

Double standards: A cross-European study on differences in norms about non-marital cohabitation and divorce for men and women

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ABSTRACT

We examine double standards regarding divorce involving young children, non-marital cohabitation, and having children in a cohabitational union. A double standard implies that men and women are evaluated differently when displaying the same behaviour. Whether men or women are more disapproved of when engaging in these modern demographic behaviours, is not a priori clear. We formulate arguments in both directions. We expect that double standards vary cross-nationally by the level of gender equality (in terms of educational attainment and economic participation). To test our hypotheses we conduct multilevel analyses including individual and societal-level variables. Our sample consists of 44,000 individuals nested in 25 countries, obtained from Wave 3 of the European Social Survey (2006). Subjective norms towards divorce and (childbearing in) non-marital cohabitation were measured with a split ballot design; half of the respondents was randomly assigned items regarding women displaying these behaviours, the other half was assigned items regarding men. Findings indicate that men are generally more disapproved of than women when displaying such non-traditional family behaviours. This double standard is strongest for divorce involving young children. Overall in Europe, women endorse all three double standards, whereas men only endorse the double standards regarding divorce (though not as strongly as women do). Clear cross-national differences in the double standard exist, which are partly explained by the level of gender equality. Surprisingly, the higher the level of gender equality, the stronger the double standards. Hence, especially in gender equal countries people are more tolerant towards women displaying non-traditional family behaviour than towards men.

INTRODUCTION

Western societies have witnessed an enormous increase in gender equality during recent decades, for example with respect to education and economic participation. At the same times, family patterns have changed. The centrality of marriage has declined; phenomena such as non-marital cohabitation, non-marital childbearing and divorce have become more common (Smock 2000; Kiernan 2000) and also more accepted (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001; Liefbroer and Fokkema 2008). Yet, this trend towards greater acceptance of non-marital living arrangements does not imply that these are universally accepted. Disapproval of these types of behaviour may still be relatively strong among parts of the population in these societies.

Despite the close link between the gender role revolution and the Second Demographic Transition, the Second Demographic Transition Theory (Van de Kaa 1987) has been criticized for a lack of an explicit gender perspective (Bernardt 2004). Research on attitudes and norms regarding non-traditional family behaviours ignored potential differences in norms for men and women. It may seem logical that modern demographic behaviours, such as non-marital cohabitation and divorce –which usually involve a man and a woman– are tolerated to the same extent for women as for men, but reality might be different. Opting for such modern family arrangements may impact very differently on the lives of men and women. Therefore, in this paper we investigate double standards in family norms. A double (or multiple) standard can be defined as a different code of conduct for different groups of people, or in other words: a different evaluation of the same behaviour for different groups of people. The distinction of groups may be based on a variety of characteristics, such as sex, ethnicity, nationality, or socio-economic background (Foschi 2000). Most often the concept is used to refer to a different norm for men and women, as it is in this paper.

The classical and most researched example of the double standard is the one consisting of different codes of sexual behaviour. In general, the two codes allow for a wider range and frequency of sexual experience for men than for women. For instance, promiscuity and extra-marital affairs are judged as less acceptable for women than for men. Research indicates that there is still evidence of the existence of a double standard with regard to sexual behaviour (see Crawford & Popp 2003 for an overview), although other studies did not find evidence (O', Sullivan 1995; Marks & Fraley 2005). Another example of a double standard based on gender concerns the inference of task competence. Surveys and (quasi-)experiments have shown that

women have to try harder and are allowed fewer mistakes than men for the attribution of the same level of ability (for an overview of these studies see Foschi 2000). Furthermore, physical signs of aging result in more negative evaluations of women's attractiveness and overall worth than men's (Berman et al. 1981, Deutsch, Zalenski & Clark 1986). We will examine whether double standards also exist with regard to non-marital cohabitation, having a child in a non-marital cohabitational union, and getting divorced while one has young children. These phenomena have in common the (potential) negative consequences for dependent family members, often women and children. In case of non-marital cohabitation, negative consequences arise in particular when the couple separates – which is more likely than if the couple would be married (Kiernan 2001). Whether man or women displaying these behaviours are more disapproved of is not a priori clear. We formulate arguments in both directions. We also look into whether men and women hold equally strong double standards or not. Furthermore, norms about what kind of behaviour is acceptable for men and women are likely to vary between societies. The existence of double standards might be related to the level of gender equality in a society. Therefore we also examine whether double standards vary across European countries, and to what extent this variation can be explained by the level of gender equality in a country.

Doing so, we extend the literature in several ways. First, we contribute to the gender literature on double standards, by broadening the range of topics studied. Second, we contribute to the study of family attitudes and norms, because in this field of study differences between norms for men and women have been neglected. Third, we aim to explain cross-national differences in double standards. We make use of the third wave of the European Social Survey (ESS), which was conducted in 25 European countries and includes items with a split ballot design that provide the unique opportunity of studying double standards with regard to family behaviour.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Why would we expect double standards regarding non-marital cohabitation, childbearing in non-marital cohabitation and divorce involving young children? Generally, women are still often (partly) financially dependent on their partner, especially when they have children. Studies on the economic consequences of partnership dissolution have shown that women (and their dependent children) are often the financial losers of separation or divorce; they experience a considerable

loss in adjusted household income, whereas men experience only moderate income losses, or even improve their economic status (see Andreß et al. (2006) for an overview of 24 studies from several European countries and Canada and the United States). Additionally, in their own panel study including five European countries, Andreß et al. (2006) showed that women with dependent children experience most economic losses.

Still, marriage might be seen as the family form that provides most financial security for dependent family members, even after divorce (Scott 2004). Hence, cohabitational unions, especially when having a child, are more risky for women. Moreover, cohabitational unions are more likely to dissolve than marriages, also when there are children – even in countries where cohabitation is considered by many as an alternative to or substitute for marriage (Kiernan 2001). Kiernan also showed that in France, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States children who are born in a cohabitational union are more likely to have experienced the dissolution of their parents' union by age five even if the cohabitation was converted into a marriage after childbirth.

