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Gender ideology construction from adolescence to young adulthood

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Abstract

This paper updates and extends research examining the origins of adolescent beliefs about gender. Although previous research noted the importance of maternal attitudes on adolescent beliefs, more recent attempts to model adolescent and young adult gender ideology have been limited in the kinds of intergenerational models tested. Using latent curve modeling and recent survey data from children of a nationally representative sample of women in the United States, I demonstrate that current family context is the most crucial component of adolescent and young adult gender ideology. Egalitarian mothers are more likely to have egalitarian children, although maternal ideologies have little effect on ideology change over time. Young women are more egalitarian than are young men, and this difference diminishes over time. As adolescents age, current life experiences are better predictors of gender ideology than are characteristics of family of origin. There is little evidence that the recent historical trends toward more egalitarian gender ideologies have abated.

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Keywords: Gender ideology; Gender role attitudes; Transition to adulthood

1. Introduction

Much recent research examining potentially gendered behavior includes a measure of gender ideology, or gendered role attitudes, as one of several predictors (e.g., adolescent childbearing plans—Mahaffy and Ward, 2002; cohabitators' union transitions—Sanchez

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et al., 1998).¹ Although previous research has examined factors influencing gender ideology, this body of work has left some crucial questions unanswered. Using data on adolescents from the 1990s, this research builds upon previous research to examine the process of gender ideology construction. I ask three questions in this research. First, what factors influence ideology in adolescence? Second, are the factors influencing ideology in adolescence the same as those that affect change in ideology over time? Third, is there evidence for a “cyclical, interactive relationship between interests and exposure” (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004: 763) as they are related to gender ideology construction over time?

This study is grounded in the life course perspective, that is, it acknowledges that the individuals experience and respond to events based in part on the life stage at which the event is experienced (Elder, 1994). In this study I examine gender ideologies as trajectories across an eight-year period covering an age spread associated with the transition to young adulthood (ages 14–17 to 22–25). The data come from a nationally representative panel study. Using latent trajectory models (Willett and Sayer, 1994), I examine both “average trajectories” of gender ideologies during this transition from adolescence to young adulthood and how individuals’ own ideology trajectories are a reflection of their social background, interests, and exposures to potential ideology-altering experiences.

2. Background

2.1. Gender ideology construction and the transition to young adulthood

Understanding how gender ideology is constructed in adolescence and over time is important to any researcher examining other attitudes or behavior that may be gendered. We know that many behaviors in families are affected by gender ideology (e.g., birth timing—Matthews and Beaujot, 1997; Thomson, 1997; division of household labor—DeMaris and Longmore, 1996; Greenstein, 1996; marital happiness—Amato and Booth, 1995; Kaufmann, 2000; divorce propensity—Davis and Greenstein, 2004) and that adolescent gender ideology is theorized to affect adult occupational decisions (Eccles, 1987, 1994). As argued below, it is likely that ideology construction is part of a reciprocal cycle; individuals, by being in situations that are less gender egalitarian or where expectations of them are to be less gender egalitarian, become less egalitarian. Some stages in this reciprocal cycle have been documented previously (Cunningham et al., 2005; Fan and Marini, 2000; Tallichet and Willits, 1986; Thornton et al., 1983), although the more specific connections between factors affecting initial ideology and change over time have been under-examined.

Bolzendahl and Myers (2004) argue that individual “attitudes toward feminist issues,” including the concept of gender ideology, are a function of interest-based or

¹ The literature upon which this research is based uses a variety of phrases to describe individuals’ level of support for a division of paid work and family responsibilities that are based on the notion of separate spheres: “gender ideology”; “gender role attitudes”; “attitudes about gender”; “gender-related attitudes” and “gender egalitarianism”. Authors’ use of a particular phrase may be partly due to their own beliefs about conceptual distinctions, or due to journal preferences (*Journal of Marriage and Family* discourages authors from using the language of “gender roles”, for example). In this paper, while the measures used tap specific attitudes, the analysis utilizes latent variables to capture the underlying concept that informs responses to individual attitude questions. As such, I have chosen to use the language of the concept of gender ideology.

exposure-based explanations. Interest-based explanations rely on the interest structures of individuals, that is, the goals for which people strive. When people's interests benefit from gender equality, they are likely to hold more egalitarian gender beliefs. As there is abundant evidence that most people's interests, regardless of gender, would benefit from gender equality (Barnett and Rivers, 2004), an obvious question is why more people do not hold egalitarian gender beliefs. One answer is that the interest structures of women and men are culturally expected to be different based upon the hegemonic gender beliefs reifying the notion of polarized gender differences (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004), and that this expectation becomes real in its consequences (Barnett and Rivers, 2004). This explains why women are more likely to hold egalitarian gender beliefs than are men, as men are less likely to believe, based on cultural explanations, that gender equality will benefit them.

Exposure-based explanations argue that exposure to ideas and situations that are consonant with egalitarian ideals will lead to the development of more egalitarian beliefs (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004). This exposure may be in the form of socialization, education, or personal experience. These explanations are inherently about change over time; individuals are exposed to ideas and situations that are consonant with egalitarian ideals and then at some later point become more egalitarian. Are these exposure effects situation-specific, that is, does each new exposure lead to a subsequent and related change in beliefs? Does exposure have a cumulative effect such that it takes repeated exposure to create a change in beliefs, or does more exposure lead to exponential change in beliefs?

A similar argument could be made as to why individuals become less egalitarian over time, that is, they experience situations that lead them to believe that egalitarianism is not in their best interest or would not be beneficial to them, and increased exposure to such situations would lead to less egalitarian beliefs. Another plausible explanation is that because interactions are embedded in a cultural milieu where behaviors are attributed symbolic meaning about the appropriateness of gendered behavior, in interactions where gender egalitarianism is expected but gender inequality is historically the norm (e.g., in marriages and parenting) individuals become less egalitarian to match their beliefs with their behaviors.

Additionally, the reciprocal relationship between interests and exposures implies some type of longitudinal analysis, as exposures to egalitarianism would likely lead to changed interests as an attempt to alleviate cognitive dissonance in connecting concrete experiences to abstract beliefs. The analytic strategy employed here, latent trajectory modeling, is uniquely appropriate to address the extent to which factors affect initial gender ideologies in adolescence and the effects of additional exposures over time on ideology construction.

