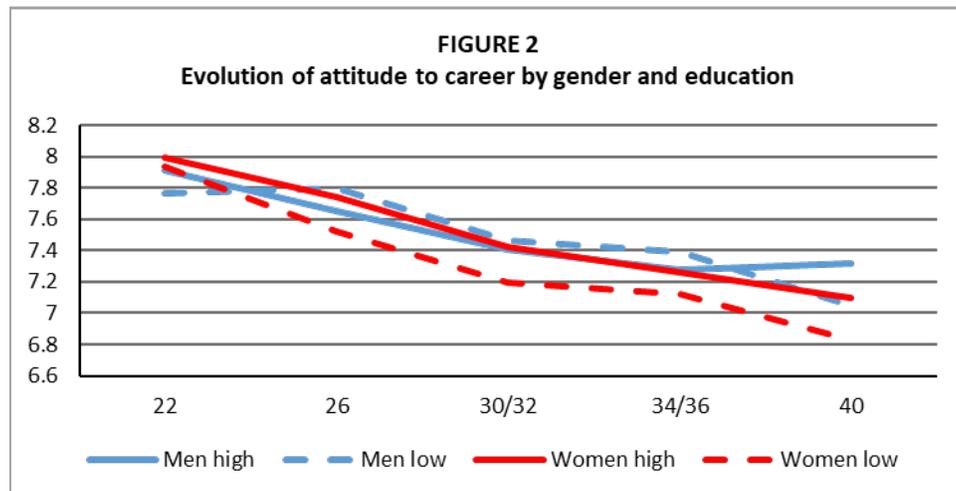
Model (i) is used to run separate regressions where the dependent variable *AttIndex_i* represents either the work and career, or parenthood indices, respectively.

Results

Clearly, both men and women attach greater importance to parenthood as they become older (Fig. 1). At all ages women are more positive to parenthood than men – this is true regardless of educational level. Educational differences are small, so that women with a postsecondary education don’t differ much from women with only a secondary education, and the same is true for men.



The evolution of attitudes to work and career over the life cycle presents quite a different picture (Fig. 2). The work and career index declines over the life course for both men and women. Most noteworthy is the fact among those with higher education, men and women do not differ in how much importance they attach to work and career, except at the oldest age category. In contrast, among those with only secondary education, women stand out as being the least interested in work and career.



Thus, we have observed that, overall, Swedish men and women become more positive to parenthood as they become older, while attitudes to work and career become less positive. Our paper aims to explain to what extent these trends are influenced by family transitions

(union formation, childbearing, and union dissolutions) or to what extent they are simply a result of the ageing process. Tables 2 and 3 present the results of regression analyses of changing attitudes as explained by life-course transitions, separately for men and women.

Family transitions such as union formation and childbearing clearly make both men and women view parenthood more positively (col 1 and 2 in Table 2). Thus, they strengthen the individual's already positive parenthood attitudes. The effect is most marked for those who have just become parents but weakens somewhat for parents with older children. The positive effect of union formation is weaker than the effect of childbearing but remains significant for both genders. That men and women, once they have entered a co-residential relationship, think parenthood more important than before, may testify to the fact that most individuals see childbearing as an integral part of a partnership. Men and women seem to react in very similar ways to these life-course transitions; no significant gender differences were found (results available on request).

However, taking account of the educational levels of the individuals, distinguishing those who have at the most a secondary education and those who have a post-secondary education, we find intriguing gender differences (col 3, 4, 5 and 6 in Table 2). Union formation has a significant positive effect on women with only secondary education, but not on women with a post-secondary education. In contrast, for men, union formation only affects attitudes of those with post-secondary education, but not of those with only secondary education. This suggests that for men with post-secondary education union formation may signal a readiness to make the transition to parenthood, while for women with secondary education only, finding a steady partner may be essential to making the transition into parenthood. It is also noteworthy that men with a post-secondary education view parenthood less positively following the transition from education to work, possibly because they are in career-type jobs where they want to become established before they make the transition to parenthood. While we find a transitory effect of childbearing for women and men with a post-secondary education, this is not the case for men and women with only secondary education: they view parenthood as positively when they have older children.