Since the potential consequences of divorce and of non-marital cohabitation and childbearing in that situation are more negative for women, we could expect on the one hand that women who engage in these types of family behaviour are more disapproved of than men. It could be considered unwise of a woman not to marry, to have children outside of marriage, or to divorce, especially if she has young children. On the other hand, one could argue that a man who does not marry his partner or divorces her –especially if they have children– is considered to refrain from his responsibilities, because his partner is dependent on him. He could be said to refrain from the commitments he should make as a responsible man. Therefore, his non-traditional family behaviour could be more disapproved of than hers. To put it provocatively, norms could serve either to prevent women of becoming 'victim' of risky family situations, or to prevent men of becoming the 'inflictor'. Hence, we formulate the following contrasting hypotheses:

H1a) Women who experience a divorce or engage in non-marital cohabitation and childbearing are more disapproved of than men.

H1b) Men who experience a divorce or engage in non-marital cohabitation and childbearing are more disapproved of than women.¹

Above, we assumed that men and women are equally likely to endorse double standards concerning family life. However, it is questionable whether this is true. Perhaps people can identify or empathize better with the family issues or choices of people of the same sex and therefore disapprove more of the non-conformist behaviour of the other sex. Besides, expressing norms generally entails costs (Coleman 1990) and disapproval of members of one's own group may entail higher costs than disapproval of members of another group. Holding a double standard which mainly restricts the other sex allows more freedom for the own sex and thus also for the self.

Surprisingly little research on double standards took the sex of the respondents into account. The scarce empirical evidence on the topic is mixed. Jurich and Jurich (1974) did not find a significant difference in the proportion of male and female college students that endorsed the traditional double standards that permits only men to have premarital sex. Berman (1981) found that male college students rated pictures of middle aged men as more attractive than pictures of middle aged women, when they had to rate them publicly in a male group, but that this double standard was smaller if they had to do so in a female group or mixed group. Robinson and Jedlicka (1982) suggested the emergence of a 'new double standard' among American college students with regard to sexual behaviour: each sex imposed greater restrictions on the sexual behaviour of the other sex than on that of one's own. Yet, Milhausen and Herold (1999) found among female Canadian university students that 46% believed that it is women themselves who are the harshest judges of women's sexual behaviour, whereas only 12% believed that men were the harshest judges of women's sexual behaviour (the rest believed men and women were equally harsh judges). As empirical evidence on double standards is inconclusive and there is no

¹ Attitudes towards non-marital cohabitation and childbearing might not only be based on ideas about the stability of unions and (financial) responsibilities, but also on norms regarding premarital sexual relationships. Though such double standards imply that extra-marital sex would be more acceptable for men than for women, we do not think it is very likely that this would make such openly and structural violations of the norm against extra-marital sex as non-marital cohabitation and childbearing in this living arrangement more acceptable for men than for women.

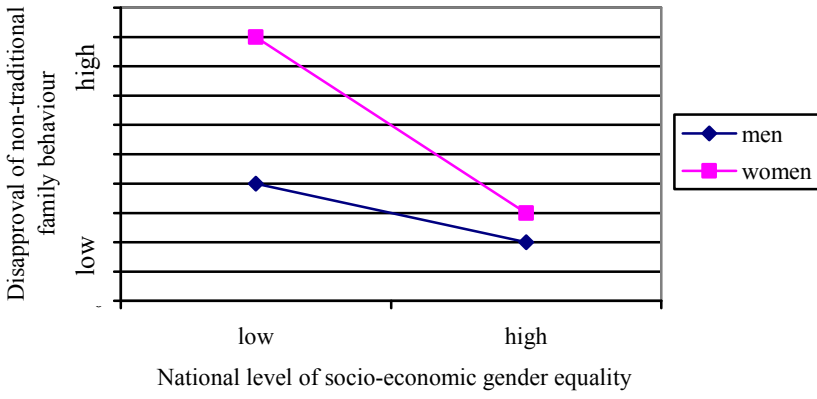
established theory formation on potential differences between men and women in their endorsement of double standards, we regard this issue as explorative.

Finally, we think that the existence or strength of double standards is related to the level of gender equality in a society. We reasoned that the origin of norms against cohabitation, having children in unwed cohabitation and divorce involving young children lies (at least partly) in the negative consequences for women and children – and thus for society. Yet, the higher the level of gender equality in a country, in terms of relative educational and economical participation and power of women compared to men, the less women are financially dependent of their male partners. Hence, the less negative the consequences for women and children in such societies are expected to be. It is likely, therefore, that in gender egalitarian societies, norms against cohabitation and divorce are less restrictive for men as well as for women. We assume, however, that norms for women vary stronger by national level of gender equality than norms for men, because higher levels of gender equality are preceded by a process of women's emancipation: their lives have changed more than that of men (Gershuny & Robinson 1988; Sayer 2005; England 2010), and probably attitudes about women's roles have changed more than attitudes about men's roles. In gender egalitarian societies, emphasis might be given in particular to women's right to autonomy. As the level of gender equality varies across European countries, we expect the double standards to vary across Europe too. We formulate a threefold hypothesis on the association between national levels of gender equality and double standards:

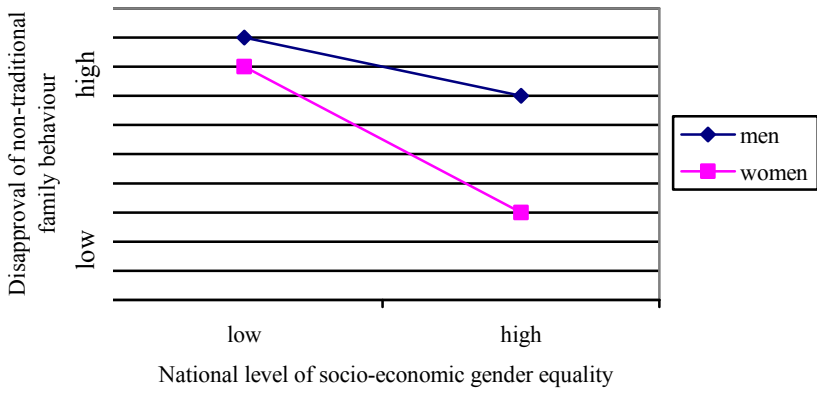
H3) If norms against cohabitation and divorce are generally stricter for women (i.e. H1a is true): the higher the level of gender equality, the smaller this double standard. If norms against cohabitation and divorce are stricter for men (i.e. H1b is true), the higher the level of gender equality, the larger this double standard. A third possibility is a 'flip over': in countries with low level of gender equality, double standards are in favour of men, whereas in countries with high levels of gender equality, double standards are in favour of women. In this case, the double standards in different countries could average each other out and we might not find a main effect of gender of target

Below, these three variants of Hypothesis 2 are visualized in graphs.

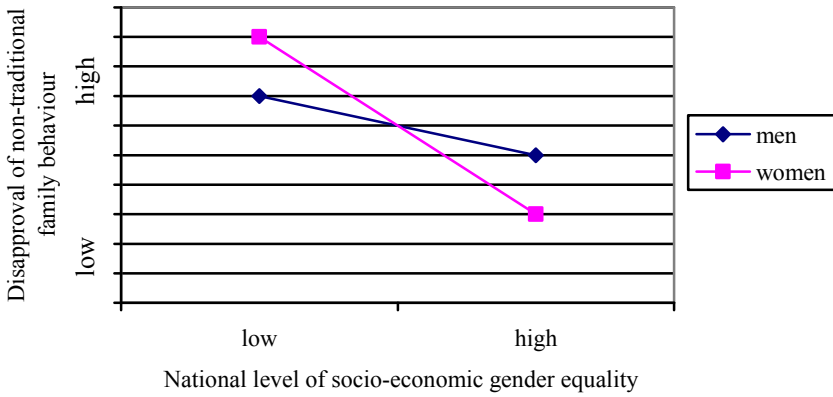
Hypothesis 2-I



Hypothesis 2-II



Hypothesis 2-III



METHOD

Data

In this study, we used data from the 2006 wave of the European Social Survey (ESS), a repeated cross-sectional survey that was designed to measure social attitudes and values using face-to-face interviews. The ESS aimed to be representative of the residential populations aged 15 years and above, regardless of their nationality. Strict guidelines were used to obtain a high quality dataset. We used the 2006 wave because it contains a module with questions on attitudes regarding family formation and other life course events. Data were collected in 25 countries. A total of 47,009 respondents participated. Response rates per country vary between 46.0% and 73.2%. The (unweighted) average is 63.5%. We did not employ selection criteria for our sample. Our sample sizes range from 43,520 to 44,554 individuals (for different analyses), nested in 25 countries. Differences in sample size are caused by missing values on the dependent variables.

Measures

Dependent variables

We included three dependent variables in this study. First, the degree of disapproval of divorce when young children are involved, measured with the following item: ‘How much do you approve or disapprove if a woman/man gets divorced while she/he has children aged under 12?’. Second, the degree of disapproval of unmarried cohabitation, measured with the item: ‘How much do you approve or disapprove if a woman/man lives with a partner without being married to him/her?’ Third, the degree of disapproval of having children in unmarried cohabitation, measured with the item: ‘How much do you approve or disapprove if a woman/man has a child with a partner she/he lives with but is not married to? Answer categories range from 1 (strongly disapprove) to 5 (strongly approve). We inversely recoded the answers so that a higher score implies higher disapproval. The survey has a split ballot design; the female version of the questions was randomly assigned to half of the respondents and the male version was assigned to the other half.

Independent variables

Individual level variables

As described above, our dependent variables are measures of attitudes, not of double standards. Hence, double standards are not measured at the individual level. However, our interest is in the double standard as a characteristic of groups; of men, women, and national populations. Therefore, in this paper we focus on the effects of the dummy variable which indicates whether the respondent was assigned the female or the male version of the question (0 = male version, 1 = female version). This variable is labelled 'sex of target'. The sex of the respondent is also included (0 = male, 1 = female).

We included a set of control variables at the individual level²: Age measured in years; educational level, ranging from 0 (primary education not completed) to 6 (second stage of tertiary education); and employment status (0 = not employed, 1 = employed). Furthermore, we included partner status, distinguishing the following categories: (1) married or widowed, (2) divorced (and not married or cohabiting with a new partner), (3) cohabiting unmarried, and (4) single (i.e. never married and not cohabiting). The variable 'children' indicates whether the respondent has ever had (a) child(ren) (0 = childless, 1 = has ever had one or more children). We accounted for religion by using the degree of religious involvement. This was measured as a factor score based on three items: frequency of church attendance, frequency of prayer, and self-evaluated level of religiosity (measured with the question 'How religious are you?'). A factor analysis showed one clear factor underlying these items. The higher the factor score, the higher a person's religious involvement was. An overview of the descriptive results on these variables is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 here

² Note that these control variables are not related to our variable of interest 'gender of target', as that is a random variable. Therefore, these control variables do not influence the effect of 'gender of target' on the dependent variables. However, they are important to include, because the interaction effects between gender of target and gender of respondent, respectively GGGI, are also central to this paper. And the latter two variables, as well as the dependent variables, could be associated to the control variables. Thus, by including the control variables we control for compositional effects (that would otherwise have been attributed to GGGI) and correct the effect of gender of respondent.