2.2. Factors related to gender ideology formation and change

2.2.1. Social and demographic background and gender ideology

As noted above, exposures to gender egalitarianism may come in the form of socialization; personal interests more or less in line with gender egalitarianism may also develop as a result of socialization. Through modeling behavior and setting expectations, parents socialize their children to have specific goals, belief systems, and expectations for their future behavior (Biddle et al., 1980; Otto and Haller, 1979; Wilson and Portes, 1975). Below I describe some of the pathways through which socialization has been hypothesized to influence gender ideology formation.

Bolzendahl and Myers (2004) argue that because women have more of a vested interest in increased egalitarianism, men are expected to be less egalitarian than women. Both longitudinal trend studies (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Brooks and Bolzendahl, 2004; Thornton and Young-DeMarco, 2001) and panel studies (Cunningham et al., 2005; Fan and Marini, 2000) note that men are less gender egalitarian than are women. Young men in particular are hesitant to challenge the reified cultural standard of the mother-role and the expectation of negative child outcomes due to maternal employment (Jorgenson and Tanner, 1983; Thornton et al., 1983; Mason and Lu, 1988). Perhaps this hesitation is because on the whole, men benefit from women's unequal performance of family and household tasks.

One key focus is on possible intergenerational components of ideology construction. Mothers play a key role in socialization, therefore much of the previous research has focused on maternal influence (see Myers and Booth, 2002 for an exception).² Maternal education and employment are both representative of mothers' increased exposure to egalitarian beliefs and practices (Banaszak and Plutzer, 1993; Liao and Cai, 1995; Rhodebeck, 1996; Tallichet and Willits, 1986). Mothers' increased exposure to gender egalitarianism is expected to alter their own ideologies. Further, mothers act as role models during socialization, and increased education and labor force participation provide children with exposure to a more gender egalitarian method of dividing household responsibilities. Not only are increased maternal employment and education associated with egalitarianism in children (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Fan and Marini, 2000; Harris and Firestone, 1998; Powell and Steelman, 1982), but more egalitarian mothers tend to have less gender-role stereotyped children (Bliss, 1988; Myers and Booth, 2002; Thornton et al., 1983).

Racial/ethnic differences in gender ideology have roots in historical racial/ethnic differences in labor force participation and access to education. African Americans are expected to be more gender egalitarian than whites because African American women have a higher rate of labor force participation (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005), and African Americans have a higher commitment to egalitarianism in general (Harris and Firestone, 1998). African American women are more egalitarian than white women, although there does not seem to be a difference among men (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Fan and Marini, 2000). Some research also suggests that Hispanics are less egalitarian than are non-Hispanic whites (Fan and Marini, 2000).

Although the relationship between aspects of religion and beliefs about gender is complex (Denton, 2004), increased levels of religious practice are expected to reinforce traditional viewpoints and reduce support for gender egalitarianism (Hertel and Hughes, 1987; Peek et al., 1991). Further, specific tenets within the doctrine of religious affiliations focus on gender relations and women's and men's relative responsibilities for childrearing. As such, religious affiliations are expected to differ in their teachings about gender relations,

² Myers and Booth (2002) note that having both mothers and fathers who are gender egalitarian significantly increases the likelihood that boys would also be forerunners in gender egalitarianism (this relationship does not exist for girls). Fathers' gender ideologies likely are independently influential in the socialization process. Fathers may indeed set expectations for their children and model how to divide family responsibilities in a manner similar to mothers. However, the lion's share of childrearing continues to be performed by mothers. The influence of men's ideologies on family processes, specifically child socialization, is under-examined and beyond the scope of the present study. Additional research focusing specifically on fathers' ideological influence on children's ideology construction is warranted.

and thus lead to different ideologies among their followers. Findings generally indicate that Conservative Protestants are the least supportive of gender egalitarianism and Jews are the most supportive, with Catholics and mainline Protestants somewhere in between (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Greeley, 1989; Hoffman and Miller, 1997, 1998; but see Fan and Marini, 2000).

Egalitarian gender beliefs are also correlated with other social psychological measures. Having personal confidence, higher self-esteem, higher self-efficacy, and instrumentality are related to more egalitarian gender beliefs (Ahrens and O'Brien, 1996; Ossana et al., 1992; Ridgeway and Jacobson, 1979). In particular, young women with personal confidence are more likely to have the courage to break away from traditional definitions of "gender roles" (Ridgeway and Jacobson, 1979).

2.2.2. *The continuing significance of social origins for gender ideology*

Although young women are more gender egalitarian than young men in adolescence, this gap is expected to decrease over time as young men encounter additional exposures to gender egalitarianism. Trend studies show that the gap between women's and men's attitudes has decreased over time, particularly since 1974 (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Thornton and Young-DeMarco, 2001). Panel study findings also show the gap in attitudes between young men and young women decreased over time (Fan and Marini, 2000).

As religious adolescents age, they are likely to develop a better understanding of religious tenets and attend religious services as a reflection of their personal choice rather than parental requirement. Because Judeo-Christian religions focus intensely on heterosexual marriage and the corresponding gendered roles, young adults affiliated with those religions will be more likely to be exposed to material related to marriage and childrearing as they move into those stages of the life course through aging. There is some evidence that this kind of exposure during the young adult stage of the life course is correlated with a movement away from egalitarian gender beliefs in some Protestant religions (Thornton et al., 1983).

2.2.3. *Experiences in adolescence and young adulthood and gender ideology*

Education provides exposure to egalitarian ideas and counters acceptance of gender myths and stereotypes (Cassidy and Warren, 1996; Davis and Robinson, 1991; Rhodebeck, 1996). Trend and panel studies have shown that increased education is associated with increased gender egalitarianism (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Brooks and Bolzendahl, 2004; Brewster and Padavic, 2000; Cunningham et al., 2005; Fan and Marini, 2000; Tallichet and Willits, 1986).