TABLE 2
OLS Regressions: Change in Attitudes Toward Career Explained by Life Transitions
By Gender, Education, and Early Life Attitudes to Parenting

Dep Var: Change in Attitude to Parenting

Explanatory variable	Women (All)	Men (All)	Women (Secondary)	Women (Postsec)	Men (Secondary)	Men (Postsec)	Women (Early Career Att High)	Women (Early Career Att Low)	Men (Early Career Att High)	Men (Early Career Att Low)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
u_form	0.343** (0.158)	0.396** (0.175)	0.605* (0.313)	0.242 (0.182)	0.116 (0.383)	0.586*** (0.203)	0.317 (0.261)	0.332* (0.201)	0.656** (0.325)	0.331 (0.205)
educ_trans	0.0253 (0.169)	-0.167 (0.193)	-0.259 (0.376)	0.104 (0.196)	0.181 (0.499)	-0.471** (0.228)	-0.273 (0.283)	0.183 (0.210)	0.162 (0.357)	-0.298 (0.227)
parent_young	1.061*** (0.211)	0.822*** (0.239)	0.860** (0.411)	1.141*** (0.247)	0.949* (0.485)	0.645** (0.288)	0.833** (0.352)	1.246*** (0.266)	1.302*** (0.392)	0.641** (0.296)
parent_old	0.614*** (0.188)	0.567*** (0.217)	0.893*** (0.336)	0.508** (0.226)	0.978** (0.449)	0.116 (0.248)	0.599* (0.317)	0.641*** (0.232)	0.805* (0.416)	0.467* (0.252)
u_diss	-0.116 (0.220)	0.168 (0.299)	0.141 (0.359)	-0.204 (0.274)	0.350 (0.570)	-0.0442 (0.359)	0.0587 (0.489)	-0.175 (0.226)	0.228 (0.525)	0.154 (0.362)
no_trans	0.0477 (0.197)	0.0855 (0.231)	0.125 (0.359)	0.0777 (0.238)	0.274 (0.479)	-0.169 (0.283)	-0.0217 (0.347)	0.125 (0.236)	0.510 (0.442)	-0.108 (0.270)
age_period1	0.0940 (0.216)	-0.103 (0.240)	0.128 (0.409)	0.0424 (0.255)	-0.0795 (0.483)	0.00979 (0.308)	0.329 (0.369)	-0.0625 (0.261)	-0.318 (0.437)	-0.0207 (0.288)
age_period2	-0.107 (0.198)	0.117 (0.224)	-0.428 (0.365)	0.0168 (0.236)	-0.171 (0.482)	0.486* (0.258)	0.00416 (0.339)	-0.152 (0.244)	-0.505 (0.414)	0.359 (0.264)
age_period3	0.0122 (0.196)	-0.290 (0.233)	-0.0103 (0.356)	-0.0514 (0.238)	-0.586 (0.475)	0.116 (0.283)	0.115 (0.341)	-0.0619 (0.237)	-0.592 (0.458)	-0.150 (0.271)
age_period4	-0.224 (0.207)	-0.0190 (0.265)	-0.383 (0.378)	-0.176 (0.251)	-0.231 (0.529)	0.271 (0.304)	-0.460 (0.406)	-0.230 (0.242)	-0.223 (0.537)	0.0796 (0.305)
Observations	1,447	1,041	556	891	516	524	448	969	330	701
Adj R-squared	0.063	0.041	0.057	0.070	0.026	0.069	0.061	0.062	0.024	0.045

Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Attitudes to work and career can be regarded as attitudes toward competing alternatives to childbearing (Barber 2001). One may therefore expect that the effect of family transitions on parenthood attitudes may differ depending on the individual's early life attitudes to work and career. Thus, we see in col. 7, 8, 9, and 10 in Table 2 the effect of family transitions on parenthood attitudes depending on whether the individual expressed strong or weak attitudes toward work and career at the age of 22. Here again, the results differ for men and women: union transition makes career-oriented men more positively inclined towards parenthood, while the same is true for women who are not career-oriented early in life, and vice versa. Becoming a parent has a stronger impact on parenthood attitudes for career-oriented men than on men who are not career-oriented, while for women the effect is the opposite: women whose early career attitudes are low are more positively affected than career-oriented women.