Country level variable

As the indicator of the level of gender equality in a country we use a scale of socio-economic gender equality, as women's independence of their partners is what is theoretically relevant for our study. This scale is calculated as the average score on two of the four subscales of the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) of 2006, namely: the economic participation and opportunity sub-index and the educational attainment sub-index (for the indicators of these sub-indices see Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi 2006). Theoretically, the scale ranges from 0 (inequality) to 100 (equality). The scores of the countries in our sample range from 76.24 in France to 86.66 in Finland. We centred the scores around the mean. The non-centred scores are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 about here

Method of analysis

Separate multilevel analyses were conducted for each of the dependent variables. The analyses include variables at the individual and the country level. The effect of the variable sex of target tells us whether there are double standards regarding the attitudes that are measured with our dependent variables, and whether non-traditional family behaviours are more disapproved of when displayed by men or by women (Hypotheses 1a and 1b). To investigate whether men or women hold stronger double standards regarding these behaviours (explorative issue), we added the interaction term of sex of the target and sex of the respondent. Because we also wanted to know whether the existence and strength of double standards varies across countries, we used random-slope models; the slope of sex of target is allowed to vary across countries. To test whether the strength of double standards is related to the level of gender equality of a country (Hypothesis 2), we add the cross-level interaction term of sex of target and level of socio-economic gender equality. Analyses were conducted with the `xtmixed` command in Stata10 using the maximum likelihood option.

FINDINGS

Descriptive findings

In Figure 1, 2 and 3, we present the mean disapproval of divorce involving young children, non-marital cohabitation and having children in non-marital cohabitation by sex of respondent and sex of target; hence, the bars represent women's attitudes towards women, women's attitudes towards men, men's attitudes towards women and men's attitudes towards men. Figure 1 shows that men as well as women disapprove more of men who are getting divorced than of women. Women are more tolerant towards divorce than men, but especially when it regards women. Figure 2 and 3 show that men are more tolerant about non-marital cohabitation and childbearing in non-marital cohabitation than women. Furthermore, men do not endorse double standards in this regard, while women's attitudes towards men and women differ. The double standard is strongest with regard to divorce involving young children, and weakest for unmarried cohabitation and having a child in such a living arrangement.

In Table 3, we present for each country the mean scores on the three dependent variables and the double standard, calculated as the average score on attitudes towards women minus the average score on attitudes towards men. Hence, a negative score implies that men who deviate from traditional family formation are more disapproved of than women doing the same. For each of our dependent variables, we observe that disapproval of men's behaviour is stronger than that of women's in most countries. Especially the strength of the double standards with divorce involving young children shows quite some variation across Europe. It is strongest in the Nordic countries and in Russia and Ukraine, while in Bulgaria and Portugal the difference between norms for men and women are smallest.

Table 3 about here

Multilevel analyses

Disapproval of divorce involving children under age 12

In Table 4, the models of disapproval of divorce involving young children are presented. Model 1 shows that people are more disapproving of divorce if they are older, lower educated, not employed and religiously involved. Furthermore, married and widowed people are more disapproving of divorce than people who are divorced, cohabiting or single. Surprisingly, parents are less disapproving of divorce involving young children than childless people.

The negative effect of sex of respondent implies that women are less disapproving of divorce involving young children than men are. The negative effect of sex of target indicates that there is a double standard regarding divorce involving young children; men getting divorced while they have young children are more disapproved of than women with young children who are getting divorced. This supports Hypothesis 1b. Unexpectedly, the level of socio-economic gender equality does not influence general disapproval of divorce involving young children. Finally, the random part of the model shows that the variance of sex of target is .009 and significantly different from 0. This indicates that the double standard varies across countries.

Adding the interaction between sex of target and sex of respondent to the model (Model 2), shows that women's double standard regarding divorce involving young children is almost twice as strong as men's. Yet, both sexes hold a double standard which is more favourable for women. (The main effect of sex of target –now representing the effect for male respondents– is still statistically significant, indicating that men also hold a double standard.) The main effect of sex of respondent –now representing the effect on attitudes towards divorcing men– remains significant, implying that women are less disapproving of men who are getting divorced while they have young children than men themselves are. The fit of Model 2 is significantly better than the fit of Model 1 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 56.0$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .001$).

In Model 3, we added the interaction between sex of target and socio-economic gender equality. This interaction term has a negative effect, implying that the higher the level of socio-economic gender equality in a country, the stronger is the double standard regarding disapproval of divorce involving young children in favour of women. By adding this interaction term, the variance of sex of target decreases with 17.9%. (Due to rounding off the difference between the variances of sex of target in Model 2 and 3 in the table appears to be smaller.) This means that

17.9% of the variation between countries in the double standard is explained by the variation in national levels of socio-economic gender equality. In Figure 4 we plotted this interaction effect for the range of socio-economic gender equality scores that is represented by the countries in our dataset (76.24–86.66). The effect is consistent with version II of Hypothesis 2.

Table 4 here

Disapproval of non-marital cohabitation

In Table 5, we present multilevel effects on attitudes towards non-marital cohabitation. As for attitudes on divorce involving young children, we find that people are more disapproving of unmarried cohabitation if they are older, lower educated, not employed, religiously involved or married or widowed. Contrary to the findings for disapproval of divorce, we find no difference between parents and people without children in attitudes towards unmarried cohabitation. The effect of sex of respondent is negative; women are more tolerant towards non-marital cohabitation than men. Note that the bivariate descriptive results show the opposite. Additional analyses (not presented) indicate that including religious involvement in the model results in a negative effect of sex of respondent in stead of a positive effect. This implies that women are more tolerant towards non-marital cohabitation than men of with the same level of religious involvement, but women are more religiously involved. The negative effect of sex of target in Model 1 indicates that the double standard is in favour of women; women who are cohabiting are less disapproved of than men who are cohabiting. This finding again provides evidence for Hypothesis 1b. The variance of the double standard across countries is much smaller than for divorce involving young children, but still statistically significant.

