

Changing Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Switzerland (2000–2017): Period, Cohort and Life-Course Effects

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Abstract: This paper investigates trends in Swiss women's and men's gender attitudes in the period 2000–2017 using the Swiss Household Panel data. Based on pooled OLS and fixed-effects models, we establish the following for women and men: (1) over this time period, attitudes towards gender roles become more egalitarian, while attitudes towards gender equality achievement remain stable; (2) the youngest cohort unexpectedly holds more traditional attitudes; and (3) individual attitudes change over the life course based on life events and the attitudes of one's partner.

Keywords: attitudes, gender equality, sexism, longitudinal analysis, Switzerland

Changement des attitudes envers l'égalité des genres en Suisse (2000–2017) : effets de période, de cohorte et du parcours de vie

Résumé: Cet article analyse l'évolution des attitudes des femmes et des hommes envers l'égalité des genres en Suisse entre 2000–2017. Nous constatons que pour les femmes et les hommes : (1) sur la période, les attitudes envers les rôles de genre deviennent plus égalitaires, tandis que les attitudes envers la réalisation de l'égalité des genres demeurent stables ; (2) la cohorte la plus jeune a, contrairement à nos attentes, des attitudes moins égalitaires ; et (3) les attitudes changent au cours de la vie selon les expériences et l'attitude du partenaire.

Mots-clés : attitudes, égalité des genres, sexisme, analyse longitudinale, Suisse

Veränderung der Einstellungen zur Gleichstellung der Geschlechter in der Schweiz (2000–2017): Perioden-, Kohorten- und Lebensverlaufseffekte

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Artikel analysiert die Trends von Einstellungen von Frauen und Männern zur Geschlechtergleichstellung zwischen 2000 und 2017 in der Schweiz anhand der Daten des Schweizer Haushalt-Panels. Basierend auf gepoolten OLS- und Fixed-Effect Modellen stellen wir für Frauen und Männern fest, dass (1) die Einstellungen zu Geschlechterrollen im Laufe der Zeit egalitärer werden, während die Einstellungen zur Erreichung der Geschlechtergleichstellung stabil bleiben; (2) die jüngste Kohorte entgegen der Erwartungen weniger egalitäre Einstellungen ausdrückt; (3) die Einstellungen sich im Lebensverlauf aufgrund von Lebensereignissen und Einstellung des Partners ändern.

Schlüsselwörter: Einstellungen, Geschlechtergleichstellung, Sexismus, Längsschnittanalyse, Schweiz

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1 Introduction¹

Women and men's social roles have evolved in Western societies since the mid-20th century. Women entered the labour market and are now as numerous as men in achieving higher education, while men are increasingly involved in childcare and domestic tasks (Hook 2006). In parallel, normative values, particularly regarding gender roles, have developed towards more equality over the same period (Mason and Lu 1988; Scott et al. 1996). Supporters of the modernisation theory (e.g. Inglehart and Norris 2003) espoused a continuing cultural convergence towards egalitarianism and thus a progressive reduction of traditional attitudes supporting male primacy and holding gender-essentialist beliefs of women's and men's separate life domains and roles due to natural and innate differences. However, changes towards more egalitarian gender attitudes – and behaviours (England 2010) – seem to have stalled in the mid-1990s in Western countries (van Egmond et al. 2010; Cotter et al. 2011). Pepin and Cotter (2018) even assert that attitudes about the division of domestic tasks and family decisions between spouses became more traditional among young Americans. However, based on a cross-country analysis including 17 European countries, Knight and Brinton (2017) interpret this stall not as a resurgence of gender-essentialist views but rather as the rise of different types of egalitarianism, namely, from liberal egalitarianism (gender egalitarian work-family views) to familial egalitarianism (support for women's employment and traditional family values).