How can this be interpreted? The pattern resembles the educational differences that were found (see above), which perhaps is not so surprising as high level of education is likely to be related to career ambitions. It might be that career-oriented men don't form unions until they feel well-established in their careers and are ready to have children, while career-oriented women are less affected by union formation since they already are positively inclined to have children whether or not they have found a suitable partner.

Comparing men's and women's change in career attitudes following family transitions (col 1 and 2 in Table 3), our analysis shows that both men and women are negatively affected by childbearing, although the effect seems to be transitory. Once they have become parents, they view career as less important. However, this decreasing interest in work and career is found only for women when it comes to the effect of union formation: men don't find work and career less important because they have entered a co-residential relationship. Thus, the implications of family transitions are more far-reaching for women than for men regarding the importance that they attach to work and career.

This is even more apparent when we take into account their educational level (col. 3, 4, 5, and 6). Women with only secondary education become distinctly less career-oriented once they have formed a co-residential union, and even more so once they have become parents, while women with a post-secondary education are not affected by union formation, and

only weakly so by the transition to parenthood. There is also a negative effect of union dissolution for women with only a secondary education, which depends on whether or not they have a child (results available upon request), while we find no such effect for men. Men seem on the whole unaffected by family transitions – however, there is a transitory effect on career attitudes following the transition to parenthood for men with a post-secondary education. The work attitudes of men with only a secondary education are not affected by any family transition, which clearly distinguishes them from women with only a secondary education, for whom family transitions have distinct negative effects.

Taking into account their early life attitudes to parenthood (col. 7, 8, 9, and 10 in Table 3), we find no significant effects for those whose early life attitudes to parenthood are weak. In other words, if they attach little importance to becoming a parent in the beginning of their adult life, attitudes to work and career remain unchanged over the life course (as far as we can follow them). Comparing men and women whose early life attitudes to parenthood are strong, we find that women are negatively affected by both union formation and the transition to parenthood, while the work attitudes of men are not affected by union formation, but they become less interested in work and career once they have become parents. In the case of men, this effect remains also for those who have older children, which is not the case for women. Thus, it is only when they attach great importance to parenthood early in adult life that their career attitudes are affected by family transitions, which testifies to the notion that parenthood and work attitudes are to some extent competing attitudes, as argued by Barber (2001).

TABLE 3
OLS Regressions: Change in Attitudes Toward Career Explained by Life Transitions
By Gender, Education, and Early Life Attitudes to Parenting