The negative effect of the interaction between sex of target and sex of respondent in Model 2, together with the finding that the main effect of sex of target (now representing the effect for male respondents) is not statistically significant anymore, tell us that women hold a double standard regarding non-marital cohabitation, whereas men do not. As for disapproval of divorce, the main effect of sex of respondent remains significant, implying that women are less disapproving of men living in non-marital cohabitation than men themselves are. The fit of Model 2 is significantly better than the fit of Model 1 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 15.77$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .001$). The negative effect of the interaction of sex of target and the level of socio-economic gender equality

(Model 3) is significant at the 10% α -level and indicates that the higher the level of gender equality, the stronger the double standard (in favour of women). By adding this interaction term, the variance of sex of target decreases with 18.7% (which cannot be seen in the table, due to rounding off), and the model fit improves significantly at the 10% α -level (Model 3 versus Model 2: $\Delta\chi^2 = 3.23$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p = .072$). In Figure 5 we show this interaction effect. Again, the plot is consistent with version II of Hypothesis 2.

Table 5 here

Disapproval of having a child in a non-marital cohabitational union

With regard to disapproval of having a child in a non-marital cohabitational union (Table 6), we find the same pattern of effects as for non-marital cohabitation, except that people with children are less disapproving of childbirth in an unmarried cohabitational union than married people are. Once more the double standard is in favour of women (supporting Hypothesis 1b) and only held by women. The fit of Model 2 is significantly better than the fit of Model 1 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 15.36$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .001$). The interaction effect of sex of target and socio-economic gender equality is statistically significant and brings about a statistically significant improvement in model fit (Model 3 versus Model 2: $\Delta\chi^2 = 4.48$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p = .034$), indicating again that the higher the level of gender equality, the stronger the double standard (in favour of women). The decrease in variance of respondent of target between Model 2 and 3 (which cannot be seen in the table, due to rounding off) implies that 23.1% of the country-level variation in double standards is explained by level of socio-economic gender equality. In Figure 6 we plotted this interaction effect. Once more, the plot is consistent with version II of Hypothesis 2.

Table 6 here

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study is the first to show the existence of double standards regarding family formation and divorce in Europe. Previous research on double standards mainly focused on sexual double standards, the double standard of aging and double standards in the evaluation of task performance. And previous research on family attitudes and norms ignored the possibility of different norms for men and women. The ESS provides an excellent split ballot design to reveal double standards. Measuring double standards at the individual level would be very difficult; when each respondent would have to rate his or her approval of men *and* of women based on the exact same items, the likelihood of social desirable answers (i.e. no double standard) would probably be high.

Whereas double standards based on gender usually imply that norms are stricter for women (e.g. the sexual double standard), our findings indicate that norms against non-traditional family formation and against divorce are stronger for men. However, in the case of unmarried cohabitation and having a child in unmarried cohabitation, this double standard is only endorsed by women, who are much more tolerant towards women in such family situations than towards men in the same situations. Men do not hold double standards with regard to unmarried cohabitation nor to having a child in this living arrangement. Both men and women hold double standards regarding divorce involving young children: both sexes are more disapproving of divorcing men than of divorcing women, though women's double standard is about twice as large as men's is. It is not the case, however, that women are more disapproving of men who cohabit, have a child within non-marital cohabitation or get divorced than men themselves are. In contrast, they are a little more tolerant towards men in such family situations than men are, but they are even more tolerant towards women.

The existence and strength of double standards vary substantially across Europe. The double standard regarding divorce and unmarried cohabitation is related to the country's level of gender equality: the higher the level of gender equality, the stronger the double standard. This might seem counter intuitive, but given the fact that in Europe these double standards generally are in favour of women, it is not so surprising. Apparently, people in gender equal countries are especially tolerant towards family decisions of other women. More research is needed to get more insight in the reasons why people hold double standards. Are women granted more autonomy in family choices, especially by women in gender equal countries or are women in non-traditional

living arrangements seen as the “victims” of their partner’s unwillingness to commit to marriage? Unfortunately, it remains unclear from the formulation of the items about non-marital cohabitation, having a child in non-marital cohabitation, and getting divorced when one has young children, whether it is a voluntary choice to opt for these living arrangements or not. A divorce could be initiated by the other partner, and even though non-marital cohabitation is a living arrangement both partners choose, it could be the result of one partner’s unwillingness to marry. Possibly, in some countries – like the Nordic countries – an emphasis on women’s autonomy explains the double standard, whereas in other countries – like Russia and Ukraine – women in non-traditional living arrangements are seen as ‘victims’ of irresponsible men and therefore less disapproved of than men. Another suggestion for future research would be to focus on the ‘target’: do men and women experience double standards regarding non-marital cohabitation, non-marital childbearing and divorce and if yes, how does it affect them?

Our study has a cross-sectional design. We assume that emancipation processes have caused more changes in attitudes towards women than towards men, but we do not know if and how double standards on the issues we study were manifested in past times. There are no cross-national trend data that could provide this information at hand, but perhaps national datasets could provide more historical information.

In addition, future research could elaborate on the links between personal characteristics and double standards. Besides our focus on cross-national differences in double standards, we chose to focus on only one individual characteristic, namely sex. We found this theoretically the most interesting individual determinant to investigate, as we studied attitudes towards men and women. Investigating the effects of other individual characteristics would have required including more interaction effects – as double standards are not measured at the individual level – which would make the models less parsimonious.

Despite these limitations, we believe that the results of our study underline the value of using a gender equality framework when studying attitudes and norms about modern family behaviours.