As was the case for maternal employment, the labor force participation of adolescents and young adults also provides exposure to new ideas and people. For young women in particular, labor force participation increases confidence and expectations for financial independence and provides additional role models for negotiating family and work roles (Klein, 1984); employment arguably could have similar effects on young men. Labor force participation could also change the interests of young men. Gerson (1993) and Coltrane (1996) both note that men who experience blocked opportunities in the labor force are likely to become more gender egalitarian as they change their definitions of success. Being in the labor force does seem to be related to more gender egalitarian beliefs in some women, depending on the age at which the relationship is measured (Bolzendahl and Myers,

2004; Cunningham et al., 2005; Fan and Marini, 2000; Harris and Firestone, 1998; Tallichet and Willits, 1986) with no corresponding effect for men.

Marriage is a highly gendered institution. For example, men who enter coresidential unions (either marriages or cohabitations) behave in more traditional ways than they did when living as a single (Gupta, 1999). Making the transition into marriage at the ages under study here may lead to more traditional gender beliefs because of the gendered roles associated with marriage. Further, as the median age at first marriage was 25.3 for women and 26.9 for men in 2002 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003), respondents who marry during the time included in the study would be considered early timed, of whom men engage in less egalitarian behaviors in their marriages (Coltrane and Ishii-Koontz, 1992). Fan and Marini (2000) found that entering marriage typically led to young women becoming less egalitarian, while men in their early twenties who married became slightly more egalitarian.

Previous research has also used the number of children to identify “traditional” family circumstances (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Plutzer, 1991), as married couples with several children are considered the most traditional family arrangement and are expected to be less gender egalitarian. However, there is little evidence to suggest that the birth of children has the same “traditionalizing” effect across the life course and for both women and men (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Cunningham et al., 2005; Fan and Marini, 2000; Tallichet and Willits, 1986).

3. The present study

3.1. Purpose

Taking advantage of recent panel data on American adolescents from middle school into their mid-twenties, this study investigates whether individuals’ trajectories of gender ideologies are linked to social origins. Conceptualizing gender ideology as something that is dynamic rather than static recognizes that adolescents and young adults may change their abstract beliefs about gender once their personal experience requires them to call upon those beliefs. Young adults may become more or less egalitarian over time depending upon the gendered nature of their social context. Previous research has acknowledged the dynamic nature of gender ideology (Fan and Marini, 2000), although the extent to which there is continued influence of family of origin as ideology changes has not yet been examined. In addition, as gender socialization is theorized to be one of the processes through which gender ideology is constructed, and gender socialization revolves around socializing children to behave in gender-appropriate ways, I examine whether the data support that young women’s gender ideologies are constructed differently than are young men’s ideologies.

The main purpose of this research is to examine the influence of family of origin and social experiences on gender ideology trajectories, both adolescent gender ideology and changes in ideology as adolescents become young adults. The first goal is to identify the sources of adolescents’ gender ideologies, specifically in light of factors previously documented in older cohorts of adolescents. How much of an adolescent’s gender ideology is the result of their family of origin and other social and demographic characteristics of their adolescent life? Previous research has argued for the intergenerational transmission of gender ideology through socialization and modeling behaviors (Tallichet and

Willits, 1986; Thornton et al., 1983). I examine two specific mechanisms through which ideology could be transmitted intergenerationally—maternal gender ideology and employment status in adolescence. It is also possible that children may be differentially socialized based upon other characteristics, specifically parental education level. I examine other aspects of social origin in the construction of adolescent gender ideology, namely race/ethnicity, and religious background. Additionally, I examine the correlation between self-esteem and gender ideology. Other social and family characteristics may change over time and may have different effects on gender ideology depending on where in the life course the individual is located. I examine the effects of individual education, employment status, relationship status, and number of children on gender ideology construction over time.

A second goal of this research is to determine whether social and family origins continue to influence gender ideology during young adulthood, or whether current social and family characteristics and contexts are more influential. Together, these goals address the issue of the nature of gender ideology construction in the lives of adolescents and young adults in contemporary American society.

3.2. *Data*

The data for this project come from the Children of the NLSY79, a survey of the biological children of the women in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1979 (NLSY79). The NLSY79, sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in the U.S. Department of Labor, was designed to gather information over time on the labor market experience of men and women. The Children of the NLSY79 study began in 1986. The complete child sample statistically represents the children of women who were born during the years 1957–1964 and who resided in the United States in 1978. Beginning in 1994, these women's children completed a questionnaire similar to that of their mothers biennially. Inclusion in the Young Adult sample began when children turned 14 years of age; as such, only children ages 14 and older were asked the questions used as measures of gender ideology. Between 1994 and 2002, 3767 adolescents were eligible to be included in this study; data from 2004 adolescents (1030 female and 974 male) were included in these analyses.³

Following previous research (Fan and Marini, 2000) and using an understanding of life course transitions, I created three age groupings of adolescents: age 14–17 (corresponding to adolescence and living with parents), age 18–21 (becoming adults, transition into college or work, moving out of parents' home), and age 22–25 (early young adulthood). These adolescents came of age in a time that makes them uniquely appropriate as a sample for examining the construction of gender ideology. During their transition into young adulthood, the majority of mothers were in the labor force, there was fervent public discussion of the effects of family changes on children, and there was an implicit if not explicit drive for greater equality in educational and occupational outcomes in young women and men. These social-structural factors provide a different socialization context than existed when previous panel data were collected and examined.

³ Data collection strategies limited sample size. For example, in 1998 only young adults age 20 and younger were interviewed. In 2000, the questions that were used as measures of gender ideology were not asked of any of the respondents (U.S. Department of Labor, 2003).

3.3. Measures

Gender ideology was measured through a battery of eight statements called Family Attitudes Questions with responses ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree for each statement. The statements were as follows:

1. A woman's place is in the home, not in the office or shop.
2. A wife who carries out her full family responsibilities does not have time for outside employment.
3. A working wife feels more useful than one who does not hold a job.
4. The employment of wives leads to more juvenile delinquency.
5. Employment of both parents is necessary to keep up with the high cost of living.
6. It is much better for everyone concerned if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.
7. Men should share the work around the house with women, such as doing dishes, cleaning, and so forth.
8. Women are much happier if they stay at home and take care of their children.

For all items except 3, 5, and 7, low scores represent an egalitarian attitude, while high scores indicate a less egalitarian attitude. I recoded all items such that higher responses indicated a more egalitarian attitude.