If most attention so far has been directed at examining the attitudinal change over historical time at the population level, an increasing amount of research has focused on changes in gender attitudes within individuals over the life course. For instance, studies using panel data show that life events and transitions can have important effects on gender attitudes. In particular, women's transition to employment and their employment level are positively related to women's egalitarian attitudes (Corrigan and Konrad 2007; Kroska and Elman 2009). Parenthood generally shifts women's and men's attitudes towards more traditional views (Baxter et al. 2014; Grinza et al. 2017). However, Kaufman et al. (2017) found a relatively weak effect of the transition to parenthood on young Swedes' gender attitudes, which is attributed to strong policies that support gender equality in this country. These diverging results suggest that the national context plays a role in the level and direction of attitudinal change. Previous results on national trends and individual changes in gender attitudes

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are drawn principally from American and European data. In this paper, we focus on the change in attitudes towards gender equality in the context of Switzerland.

Thus far, few studies in Switzerland have assessed attitudes towards gender role – and more broadly, attitudes towards gender equality² – and none have adopted a longitudinal perspective. Levy et al. (2002) report that in 1998, 33% of women and 41% of men believed that mothers of schoolchildren should not work, thus favouring a clear separation of gender roles. Recent studies focus on specific groups or on specific life-course transitions. These studies indicate that factors related to gender attitudes in Switzerland are similar to those observed in other countries. For example, working women and cohabitant mothers have more egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles than, respectively, non-working women and married mothers do (Ryser and Le Goff 2015; Kuhn and Ravazzini 2018). As in other liberal welfare states, after becoming parents, most couples hold egalitarian attitudes while having an unequal work-family organisation (Bühlmann et al. 2009; 2016). However, the overall picture of the changes in gender attitudes in Switzerland over time and over the life course remains incomplete.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the trends of attitudes towards gender equality and intervening factors in attitudinal changes in the Swiss context during the last 20 years. The attitudinal changes are evaluated both at the individual and population levels. The specific structural, institutional and cultural contexts in a given time and place are expected to influence both the formation of individual gender attitudes during the socialisation process (inter-cohort effects) and their variation over the life course (intra-cohort effects). Attitudes are then expected to change when the overall context is modified (period effects) or when individuals experience a transition to a new life stage (life-course effects).

This paper contributes to the literature on gender attitudes in three ways. First, it provides new evidence on the change in gender attitudes for women and men throughout their life course and historical time in Switzerland. Second, it assesses normative change by focusing on different dimensions of attitudes towards gender equality. Indeed, four types of attitudes (attitudes towards women's and mothers' employment, women's discrimination and measures promoting women) are captured in our analyses and are related to two dimensions: attitudes towards gender roles and attitudes towards gender equality achievement. Thus, we concentrate not only on gender role attitudes, as most of the literature does (Davis and Greenstein 2009). Third, using longitudinal data, we can account for both the variation of attitudes between and within individuals over time to distinguish selection from adaptation effects, allowing us to capture the dynamics of reciprocal influence (Lesthaeghe and Moors 2002).

2 We use the term “attitudes towards gender equality” (or its shorter version, “gender attitudes”) to represent the underlying concept of an individual's level of support for gender equality.

2 Attitudinal formation and change

2.1 Social change: Cohort and period effects

The cohort replacement theory argues that within a birth cohort, individuals' attitudes are shaped by the institutional, structural and cultural context in place during youth socialisation, resulting in intra-cohort similarities in values that tend to persist throughout one's life course and influence subsequent representations and attitudes (Alwin and McCammon 2003). With the replacement of older cohorts by younger cohorts in a population, attitudinal change progressively occurs at the population level (Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004). During the last several decades, the successive birth cohorts were educated and socialized in increasingly egalitarian contexts. Therefore, the members of the younger cohorts hold more egalitarian attitudes towards gender equality than those of the older ones (Berridge et al. 2009; Perales et al. 2019).