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Table 1. Overview of individual characteristics (N = 42,826)

Variable	<i>M</i> (%)	<i>SD</i>
Independent variables		
Age ^a	47.52	18.50
Educational level ^b	3.02	1.46
Employed (% yes)	53.89	
Children (% yes)	68.70	
Partner status		
Married or widowed (%)	62.76	
Divorced (%)	6.34	
Cohabiting (%)	8.71	
Single (%)	22.18	
Religious involvement ^c	.00	1.00
Gender (% female)	54.69	
Gender of target (% female version)	50.25	
Dependent variables		
Disapproval of divorce involving young children ^d	3.16	1.03
Disapproval of non-marital cohabitation ^d	2.66	1.08
Disapproval of having a child in a non-marital cohabitational union ^d	2.73	1.09

^aIn years. ^bScale: 0–6. ^cFactor scores. ^dScale: 1–5.

Note: These descriptives are based on the respondents that do not have missing values on any of the independent and dependent variables, therefore the N is a smaller than for each of the separate multilevel analyses.

Table 2. Socio-economic gender equality country

Country	Socio-economic gender equality (non-centred)
Austria	76.64
Belgium	81.00
Bulgaria	80.11
Switzerland	83.30
Cyprus	77.87
Denmark	85.41
Estonia	84.08
Finland	86.66
France	76.24
Germany	83.24
Hungary	81.55
Ireland	82.02
Latvia	81.80
Netherlands	80.38
Norway	86.41
Poland	81.75
Portugal	82.90
Romania	83.27
Russian federation	84.77
Slovak Republic	82.28
Slovenia	83.28
Spain	76.66
Sweden	86.50
Ukraine	84.44
United Kingdom	83.22

Table 3. Overview of norms and double standards by country

Country	Disapproval of divorce involving young children	Double standard divorce involving young children	Disapproval of non-marital cohabitation	Double standard non-marital cohabitation	Disapproval of childbearing in non-marital cohabitation	Double standard childbearing in non-marital cohabitation
Austria	3.23	-.20	2.53	-.01	2.65	.03
Belgium	2.85	-.21	2.12	-.07	2.25	-.07
Bulgaria	3.63	.05	3.06	.01	3.05	.01
Switzerland	3.23	-.09	2.61	-.02	2.82	-.08
Cyprus	3.00	-.10	2.94	.19	3.33	.12
Denmark	2.12	-.28	1.51	-.01	1.66	-.06
Estonia	3.59	-.24	3.18	-.05	3.11	-.11
Finland	2.77	-.35	2.08	-.04	2.23	-.07
France	3.15	-.25	2.45	-.08	2.48	-.09
Germany	3.28	-.15	2.78	-.02	2.88	-.01
Hungary	3.26	-.26	2.78	-.07	2.77	-.13
Ireland	3.32	-.16	2.98	-.03	3.05	.01
Latvia	3.28	-.21	2.87	-.03	2.90	-.13
Netherlands	2.76	-.15	2.05	.01	2.16	-.00
Norway	2.54	-.31	1.79	-.10	1.80	-.11
Poland	3.39	-.24	2.93	.04	2.88	.05
Portugal	3.03	.03	2.61	.04	2.64	.04
Romania	3.62	-.11	3.33	.06	3.42	.07
Russian federation	3.59	-.34	3.27	-.10	3.28	-.23
Slovak Republic	3.55	-.22	3.16	-.05	3.27	-.03
Slovenia	3.10	-.25	2.56	-.15	2.49	-.16
Spain	3.06	-.18	2.45	-.03	2.52	-.00
Sweden	2.78	-.34	2.22	-.20	2.25	-.20
Ukraine	3.71	-.40	3.54	-.04	3.53	-.10
United Kingdom	3.17	-.17	2.88	-.07	3.02	-.04

Note: Double standards are calculated as the average score on attitudes towards women minus the average score on attitudes towards men (attitudes measured on a scale ranging from 1-5, the higher, the more disapproving). Hence a negative score implies that norms are less strict for women.

Table 4. Multilevel estimates of disapproval of divorce involving children aged under 12
($N_i = 43,520$, $N_j = 25$)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Fixed part						
Constant	3.495***	.076	3.458***	.076	3.458***	.076
Individual level						
Age ^a	.005***	.000	.005***	.000	.005***	.000
Educational attainment ^b	-.071***	.003	-.071***	.003	-.071***	.003
Employment status ^c	-.155***	.010	-.155***	.010	-.155***	.010
Religious involvement ^d	.184***	.005	.184***	.005	.184***	.005
Partner status (ref. cat. = married or widowed)						
Divorced	-.238***	.018	-.238***	.018	-.238***	.018
Cohabiting	-.186***	.017	-.185***	.017	-.185***	.017
Single	-.051**	.017	-.052**	.017	-.052**	.017
Children ^e	-.028*	.014	-.029*	.014	-.029*	.014
Gender of respondent ^f	-.206***	.009	-.140***	.013	-.140***	.013
Gender of target ^f	-.210***	.021	-.140***	.023	-.138***	.022
Gender of target * gender of respondent			-.132***	.018	-.132***	.018
Country level						
Socio-economic gender equality ^g	-.009	.024	-.008	.024	-.004	.024
Cross-level interaction						
Gender of target * socio-economic gender equality					-.014*	.007
Random part						
Variance (gender of target)	.009**	.003	.009**	.003	.008**	.003
Variance (constant)	.125***	.036	.124***	.035	.103***	.035
Covariance (gender of target, constant)	-.003	.008	-.002	.008	-.002	.007
Variance (residual)	.831***	.006	.831***	.006	.831***	.006
Log likelihood	-57,838.879		-57,810.786		-57,808.689	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Notes: ^a In years. ^b Scale: 0–6. ^c 0 = not employed, 1 = employed. ^d Factor scores. ^e 0 = no, 1 = yes. ^f 0 = male, 1 = female. ^g Original scale: 0–100, mean centred.