The family attitudes questions were asked of respondents in 1994, 1996, 1998, and 2002. These were the same questions asked of respondents's mothers in the NLSY79 in 1979, 1982 and 1987. Using confirmatory factor analysis, as in previous research (Fan and Marini, 2000), I found that six of the eight items could be used to construct a unidimensional measure of gender ideology. Items 3 and 5 did not correlate well with the other items or one another and were not included in the final analyses. As shown in Table 1, the construct of gender ideology as indicated by the six measured items is similar across all three age groups. Maternal gender ideology (measured in 1987) has a similar factor structure.

3.3.1. Socio-demographic characteristics

Social and demographic characteristics were measured when respondents were age 14–17. Race/ethnicity, measured by self-identification, distinguished blacks, whites, Hispanics, and those of other racial/ethnic groups. As there were too few individuals in the sample of other racial/ethnic groups, the analysis was limited to black, white, and Hispanics, with white respondents as the reference group. Maternal employment status was measured as whether the mother was employed outside of the home for pay during the respondent's adolescence. The highest level of education received by both parents at age 14–17 was measured by three categories: less than high school, high school, and some college, where completing high school was the reference category in the analyses. Religious background was measured first by religious affiliation (with Conservative Protestants as the reference group), and second by religious service attendance (1, never; 2, several times per year; 3, once a month; 4, 2 or 3 times a month; 5, once a week; 6, more than once a week). Additionally, respondent's birth year was included to control for possible cohort effects.

Self-esteem was measured by responses to ten statements with likert-type response categories, combined together into one index. The statements included "I feel that I

Table 1
Measurement for gender ideology^a

Standardized indicator loading on construct	Constructs and indicators
	<i>Age 14–17 gender ideology</i>
.694	A woman's place is in the home, not in the office or shop.
.633	A wife who carries out her full family responsibilities does not have time for outside employment.
.512	The employment of wives leads to more juvenile delinquency.
.688	It is much better for everyone concerned if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.
.494	Men should share the work around the house with women, such as doing dishes, cleaning, and so forth.
.593	Women are much happier if they stay at home and take care of their family.
	<i>Age 18–21 gender ideology</i>
.683	A woman's place is in the home, not in the office or shop.
.644	A wife who carries out her full family responsibilities does not have time for outside employment.
.592	The employment of wives leads to more juvenile delinquency.
.731	It is much better for everyone concerned if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.
.439	Men should share the work around the house with women, such as doing dishes, cleaning, and so forth.
.595	Women are much happier if they stay at home and take care of their family.
	<i>Age 22–25 gender ideology</i>
.696	A woman's place is in the home, not in the office or shop.
.693	A wife who carries out her full family responsibilities does not have time for outside employment.
.527	The employment of wives leads to more juvenile delinquency.
.705	It is much better for everyone concerned if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.
.379	Men should share the work around the house with women, such as doing dishes, cleaning, and so forth.
.595	Women are much happier if they stay at home and take care of their family.
	<i>Maternal gender ideology</i>
.706	A woman's place is in the home, not in the office or shop.
.666	A wife who carries out her full family responsibilities does not have time for outside employment.
.613	The employment of wives leads to more juvenile delinquency.
.698	It is much better for everyone concerned if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.
.429	Men should share the work around the house with women, such as doing dishes, cleaning, and so forth.
.651	Women are much happier if they stay at home and take care of their family.

Note: All parameters are statistically significant at $p < .001$. χ^2 , 1232.016 with 274 degrees of freedom; TLI, .990; CFI, .991; RMSEA, .042.

^a All measures were recoded such that a larger value represented a more egalitarian attitude.

am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others;" "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself;" and "All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure." The resulting index had high internal reliability (Cronbach's α ranged from .81 to .85

depending on the year) and was constructed so that a high score reflects high self-esteem. Descriptive statistics for the full sample when respondents were age 14–17 are listed in Appendix A.

3.3.2. Time-varying characteristics

I included four sets of variables that varied over time in an attempt to capture changing effects of social and relational context on gender ideology over time. Respondent education was measured as the number of years of education completed at the time of the interview. Respondent employment status was measured as either full-time, part-time, or not in the labor force, with not in the labor force as the reference category. Respondent living arrangement beginning at age 18 was measured as single and living with parents, single living independently, cohabiting, or married, with single living with parents as the reference group. Finally, I included a measure of number of children born to or fathered by the respondent at the time of the interview.

3.4. Analytical strategy

The questions posed in this research focus on individual differences in adolescents' ideologies and differences in ideology change over time. One young person may initially be very egalitarian, but over time become less egalitarian. Another person may continue to be egalitarian over time. The rich panel data provided by the NLSY79 Child/Young Adult sample allowed the examination of adolescent gender ideologies as they follow different trajectories. The analytical technique chosen for this research, latent growth (or latent curve) modeling, enabled me to examine adolescent gender ideology over three points in time and relate individual differences in change across time to adolescent social and demographic characteristics. Because much of the theoretical and empirical literature on gender ideology argues that the construction of gender ideology differs based upon the gender of the individual, I performed model comparison tests to determine whether the analyses should be performed separately for female and male respondents.

In latent growth modeling, a trajectory representing initial levels and changes over time is defined in terms of unobserved latent factors (Willett and Sayer, 1994). Repeated measures of the phenomena being examined are used as indicators of an underlying (latent) trajectory. In this study, the repeated measures (family attitudes questions) are observed measures of another underlying construct (gender ideology).

In a linear latent growth model (see Fig. 1), one latent factor defines the intercept of the trajectory. The factor loadings are set to 1.0 to represent the starting point of the trajectory at time 1. A second latent factor defines the slope of the trajectory, representing the rate of change in the phenomena being examined. Here, the factor loadings are set to 0, 1, and 2, defining the slope as linear. The intercept and slope factors are depicted as predicting the construct rather than the observed measures of the construct because the phenomena being examined is a latent construct.