Dep Var: Change in Attitude to Work and Career										
Explanatory variable	Women (All)	Men (All)	Women (Secondary)	Women (Postsec)	Men (Secondary)	Men (Postsec)	Women (Early Parent Att High)	Women (Early Parent Att Low)	Men (Early Parent Att High)	Men (Early Parent Att Low)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
u_form	-0.248** (0.124)	-0.0951 (0.148)	-0.681*** (0.259)	-0.122 (0.143)	-0.168 (0.327)	-0.0159 (0.167)	-0.373* (0.201)	-0.136 (0.167)	0.0309 (0.219)	-0.208 (0.202)
educ_trans	0.208 (0.136)	-0.0365 (0.156)	-0.00104 (0.360)	0.205 (0.152)	-0.203 (0.301)	0.0624 (0.198)	0.185 (0.192)	0.213 (0.200)	-0.00238 (0.218)	-0.0145 (0.221)
parent_young	-0.589*** (0.176)	-0.380** (0.188)	-0.955** (0.398)	-0.479** (0.194)	-0.00686 (0.344)	-0.724*** (0.233)	-0.822*** (0.222)	-0.387 (0.277)	-0.683** (0.306)	-0.180 (0.243)
parent_old	-0.0706 (0.153)	-0.0801 (0.192)	-0.490 (0.313)	0.0544 (0.178)	-0.149 (0.370)	-0.0146 (0.240)	-0.193 (0.219)	0.0506 (0.222)	-0.552** (0.252)	0.318 (0.279)
u_diss	-0.230 (0.184)	-0.0114 (0.216)	-0.541* (0.324)	-0.176 (0.230)	0.0481 (0.367)	0.0417 (0.304)	-0.192 (0.247)	-0.195 (0.278)	-0.0698 (0.335)	0.0196 (0.296)
no_trans	0.0360 (0.158)	-0.0337 (0.184)	-0.353 (0.332)	0.115 (0.184)	-0.0196 (0.357)	0.0472 (0.236)	0.0620 (0.223)	-0.0284 (0.228)	-0.00629 (0.268)	-0.0787 (0.256)
age_period1	-0.355** (0.169)	-0.164 (0.197)	-0.214 (0.360)	-0.324* (0.194)	-0.0322 (0.383)	-0.366 (0.246)	-0.312 (0.250)	-0.404* (0.229)	-0.422 (0.275)	-0.00865 (0.275)
age_period2	-0.245 (0.157)	-0.283 (0.185)	0.186 (0.319)	-0.348* (0.186)	-0.396 (0.364)	-0.258 (0.236)	-0.123 (0.223)	-0.347 (0.229)	-0.110 (0.276)	-0.370 (0.257)
age_period3	-0.104 (0.156)	-0.152 (0.180)	0.301 (0.334)	-0.196 (0.179)	-0.188 (0.349)	-0.183 (0.226)	0.0400 (0.219)	-0.308 (0.230)	-0.112 (0.266)	-0.169 (0.244)
age_period4	-0.305* (0.177)	-0.206 (0.211)	0.0621 (0.362)	-0.359* (0.209)	-0.360 (0.387)	-0.0993 (0.261)	-0.335 (0.249)	-0.171 (0.258)	-0.0614 (0.303)	-0.346 (0.296)
Observations	1,471	1,056	552	919	515	540	738	699	424	596
Adj R-squared	0.056	0.037	0.070	0.044	0.036	0.041	0.055	0.055	0.050	0.036

Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Summary and discussion

In this paper we investigate how attitudes to parenthood and career change in the family-building process in Sweden. More specifically, we are interested in the role of family transitions over the life course for attitude change. Swedish survey data show that while, on average, with age both men and women become more positively inclined to parenthood, the opposite is true for attitudes to work and career. Barber (2001) argues that attitudes to career and to parenthood are *competing attitudes*, since behaviors such as education, work and career compete with childbearing for the individual's time and attention. Our results give some support to this argument.

Running separate regressions on change in attitudes towards parenthood and career, respectively, as explained by life-course transitions such as education to work transition, union formation, and childbearing, we conclude that family transitions do influence attitudes to parenthood as well as to work and career, but in opposite directions. Moreover, both gender and educational level matter for the effects of family transitions on attitudes to parenthood as well as to work and career, albeit to varying degrees. Taking account of early life attitudes to the competing behavior (career for parenthood attitudes and parenthood for career attitudes) we found a pattern similar to the findings in the models including educational level of the respondent, probably because strong career orientation is associated with post-secondary education.

Comparing parenthood and career attitudes, it is clear that family transitions have opposing effects on attitudes to parenthood and attitudes to work and career: while union formation and childbearing have a positive effect on parenthood attitudes, attitudes to work and career decline following these life-course transitions. However, while no significant gender differences were found for the effects of family transitions on attitudes to parenthood, clearly the implications of family transitions are more far-reaching for women than for men regarding the importance that they attach to work and career. This indicates that, although Sweden is regarded as one of the most gender-equal countries in the world (the country ranks the 3rd lowest in UNs gender inequality index in 2017), traditional gender structures remain to some extent, in particular when it comes to attitudes to work and career.

Adding the educational level of the respondents to our analysis sharpens the difference between parenthood attitudes and attitudes to work and career. It is women with only a secondary education who are most affected by family transitions, both when it comes to parenthood attitudes and attitudes to work and career, compared to women with a post-secondary education. The attitudes to work and career of men with only a secondary

education, however, are not at all affected by family transitions. Regarding parenthood attitudes, men with a post-secondary education are strongly positively affected by union formation, but less so by childbearing, compared to men with only a secondary education.