Previous studies also report the importance of intra-cohort effects in explaining change in social attitudes over time. At the macro level, these are period effects known to influence the views of the whole population (regardless of their birth year) through widespread exposure to new ideas and models (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004) and through diffusion mechanisms, i. e., the diffusion of ideas from innovative groups to other groups (Pampel 2011). Former beliefs are thus adapted to the new structural, institutional and cultural context. With the increasing involvement of women and mothers in paid work or the development of institutions, policies and norms favourable to egalitarian work-family arrangements, the period effect should be consistent with increasing egalitarian attitudes in the population, as the proponents of the modernisation theory would argue (Inglehart and Norris 2003). However, some researchers found that the recent period effect is related to a stall or even a reversal of attitudes due to the persistence of gender-essentialist conceptions of women's care-giving role or the reappearance of the male primacy (Cotter et al. 2011; Knight and Brinton 2017; Pepin and Cotter 2018).

2.2 Attitudinal change in a life-course perspective

At the micro level, intra-cohort change is explained through the social structural theory, which postulates that individual attitudes vary when the individual's location within the social structure changes (Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004; van Egmond et al. 2010; Baxter et al. 2014). As individuals experience new life events and move through life stages (e. g., education, employment, marriage, parenthood), they become embedded in different social contexts and have new status and new roles (Levy and Bühlmann 2016) that can either reinforce the preceding attitudes or change them. Three mechanisms help explain attitudinal changes: the interest mechanism, the exposure mechanism and the cognitive dissonance mechanism. Let us define them briefly.

First, according to the interest mechanism, in the context of public awareness on gender inequality issues, the individuals who benefit the most from gender equality are more likely to adopt egalitarian attitudes (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). A robust finding is that young, more educated and employed women have more egalitarian attitudes. As they can easily project themselves in rewarding full-time occupational careers, for instance, these women have more personal interests in achieving gender equality and in experiencing less discrimination. After a change in individuals' socio-structural position (e.g., change in occupational position), their interest structure can change, leading to a shift in their attitudes (Kroska and Elman 2009). Indirect interests are also important. For example, men in couples have more egalitarian attitudes when their partner works (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004) because they can benefit from their wife's wages and career opportunities.

Second, based on the exposure mechanism, individuals' attitudes change after they are confronted with ideas or situations that challenge their views (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). Changes in individuals' socio-structural positions, e.g., through education or personal experience (e.g., parenthood), expose individuals to different contexts, situations and norms that influence their awareness of gender inequality issues. The exposure mechanism acts as a "socialisation process of sorts that continues into adulthood" (Perales et al. 2019, 87). Exposure to the views of one's partner is particularly important. Indeed, in observing married couples, Kroska and Elman (2009) found a strong effect of one spouse's attitudes on the other.

Interest and exposure mechanisms can jointly influence attitudinal change. For instance, women entering the professional world might develop more egalitarian attitudes, as they are more exposed to inequality and have more interest in claiming equal treatment (e.g., wages, promotions) compared to when they were completing their education. In contrast, women leaving their jobs to care for their children might develop more traditional attitudes in accordance with their new status and behaviour (new goals and interests) or because they have more contacts with people with traditional views and arrangements than in their earlier situation.

Third, the cognitive dissonance mechanism suggests that when former attitudes are inconsistent with new externally constrained behaviours, attitudes tend to change to decrease the cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957). Indeed, the structural, institutional and cultural contexts influence work-family arrangements, thus fostering or hampering certain behaviours (Pfau-Effinger 1998; Bühlmann et al. 2009). In more conservative contexts, institutions are relatively unsupportive of egalitarian work-family arrangements. In these cases, social pressures to act according to the prevailing gendered norms are stronger (Pedulla and Thébaud 2015). When gender equality is expected (e.g., between partners for paid work, housework and childcare), while norms and contextual constraints entail unequal behaviours, individuals' attitudes might become more traditional to reduce the cognitive dissonance (Davis and Greenstein 2009).

This last mechanism has mainly been mobilized to investigate attitudinal changes after the birth of the first child (Baxter et al. 2014; Grinza et al. 2017), as the transition to parenthood is related to important modifications in couples' work-family arrangements. In fact, the lack of childcare facilities, the school schedules, the gendered norms in the workplace (e. g., the disregard of the father's role) and the normative gender culture (with, for instance, the "good mother" injunctions) restrict couples' options when they have children and condition their gendered roles (Ruppanner and Maume 2016). Moving from one family life stage to the next (e. g., having toddlers or schoolchildren) exposes individuals to different constraints that result in various degrees of cognitive dissonance.