In many cases, predictors of the outcome are expected to affect the initial level of the outcome (the intercept factor) and the rate of change in that outcome over time (the slope factor). These predictors would be time invariant; that is, they would be measured at one point in time and be depicted, as shown in Fig. 2, as affecting only the intercept and slope factors. However, there are other possible predictors whose value may change over time

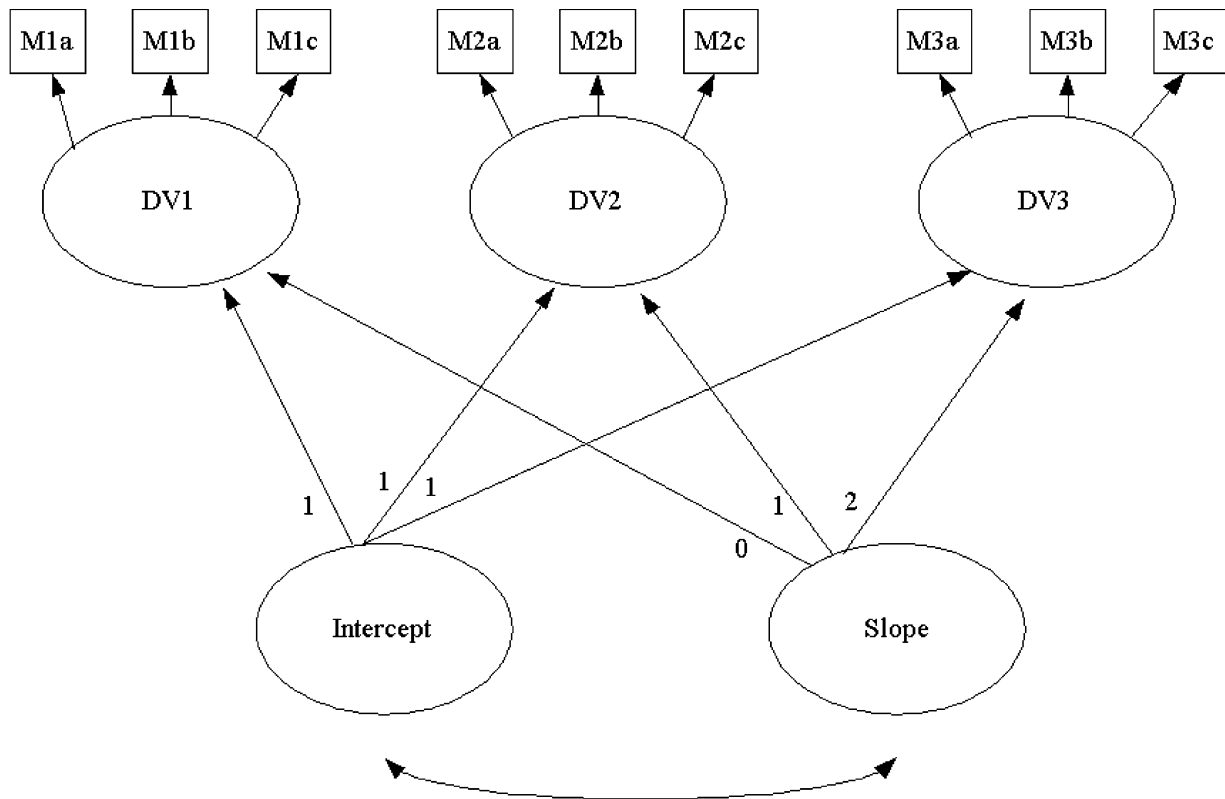


Fig. 1. Linear growth model for a hypothetical latent dependent variable (DV) measured at three time points.

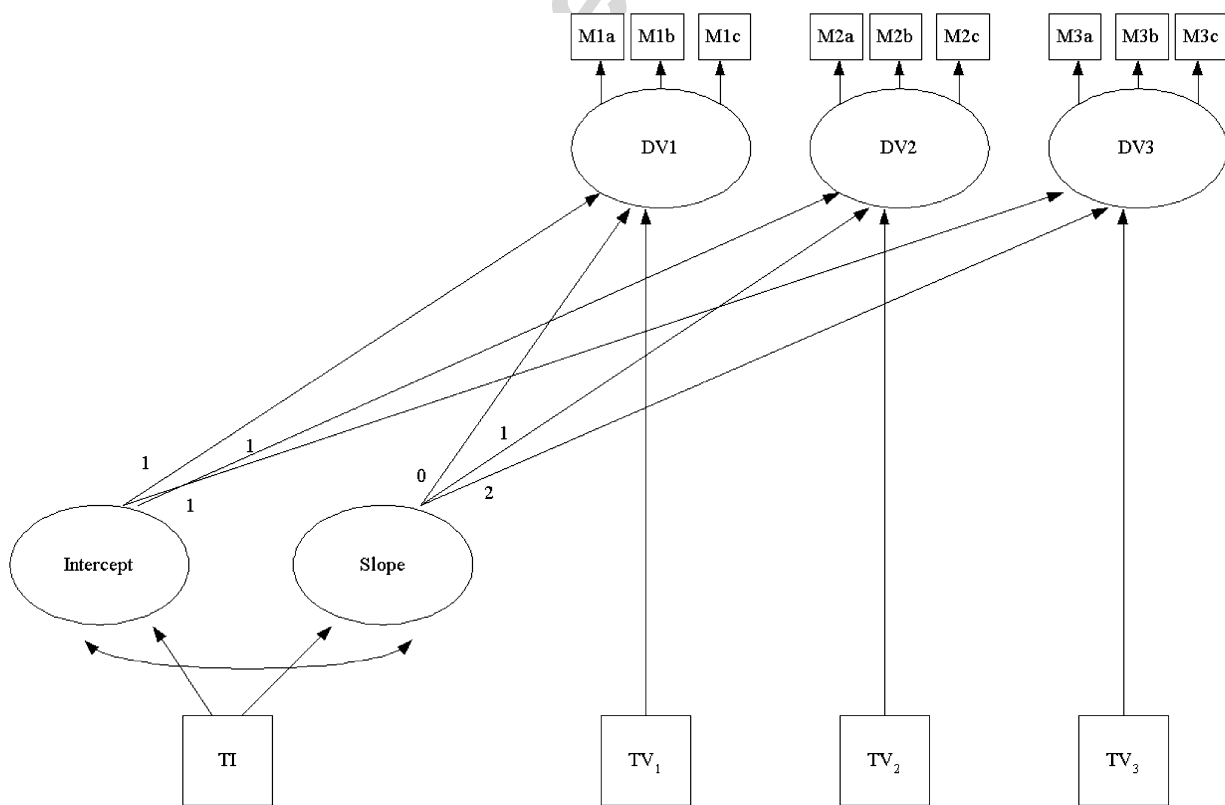


Fig. 2. Linear growth model for a hypothetical latent dependent variable (DV) including time invariant (TI) and time varying (TV) covariates.

that may also affect the phenomena being examined. Instead of affecting the intercept and slope factors, these time-varying covariates would affect the outcome variable directly, as depicted in Fig. 2.