Taking into account competing attitudes early in life also reveals some interesting differences: it is only when the respondents, male or female, attach great importance to parenthood early in life that their attitudes to work and career are affected by family transitions. On the contrary, we find the opposite effects for men and women when it comes to the effects of family transitions on parenthood attitudes depending on their early life attitudes to work and career. The parenthood attitudes of strongly career-oriented women are not affected by union transitions and less strongly by the transition to motherhood than what we find for weakly career-oriented women. Thus, the gender differences that we find with regard to the early life attitudes to competing behaviors suggest some support for the Barber thesis, but only with regard to the ‘norm-breaking’ attitude: strongly child-oriented men stand out with regard to their career attitudes, while strongly career-oriented women do likewise with regard to parenthood attitudes.

As attitudes frequently are associated with cultural notions about socially prescribed behavior related to family and reproduction, it is not surprising that parenthood attitudes are strengthened by life-course transitions such as union formation and childbearing. Bernhardt and Goldscheider (2006) found no gender differentials in the effects of costs and benefits of parenthood, each of which strongly affected the transition to parenthood, but, of course, in opposite directions. This study demonstrates that, regarding parenthood attitudes, gender differentials are absent in the adaptation process as well as in the selection process, testifying to the fact that the gender revolution in this respect is fairly well advanced in Sweden (Goldscheider et al 2015)

However, this does not seem to apply to the competing attitude, namely how much importance individuals attach to work and career. Evertsson (2012) has already shown that women’s predispositions towards work and career are weakened after exposure to the experience of parenthood, although the effect seems to be transitory. This study demonstrates that this is also the case for men, although the effect is more pronounced for women. However, as regards the attitudinal adjustment following union formation, there is a clear gender difference: men don’t find work and career less important because they have entered a co-residential relationship, but women with only secondary education do. Women with a post-secondary education, on the other hand, are more similar to men. Thus, the

individual's attitudes to work and career reflect an assessment of their life situation, which differs for men and women, even in Sweden to some extent, when it comes to the possibilities of combining work and parenthood. It is interesting to note, however, that in this respect women with post-secondary education are more similar to highly educated men than to women with only a secondary education.

In summary, our study of attitudinal responses to family events over the life course demonstrates that attitudes to work and parenthood clearly change with the experience of life-course transitions such as union formation and childbearing. In fact, the influence of family transitions on changes in attitudes (positive for parenting and negative for career) aligns well with the observed increase in attitudes to parenting and decrease in attitudes to career over the life course. This suggests that family transitions could be largely responsible for the attitudinal changes regarding work and parenthood that people experience throughout their lives. Overall, family transitions make attitudes to parenthood become stronger and work attitudes weaker, and childbearing seems more influential than union formation. Moreover, the educational level seems to play a crucial role in shaping gender differences in the effects of life-course transitions on attitude change.

References

- Ajzen, I. and M. Fishbein (1980). *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior*. Prentice Hall.
- Amato, PR (1988) Parental divorce and attitudes toward marriage and family life *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 50(2): 453-461.
- Andersson, L. (2015). Gender, family life course and attitudes towards divorce. *Acta Sociologica* 59(1): 51-67
- Baranowska A. and A. Matysiak (2011). Does parenthood increase happiness? Evidence for Poland. *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research*, 9(2011): 307-325
- Barber, J. (2001). Ideational influences on the transition to parenthood: Attitudes toward childbearing and competing alternatives. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 64(2): 101-127
- Barnett, RC and JS Hyde (2001). *Women, Men, Work, and Family: An Expansionist Theory*. *American Psychologist* 56(10):781-796.
- Baxter, J. S Buchler, and F Perales (2014). A life-changing event: First births and men's and women's attitudes to mothering and the gender division of labour. *Social Forces* 93(3): 989-1014.
- Baxter, J., B. Hewitt, and M. Haynes (2008). *Life course transitions and housework:*

Marriage, parenthood, and time on housework. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 70(2):259-272.

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

Bianchi, SM (2000). Maternal employment and time with children: Dramatic change or surprising continuity. *Demography* 37(4):401-414.