Table 5. Multilevel estimates of disapproval of non-marital cohabitation ($N_i = 44,510$ $N_j = 25$)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Fixed part						
Constant	2.620***	.093	2.601***	.093	2.601***	.093
<i>Individual level</i>						
Age ^a	.008***	.000	.008***	.000	.008***	.000
Educational attainment ^b	-.048***	.003	-.048***	.003	-.048***	.003
Employment status ^c	-.094***	.010	-.093***	.010	-.093***	.010
Religious involvement ^d	.249***	.005	.249***	.005	.249***	.005
Partner status (ref. cat. = married or widowed)						
Divorced	-.213***	.018	-.212***	.018	-.212***	.018
Cohabiting	-.325***	.017	-.325***	.017	-.325***	.017
Single	-.116***	.016	-.116***	.016	-.116***	.016
Children ^e	-.021	.014	-.021	.014	-.021	.014
Gender of respondent ^f	-.078***	.009	-.045***	.012	-.044***	.012
Gender of target ^f	-.040**	.013	-.003	.016	-.003	.015
Gender of target * gender of respondent			-.067***	.017	-.067***	.017
<i>Country level</i>						
Socio-economic gender equality ^g	-.007	.031	-.006	.031	-.003	.031
<i>Cross-level interaction</i>						
Gender of target * socio-economic gender equality					-.008†	.004
Random part						
Variance (gender of target)	.002*	.001	.002*	.001	.002*	.001
Variance (constant)	.202***	.057	.201***	.057	.201***	.057
Covariance (gender of target, constant)	-.001	.006	-.001	.006	-.000	.005
Variance (residual)	.786***	.005	.786***	.005	.786***	.005
Log likelihood	-57,891.652		-57,883.768		-57,882.152	

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Notes: ^a In years. ^b Scale: 0–6. ^c 0 = not employed, 1 = employed. ^d Factor scores. ^e 0 = no, 1 = yes. ^f 0 = male, 1 = female. ^g Original scale: 0–100, mean centred.

Table 6. Multilevel estimates of disapproval of having a child in a non-marital cohabitational union (N_i = 44,510 N_j = 25)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Fixed part						
Constant	2.620***	.089	2.814***	.089	2.813***	.089
<i>Individual level</i>						
Age ^a	.008***	.000	-.007***	.000	.007***	.000
Educational attainment ^b	-.048***	.003	-.042***	.003	-.042***	.003
Employment status ^c	-.094***	.010	-.136***	.010	-.136***	.010
Religious involvement ^d	.249***	.005	.252***	.005	.252***	.005
Partner status (ref. cat. = married or widowed)						
Divorced	-.213***	.018	-.182***	.018	-.182***	.018
Cohabiting	-.325***	.017	-.351***	.017	-.351***	.017
Single	-.116***	.017	-.157***	.017	-.157***	.017
Children ^e	-.021	.014	-.089***	.014	-.089***	.014
Gender of respondent ^f	-.078***	.009	-.049***	.013	-.049***	.013
Gender of target ^f	-.040**	.015	-.017	.017	-.017	.017
Gender of target * gender of respondent			-.068***	.017	-.069***	.017
<i>Country level</i>						
Socio-economic gender equality ^g	-.007	.029	-.009	.029	-.009	.029
<i>Cross-level interaction</i>						
Gender of target * socio-economic gender equality					-.010*	.005
Random part						
Variance (gender of target)	.002*	.002	.003**	.002	.003**	.001
Variance (constant)	.202***	.052	.181***	.052	.181***	.052
Covariance (gender of target, constant)	-.001	.007	.001	.007	-.001	.006
Variance (residual)	.833***	.006	.833***	.006	.833***	.006
Log likelihood	-59,232.481		-59,224.738		-59,222.497	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Notes: ^a In years. ^b Scale: 0–6. ^c 0 = not employed, 1 = employed. ^d Factor scores. ^e 0 = no, 1 = yes. ^f 0 = male, 1 = female. ^g Original scale: 0–100, mean centred.

Figure 1. Disapproval of divorce involving children < 12 yr by gender of respondent and gender of target

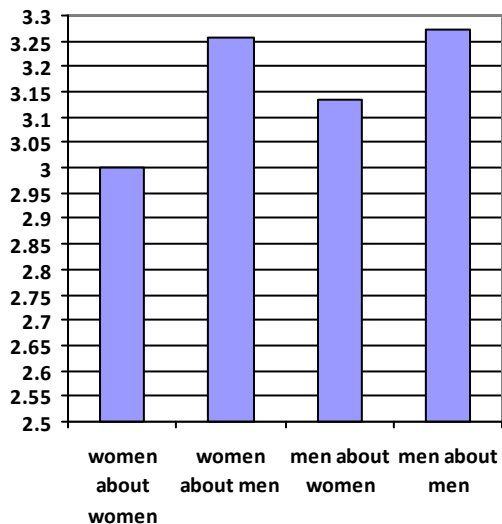


Figure 2. Disapproval of non-marital cohabitation by gender of respondent and gender of target

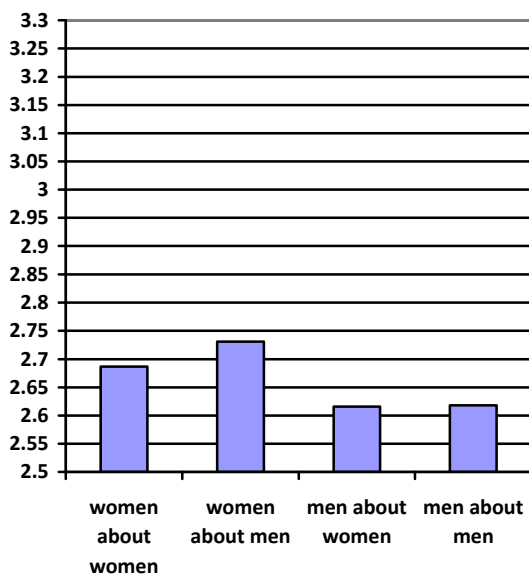


Figure 3. Disapproval of childbearing in non-marital cohabitation by gender of respondent and gender of target