Due largely to differences in the data collection strategies in 1998 and 2000, every eligible young adult was not asked the family attitudes questions at each interview, nor were all young adults included in each interview. To address these inconsistencies for young adults with information on age ideology at age 14–17, I analyzed the data with AMOS Version 4.0 (Arbuckle and Wothke, 1999), using information from all observations to estimate model parameters utilizing a maximum likelihood estimator. In this type of estimation missing data are not imputed; the program uses all data available to estimate the model parameters (see Little and Rubin, 1987). As respondents were aging into the study design at the same time as others were aging through the study, I have a subsample of individuals for whom I have information on their ideology only at age 14–17, while others have the first two ideology measures, and others have only the first and third.

4. Results

4.1. Gender ideology as a trajectory

To determine whether changes in gender ideology over time could be examined as a trajectory I first estimated an unconditional linear growth model. Fig. 3 depicts the structure of the unconditional model. The data fit the depicted growth model well (TLI = .990; CFI = .991; RMSEA = .042.), suggesting that adolescent and young adult gender ideology can be thought of as having an initial starting point and changing in a linear fashion over time.

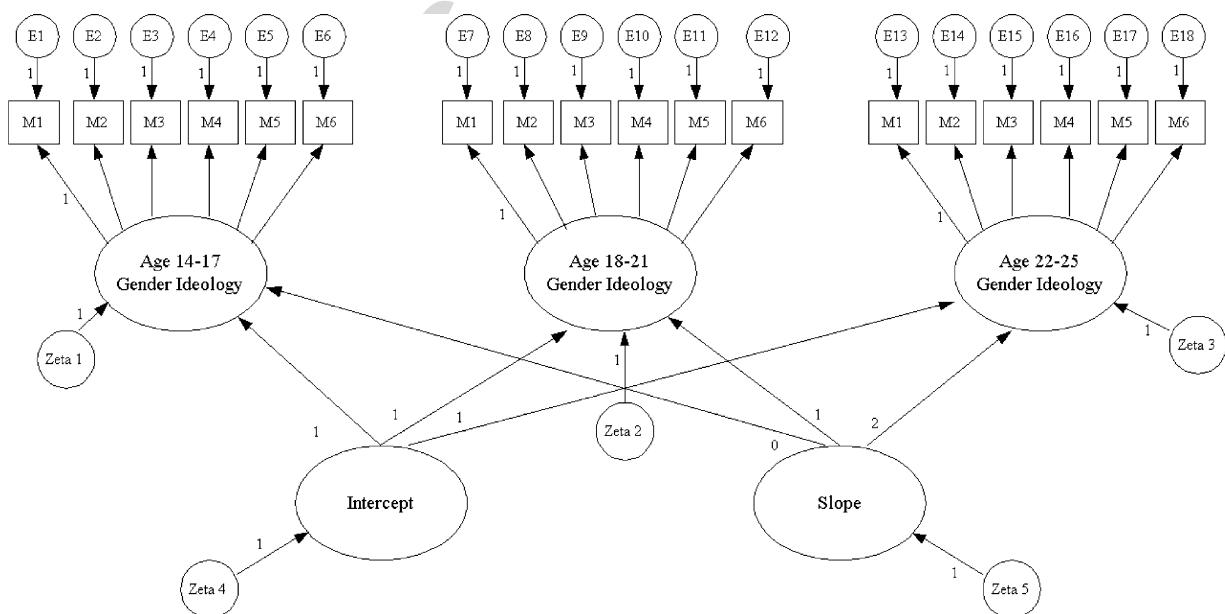


Fig. 3. Unconditional linear growth model for adolescent and young adult gender ideology *Note:* indicators (Ms) are listed in Table 1. χ^2 , 408.40 with 150 degrees of freedom; TLI, .996; CFI, .996; RMSEA, .029.

4.2. *The influence of social origins and transitions into young adulthood on gender ideology trajectories*

To examine the influence of social origins and young adult experiences on gender ideology trajectories, I estimated a conditional growth model regressing the intercept and slope factors on the time-invariant social and demographic characteristics and the time-varying covariates of education level, employment status, living arrangements, and number of children. Parameter estimates for this model are shown in Table 2.

I present the results as they relate to the two objectives of the study. First I consider how gender ideology reflects adolescents' social and demographic backgrounds. Second I consider whether these social and demographic characteristics continue to shape gender ideology into young adulthood. Statistically the first question addresses initial levels in the gender ideology trajectory, while the second question addresses rates of change in the trajectory.

Much of the previous research on gender ideology has performed separate analyses for women and men, arguing that the factors affecting ideology construction differ based upon the gender of the individual (e.g., Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Fan and Marini, 2000; Brewster and Padavic, 2000; Thornton et al., 1983). To investigate this claim, I compared the fit of a model constraining the processes to be the same regardless of gender to one allowing the processes to differ by gender. Allowing the processes to differ by gender does not significantly improve model fit ($\chi^2 = 88.095$ with 68 degrees of freedom). As such, the findings herein are based upon pooled data.

4.2.1. *Initial levels*

Adolescents' initial gender ideologies were strongly correlated with their family of origin. This strong correlation provides additional evidence of the intergenerational transmission of beliefs about gender, as maternal employment status, educational attainment, and gender ideology were strong predictors of adolescent ideology. Adolescents' own experiences also seem to have some effect on ideology at age 14–17.

Young men were less egalitarian than young women. Adolescents with more egalitarian or employed mothers were more egalitarian themselves. Adolescents whose mothers graduated from high school were more egalitarian than those whose mothers did not graduate from high school but less egalitarian than those adolescents whose mothers attended college. Adolescents with higher self esteem also had more egalitarian gender ideologies. Earlier adolescent birth years were correlated with more egalitarian ideologies at age 14–17. Finally, part-time employment at age 14–17 was correlated with a more egalitarian ideology.