3 The Swiss context for gender equality

Even though gender equality is granted at the institutional level – since 1981 in the Swiss constitution and since 1996 in a federal law prohibiting discrimination in the workplace – in practice, equality has not yet been reached in the private or public spheres. Switzerland is regarded in international comparison as a "late female mobilisation welfare state" (Siaroff 1994) – women's suffrage was only introduced in 1971 at the federal level – and as a liberal family policies regime that is characterised by low family expenditure (Korpi 2000; Fux 2002). This means that policies and institutions favouring work-family balance and egalitarian arrangements are lacking, were developed more recently or have limited effects. For example, in 2019, neither paternity nor parental leave was available in Switzerland, and comparatively short maternity leave was implemented in 2004 at the federal level. Additionally, the availability of childcare in the pre-school years and out-of-school facilities depends on the municipality, the smallest administrative jurisdiction of the country. Despite federal subsidies available since 2003 to increase childcare capacity, the supply remains too low (FSO 2017), and childcare facilities in Switzerland remain among the most expensive internationally (OECD 2017). Concerning gender equality policy, Lanfranconi and Valarino (2014) showed that from 1996 to 2011, the implementation of gender equality legislation shifted from state-oriented to economic-oriented discourses, leading to the primacy of economic outcomes over gender equality outcomes. The implementation of non-state, non-binding and inexpensive measures was thus favoured, resulting in limited progress in achieving gender equality (Lanfranconi and Valarino 2014; Fuchs 2019).

Since 1991, women's participation rate in the labour market has increased and is currently among the highest in Europe (FSO 2019). However, most women are employed part-time and in lower-paying jobs, while they account for only one-third of managers (FSO 2018). Despite the fact that the gender wage gap decreased during the last decade, women still earn, on average, 12% less than men (FSO 2019).

Research results show that work-family arrangements and, more generally, life courses remain markedly gendered in Switzerland (Levy et al. 2006), with the transition to parenthood being a strong gendering factor (Le Goff and Levy 2016). Indeed, young mothers partially or fully exit the labour market to care for their child, while fathers become the sole or main breadwinner. Consequently, the most common family model is the modified breadwinner (men working full-time, women part-time), while egalitarian models are still rare (FSO 2019). As the youngest child grows up, mothers increase their involvement in the labour market (FSO 2019). With respect to housework and childcare, in most households, the main responsibility falls on women (FSO 2019). More equality has been reached in education, while progress regarding women's representation in politics has stalled since 2000 at approximately 25% at the cantonal and federal levels (except for the National Council, FSO 2019).

There are some regional differences in cultural, institutional and behavioural settings. For instance, the French- and Italian-speaking areas have more female-friendly voting patterns (Bühler and Meier Kruker 2002). Additionally, the supply of day-cares for pre-schoolers and after-school programmes is highest in the French-speaking area and in urban cantons (Bieri et al. 2017). Women in the Italian-speaking area are more likely to stay home than in the German- and French-speaking areas (Kuhn and Ravazzini 2018).

When asked about their perception of gender equality in Switzerland, only approximately 1/4 of the working population believe that gender equality has been achieved in education, the family and politics, and approximately 1/10 think it has been achieved in the workplace and leadership positions (Fuchs et al. 2018). Thus, most respondents think that gender equality has not yet been achieved or has only partially been achieved. In each domain, men are more likely than women to report that gender equality has been achieved (Fuchs et al. 2018). Compared to the European population (European Commission 2017), the Swiss have a similar perception of the implementation of gender equality at work and in leadership but are more likely to think that equality has been achieved in politics.