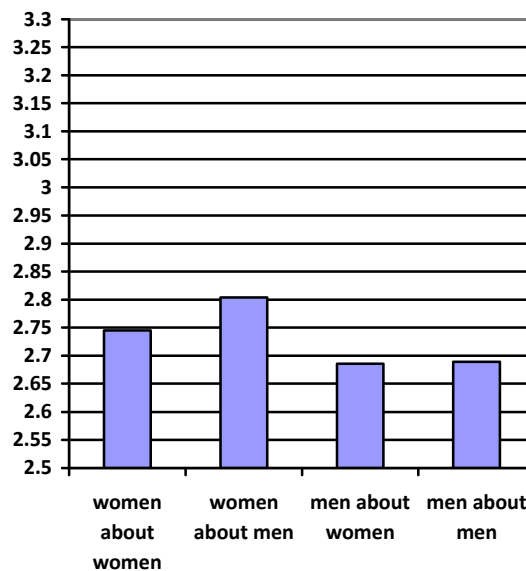


Figure 4. Disapproval of childbearing in non-marital cohabitation: cross-level interaction effect of sex of target and socio-economic gender equality

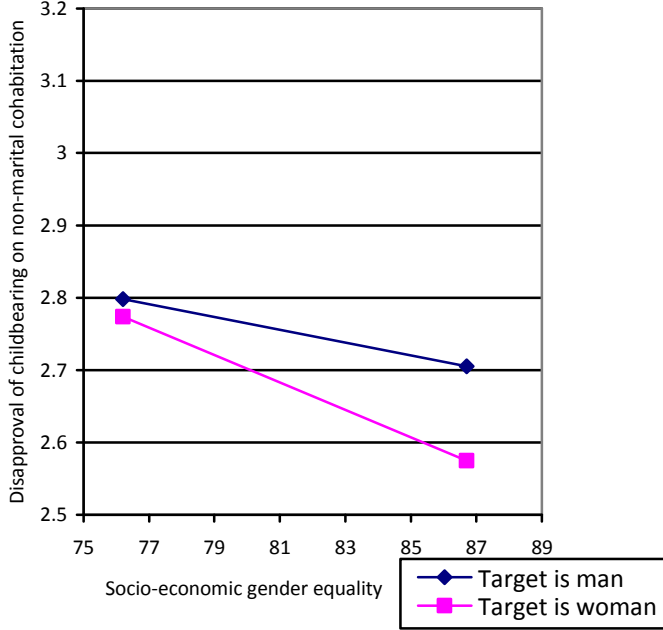


Figure 5. Disapproval of non-marital cohabitation: cross-level interaction effect of sex of target and socio-economic gender equality

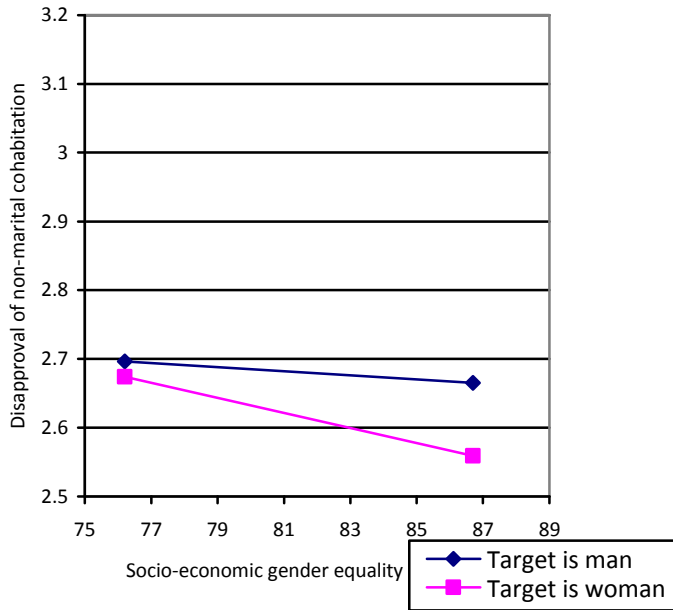
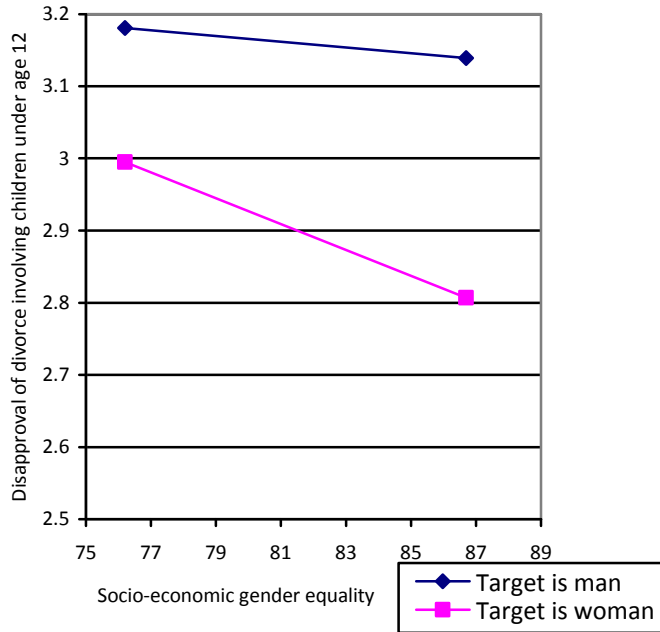


Figure 6. Disapproval of divorce involving children under age 12: cross-level interaction effect of sex of target and socio-economic gender equality



Note: The interaction plots in Figures 4, 5 and 6 are for a married and employed woman of average age (47.5) with children, and with an average level of educational attainment and religiosity.