4.2.2. *Rates of change*

It is apparent that adolescents' gender ideologies reflect their social and demographic backgrounds as well as their experiences. The question remains whether the effects of these background characteristics continue into young adulthood. Do gender ideologies remain stable after adolescence, or do experiences in young adulthood alter ideologies? Although young men started out less egalitarian than young women, they became more egalitarian over time. With respect to the intergenerational transmission of ideology, there is no evidence of additional effects of maternal ideology, employment, or education as adolescents transition into young adulthood. Indeed, the only background characteristic beyond

Table 2

Estimates (standardized) of the influence of family of origin and time-varying characteristics on gender ideology trajectories

Influences on intercept growth factor	Standardized estimate		
Male	-.50*		
Race/ethnicity ^a			
Black	-.02		
Hispanic	.02		
Maternal gender ideology	.22*		
Maternal employment at age 14–17 (1 = yes)	.16*		
Maternal education ^b			
Less than high school	-.08*		
College	.09*		
Paternal education ^b			
Less than high school	-.05		
College	-.03		
Religious affiliation ^c			
Mainline Protestant	-.01		
Catholic	.04		
Other religion	.05		
No religion	.03		
Religious service attendance	-.01		
Self esteem	.38*		
Birth year	-.08*		
Influences on linear growth factor	Standardized estimate		
Male	.19*		
Race/ethnicity ^a			
Black	.04		
Hispanic	.00		
Maternal gender ideology	-.08		
Maternal employment at age 14–17 (1 = yes)	-.01		
Maternal education ^b			
Less than high school	.10		
College	-.12		
Paternal education ^b			
Less than high school	-.03		
College	-.05		
Religious affiliation ^c			
Mainline Protestant	-.04		
Catholic	.13		
Other religion	-.03		
No religion	.05		
Religious service attendance	-.03		
Self esteem	-.34*		
Birth year	.01		
Time-varying influences on gender ideology	Standardized estimate on ideology age 14–17	Standardized estimate on ideology age 18–21	Standardized estimate on ideology age 22–25
Education	.04	.08*	.10*
Employment status ^d			
Full-time	.02	.03	.11*
Part-time	.06*	.01	.06

Table 2 (continued)

Time-varying influences on gender ideology	Standardized estimate on ideology age 14–17	Standardized estimate on ideology age 18–21	Standardized estimate on ideology age 22–25
Living arrangements ^e			
Married	n/a	–.11*	–.04
Cohabiting	n/a	.01	–.02
Independent single	n/a	–.02	–.07
Number of children	–.01	–.04	–.12*

χ^2 , 7686.452 with 1514 degrees of freedom; TLI, .961; CFI, .965; RMSEA, .045.

^a Reference category is white.

^b Reference category is having a high school education.

^c Reference category is Conservative Protestant.

^d Reference category is not employed.

^e Reference category is never married living with parent(s).

gender that continues to affect gender ideology into young adulthood is self-esteem, as those with high self-esteem in high school become less egalitarian over time.

In contrast, experiences in young adulthood alter gender ideologies throughout the transition period. As adolescents move into traditional college-age and older, greater levels of education are correlated with more egalitarian ideologies. Young adults employed full-time in their mid-twenties are more egalitarian than those not in the labor force, perhaps a function of experience in the workplace. Individuals who are married by age 21 are less egalitarian than are never married individuals who still live primarily with a parent or guardian. Children have no effect on gender ideology until the mid-twenties, perhaps because of the culturally normative expectations of marriage and procreation during this time. Individuals who marry and/or become parents typically engage in less egalitarian behaviors than prior to making this transition (Cowen and Cowen, 1992; Walzer, 1998). This finding suggests that their attitudes change perhaps as a result of their changed behavior.

These findings offer little support that adolescent social and background characteristics are deterministic of young adult gender ideology. After the initial effect in adolescence, background characteristics bear little relationship with ideology trajectories. In other words, children of egalitarian or employed mothers show as much (or as little) change in ideology into young adulthood as do children of non-egalitarian or non-employed mothers. What is more important over time is the lived experience of the young adult in the construction and re-construction of their gender ideology.

In sum, the findings indicate that the initial level of gender ideology is related to social and background origins in rather predictable ways. Moreover, the rates of change in ideology during young adulthood differ based upon experiences that are gendered and have implications for heterosexual relationships. The evidence indicates that change in ideology during young adulthood is less a function of parental and other background characteristics and more a function of the gendered experiences in young adulthood.

5. Discussion

In previous longitudinal panel research on the construction of gender ideologies, Talli-
chet and Willits (1986), Thornton et al. (1983), Fan and Marini (2000), and Cunningham

et al. (2005) noted the importance of both socio-demographic characteristics and lived experiences has having measured effects on young adult gender ideology. While acknowledging changes in ideology over time, what they could not definitively answer is the extent to which background characteristics and experiences affected the rate of change throughout the transition into young adulthood. The detailed panel data from the NLSY79 Young Adult study along with new techniques for studying individual differences in change allow for more detailed analysis into how young people construct and reconstruct their beliefs about gender during an important formative segment of their life course.

A consistent finding in previous studies on gender ideology construction is the gender difference in level of egalitarianism. Women report more gender egalitarian beliefs in every study, although men seem to become more egalitarian over time (whether time is measured within-person or using trend analyses). Due to this difference, many researchers present analyses separately by gender, although few test to see whether any observed differences are capturing actual differences in the construction of gender ideology. These analyses show that while young men do begin with significantly less egalitarian beliefs than do young women, they become more egalitarian over time. When I performed a test of equivalence for the latent trajectory model constructing gender ideology, I found that the overall process through which young men construct their ideologies and the effects of other factors does not differ from that of young women. This similarity suggests that the messages of gender socialization aimed at this cohort of adolescents and young adults do not differ by type of socializing agent (parent versus religious organization), nor do the experiences of work, childbearing and rearing, or marriage affect ideology construction differently by gender. This finding has implications for our understanding of gender socialization processes in general, and in particular, in the gendering of young men. The meaning of events within the life course as they relate to beliefs about gendered roles, such as marriage and the birth of children, do not differ by the gender of the individual. This suggests that the “traditionalizing” effects of marriage and the birth of children are not more or less strong for young husbands and fathers than they are for young mothers and wives. Perhaps this signifies a movement way from adult masculinity being seen as equivalent to being the breadwinner. It is also possible that as young adults age and become entrenched in networks synonymous with their gendered roles the process of ideology construction will become more divergent by gender. Further investigation with later stages of the life course is warranted.