Bielby and Bielby(1989). Family ties: Balancing commitment to work and family in dual-earner households. *American Sociological Review*

Buchler, Perales, and Baxter (2017). Does Parenthood Change Attitudes to Fathering? Evidence from Australia and Britain. *Sex Roles* 77: 663-675

Bumpass, L. (2002) . Family-related attitudes, couple relationships and union stability. *Meaning and Choice* 161-184

Clark, A.E., E. Diener, Y. Georgellis, and R.E. Lucas (2008). Lags and Leads in Life Satisfaction: A Test of the Baseline Hypothesis. *The Economic Journal*, 118(529): F222-F243

Coltrane, S. (1996). *Family Man: Fatherhood, housework, and gender equity*. Oxford University Press.

Cook, T. and F. Furstenberg (2002). Explaining Aspects of the Transition to Adulthood in Italy, Sweden, Germany, and the United States: A Cross-Disciplinary, Case Synthesis Approach. *American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 580: 257-287

Crompton, R and F. Harris (1998). Explaining women's employment patterns: 'orientations to work' revisited. *British Journal of Sociology* 49(1): 118-136.

Davis, SN and TN Greenstein (2009). Gender ideology: Components, predictors, and consequences. *Annual Review of Sociology* 35: 87-105.

Di Tella, R., R. J. MacCulloch, A. J. Oswald (2003). The Macroeconomics of Happiness. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 85(4): 809-827

Dribe, M. and M. Stanfors (2009). Does Parenthood Strengthen a Traditional Household Division of Labor? Evidence from Sweden. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 71: 33-45.

Ellingsaeter and Leira (2006). *Politicising parenthood in Scandinavia: Gender relations in welfare states*. Polity Press

Elvin-Nowak, Y. and H. Thomson (2001). Motherhood as an idea and practice. A discursive understanding of employed mothers in Sweden. *Gender and Society* 15(3): 407-428.

Evertsson, M. (2012). The importance of work: Changing work commitment following the transition to motherhood. *Acta Sociologica* 56(2): 139-153.

Evertsson, M. and K. Boye (2018). Fathers on call? A study on the sharing of care work among parents in Sweden. *Demographic Research* 39(2): 33-60

Giele, JZ and GH Elder (1998). Life course research: Development of a field. In Giele and Elder (eds.) *Methods of Life Course Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Sage Publications.

Goldscheider, F., E. Bernhardt, and M. Brandén (2013). Domestic gender equality and childbearing in Sweden. *Demographic Research* 49(40): 1097-1126.

Goldscheider, F., E. Bernhardt, and T. Lappegård (2015). The gender revolution: Understanding changing family and demographic behavior. *Population and Development Review* 41(2): 207-239.

Herbst C. M. and J. Ifcher (2016). The increasing happiness of US parents. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 14(3): 529-551

Hitlin, S. and J.A. Piliavin (2004). Values: Reviving a dormant concept. *Annual Review of Sociology* 30: 359-93.

Hobson, B. (Ed.) (2014). *Work-Life Balance. The Agency and Capabilities Gap*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hwang, CP and ME Lamb (1997). Father involvement in Sweden. A longitudinal study of its stability and correlates. *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 21 (3): 621-632.

Joshi, H. (1998). The opportunity costs of childbearing: More than mothers' business. *Journal of Population Economics*. 11(2): 161-183.

Kalleberg, AL and A. Mastekaasa ((2001). Satisfied movers, committed stayers. *Work and Occupations* 28(2): 183-289.

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

Kaufman, G. (2013). *Superdads. How Father Balance Work and Family in the 21st Century*. New York: New York University Press.

Kaufman, G., E. Bernhardt and F. Goldscheider (2016). Enduring egalitarianism? Family transitions and attitudes toward gender equality in Sweden. *Journal of Family Issues*

Leete, R. (1999). Introduction and overview. In *Dynamics of values in fertility change*. Oxford University Press

Lesthaeghe, R. and G. Moors (2002). Life course transitions and value orientations. In *Meaning and Choice: Value orientations and life course transitions*

Liao, TF and Y. Cai (1995). Socialization, Life Situations, and Gender-Role Attitudes Regarding The Family among White American Women. *Sociological Perspectives* 38(2):241-260.

Lincoln, JR and AL Kalleberg (1992). *Culture, control and commitment: A study of work organization and work attitudes in the United States and Japan*. Cambridge University Press.

Maio, G.R., J.M. Olson, M.M. Bernard and M.A. Luke (2003). Ideologies, values, attitudes, and behavior. Chapter 12 in *Handbook of Social Psychology*, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, New York.

McQuillan, J., AL Greil, KM Shreffler and V. Tichenor (2008). The Importance of Motherhood among Women in the Contemporary United States. *Gender & Society* 22(4): 477-496.

Moors, G. (1997). The Dynamics of values-based selection and values adaptation with an application to the process of family formation

Moors, G. and E. Bernhardt (2009). Splitting up or getting married? Competing risk analysis of transitions among cohabiting couples in Sweden. *Acta Sociologica* 52(3): 227-247.

Morgan R. and K. J. O'Connor (2017). Experienced Life Cycle Satisfaction in Europe. *Review of Behavioral Economics*, 4(4): 371-396

Musick K. and L. Bumpass (2012). Reexamining the Case for Marriage: Union Formation and Changes in Well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74 (1): 1-18

Myrkylä M. and R. Margolis (2014). Happiness: Before and After the Kids. *Demography*, 51(5): 1843-1866

Nomaguchi, K. M. and M. A. Milkie (2003). Costs and Rewards of Children: The Effects of Becoming a Parent on Adults' Lives. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 65(2): 356-374.

Olàh, L. and E. Bernhardt (2008). Sweden: Combining childbearing and gender quality. *Demographic Research Special Collection 7: Childbearing Trends and Policies in Europe*, vol. 19, Article 28 pp1105-1144

Petty, R.E., D.T. Wegener, and L.R. Fabrigar (1997). Attitudes and attitude change. *Annual Review of Psychology* 48:609-47.

Sanchez, L. and E. Thomson(1997). Becoming mothers and fathers: Parenthood, gender and division of labor. *Gender and Society* 11(6): 747-772.

Schwarz, N. and G. Bohner (2001). The construction of attitudes. In *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology*. Blackwell Publishers.

Sigle-Rushton, W. and J. Waldfogel (2007). Motherhood and women's earnings in Anglo-American, Continental European, and Nordic Countries *Feminist Economics* 13(2): 55-91.

Stanca L. (2012). Suffer the little children: Measuring the effects of parenthood on well-being worldwide. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 81(3): 742-750.

Svanberg, AS, C. Lampic, PO Karlstrom, and T Tydén (2006). Attitudes toward parenthood and awareness of fertility among postgraduate students in Sweden. *Gender Medicine*3(3): 187-195.

Switek M. and Easterlin R. (2018). Life Transitions and Life Satisfaction During Young Adulthood. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 19:297-314.

- Thomson, E. (2002). Motherhood, fatherhood and family values. In Lestaeghe (Ed): Meaning and choice: Value orientations and life course decisions
- Thomson, E. and E. Bernhardt (2010). Education, values and cohabitation in Sweden. *Marriage and Family Review* 46(1-2): 1-21
- Thornton, A. (1989). Changing attitudes toward family issues in the United States. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 51(4): 873-893.
- Thornton, A., DF Alwin and D Camburn (1983). Causes and Consequences of Sex-Role Attitudes and Attitude Change. *American Sociological Review* 48(2): 211-227.
- Townsend (2010). *Package Deal. Marriage, Work and Fatherhood in Men's Lives*. Temple University Press.
- Waite, L. J. (1995). Does Marriage Matter? *Demography*, 32(4): 483-507.
- Waite, L.J., Y. Luo, and A. C. Lewin (2009). Marital happiness and marital stability: Consequences for psychological well-being. *Social Science Research*, 38(1): 201-212.
- Zimmermann, A. and R.A. Easterlin (2006). Happily ever after? Cohabitation, marriage, divorce, and happiness in Germany. *Population And Development Review*, 32(3): 511-528