A key hypothesis of the second wave of feminism was that one way to facilitate social change was to raise more pro-feminist or gender egalitarian children. This hypothesis was predicated on the notion that egalitarian mothers, either in ideology or behavior, would raise children to be more egalitarian. This research, as in previous research (Myers and Booth, 2002; Thornton et al., 1983), finds there is some intergenerational transmission of egalitarian beliefs. However, the factors that lead to more egalitarian children do not offer long-term protection against becoming more traditional. That is, maternal effects on gender ideology stops once children move into the stage of the life course where parental influences are expected to diminish relative to the influences of new significant others (primarily peers). This dissipation of parental influence as adolescents transition into early adulthood is not limited to ideology, as Plutzer (2002) has shown in his research on young adult voting behavior. These findings are consonant with the recognition of the importance of social context in understanding primary agents of socialization.

The importance of lived experiences as a source of knowledge from which ideology is derived is highlighted in these findings. Beliefs about gender and gender relations are more a function of how young adults negotiate their own lives (or wish to negotiate their own lives) than their own social background. Gender relations are more salient for young adults as they move into their twenties, as many of them begin forming their own families of procreation. These findings beg the question of causality; do the correlations between marital status and number of children and decreasing gender egalitarianism suggest that moving into these roles in and of itself leads young adults to become less egalitarian? Or is it that because there are few structures in place to support egalitarian marriages and child-rearing practices that individuals fall away from egalitarian practices and, as a reflection of their new interests, alter their belief structure to reduce cognitive dissonance?

That number of children does not affect young adults' ideologies until the mid-twenties is telling; simply having children does not cause young people to become less gender egalitarian. It is the timing of children that is important. The meaning of children during the life course seems to change as well, in that the more normative timing of children in the mid-twenties signifies a movement into an adult role that is culturally acceptable. Children earlier in the life course do not seem to correspond to a change in gender ideology, such that the meaning of having children "early" does not seem to be correlated with a retreat from gender egalitarianism. It is only when the number of children increases during the "appropriate time" that young adults become less gender egalitarian.

Two findings are particularly interesting. Neither race/ethnicity nor religious affiliation and practice affect initial gender ideologies, nor do race/ethnicity and religious practice affect ideology trajectories. As previous research noted that minorities, and minority females in particular, were more egalitarian than whites, these findings suggest that either minorities have become less egalitarian or that whites have become more egalitarian. Longitudinal trend analyses provide more support for the latter explanation (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004).

Religious affiliation and religious service attendance have been argued to be socializing factors that reinforce beliefs about gender and gender relations. That there is no effect of affiliation or attendance on initial ideology or ideology trajectories suggests that the messages within religions regarding gendered roles may be secondary to cultural images, parental socialization, and lived experiences in the studied segment of the life course. It is also possible that religious service attendance during young adulthood may not be as strong an indicator of community embeddedness for adolescents as it is for adults (Plutzer, 2002), a suggestion borne out by the inconsistent findings among previous research on young adult gender ideology (Fan and Marini, 2000; Thornton et al., 1983). Additionally, there is evidence suggesting that adolescents have a shallow understanding of religious tenets (Smith, 2005). As these young adults move through the life course, it is possible that not only will those who are religious have a deeper understanding of the religious tenets, but will also be more likely to have religion as a primary source of teaching regarding gender as compared to popular culture, peers, and parents.

That multiple researchers examining the same or similar process have varied findings is not unexpected. That some of the findings of this research are so different begs the question of "why?" It is likely that some of the difference is due to the early initial ages of the young adults in this study. The construction of gender ideologies has typically been studied when young adults were at least age 18 (Fan and Marini's (2000) examination

of gender ideologies is an exception) or were focused solely on girls. This study shows that both young women and young men have constructed/internalized gender ideologies as young as age 14. Differences by race/ethnicity and religious affiliation and/or service attendance that have been captured in previous studies may be the result of measuring initial attitudes later in early adulthood when the young adults have had more life experiences, suggesting support for the reciprocal cycle of exposures changing interests and ideologies over time.

It is also likely that some of the differences are due to the modeling technique. Rather than measure beliefs at multiple points in time as discrete characteristics (even when controlling for previous beliefs), latent trajectory modeling examines change over time. That there are no religious differences at ages 14–17 may be due to the adolescents' shallow understanding of religious tenets. If religious affiliation were a crucial component of gender ideology construction at this stage of early adulthood, there should be differences in the effects of affiliation on the slope, or measure of change over time, for ideology. These differences are not present. Perhaps even this eight-year time span is too short of a range to see differences based on affiliation, as even the oldest young adults are in their mid-twenties. It also may be that differences by religious affiliation in teachings regarding gender traditionalism or egalitarianism are not as salient in the lives of these young adults and, as such, are not showing up as religious affiliation effects. Future research should tease out the answers to these queries.

This study argues that a trajectory approach to understanding the construction of gender ideologies is not only appropriate but necessary if we are to truly understand the relative importance of social, background and experiential characteristics of individual's lives as they affect belief systems. This kind of approach is not only consistent with life course approaches where early life experiences have implications for later life experiences, but also takes seriously the issues of causality in examining change over time. The cyclical relationship between increased exposures to more or less gender egalitarian situations and changed interests as they affect ideologies can most fruitfully be examined by utilizing a trajectory approach. Future research is warranted in order to develop a more full understanding of how the transitions across young adulthood into middle adulthood also alter gender ideologies, with a specific focus on whether the rate of change over time is a linear change, or if there are ebbs and flows in gender egalitarianism corresponding to position in the life course.

Appendix A

Descriptive statistics for all youth at age 14–17

Variable	Mean or %
Male	.49
White	.38
Black	.39
Hispanic	.23
Maternal employment (1 = yes)	.67
Maternal education	
Less than high school	.23
High school diploma	.71
College	.06

Appendix A (*continued*)

Variable	Mean or %
Paternal education	
Less than high school	.23
High school diploma	.75
College	.02
Conservative Protestant	.24
Mainline Protestant	.21
Catholic	.21
Other religion	.09
No religious affiliation	.17
Religious service attendance	3.28
Self esteem	32.04
Education	9.23
Employed full-time	.06
Employed part-time	.26
Not in the labor force	.68
Number of children	.03

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