4 Hypotheses

Based on our theoretical framework applied to the Swiss context, we first expect that, similarly to other countries, individuals in younger cohorts have more egalitarian attitudes towards gender equality and that this trend holds over time (*H1 – cohort hypothesis*). As the overall Swiss structural and institutional contexts became more egalitarian during the observed period (e. g., increase in women's employment rate, implementation of maternity leave), we expect that the diffusion of egalitarian attitudes persisted in the population. We assume that in Switzerland, between 2000

and 2017, historical time is associated with more egalitarian attitudes (*H2 – period hypothesis*).

To test the interest, exposure and cognitive dissonance mechanisms, we rely on, respectively, women's employment, partners' attitudes and family life stages. First, as in Switzerland, most women work part-time; thus, we expect that higher participation of women in the labour force is related to more interest in gender equality and thus more egalitarian attitudes (*H3a – interest hypothesis*). Additionally, given the indirect interests of men in couples, we expect that women's higher participation in the labour force is related to men's more egalitarian attitudes (*H3b – indirect interest hypothesis*). Second, as a result of exposure, we expect that the attitudes of both partners in couples evolve in the same direction (*H4 – exposure hypothesis*). Third, in the Swiss context, childless individuals should experience the least cognitive dissonance regarding gender attitudes, as their behaviours are not or are only a little constrained, while (women's) behaviours in families with pre-schoolers could be constrained by the lack of (affordable) childcare. Individuals in this first family stage probably experience the strongest constraints and thus dissonance, which should result in a change towards more traditional attitudes. We thus expect that cognitive dissonance increases in early family life stages (with a peak in pre-school families) and decreases in subsequent family life stages (i. e., families with post-school and out-of-nest children). This implies a change towards more traditional attitudes in early family stages, while there should be no attitudinal change in subsequent stages (*H5a – cognitive dissonance hypothesis*). Moreover, the cognitive dissonance associated with family life stages should be stronger for women than for men, and thus women should develop more traditional attitudes at early family stages (*H5b – gendered cognitive dissonance hypothesis*).

5 Data and method

This study uses the Swiss Household Panel data (SHP 2018), collected annually since 1999. The data are gathered at the household and individual levels on a range of social, economic and attitudinal indicators, either in the yearly questionnaire or in rotative modules. The SHP data fit well with our research goals, as they are the only longitudinal data in Switzerland that include several indicators of gender attitudes over almost the last two decades, allowing us to observe variations over historical time and over individuals' life courses. Moreover, as all adult household members are interviewed, for couples living together, data on both partners' attitudes are available, making it possible to assess the reciprocal influence of partners' attitudes. We use all the waves of data including items on gender attitudes, which correspond to data collected from 2000-2011, in 2014 and in 2017.

To account for attitudinal change over time *within* individuals, we apply fixed-effects regressions. With this method all time-invariant characteristics, such as cultural, familial and individual backgrounds, are controlled for (Brüderl and Ludwig 2015). In this way, time-invariant unobserved heterogeneity is eliminated, but the estimation of invariant attributes (e. g., cohort) is not possible. To estimate the association between attitudes and time-invariant characteristics, we use pooled OLS regressions with standard errors corrected for clustering by respondent.³ Moreover, pooled OLS regressions enable us to assess differences and change *between* individuals. The resulting models, later referred to as *within* and *between* models, are conducted on two different samples. A first set of analyses on the change in gender attitudes was conducted on adult respondents of working age (18–64 years old) who completed at least one individual questionnaire. In a second set of analyses, to test the mutual influence of the partners, we restrict our sample to individuals living as a heterosexual couple (married or not) at any time of the period of observation and who have no other adults cohabiting with them (except their children up to 30 years old). As the literature shows a clear sex difference in gender attitudes, separate analyses are conducted for women and men.

Attitudes towards gender equality are assessed with four items in the SHP that relate to two different dimensions of gender attitudes. The first and second items relate to *attitudes towards traditional gender roles* and measure the attitudes towards mothers' and women's employment, respectively: 1) "A pre-school child suffers, if his or her mother works for pay" and 2) "To have a job is the best guarantee for a woman as for a man to be independent". The third and fourth items relate to *attitudes towards gender equality achievement* and assess attitudes about women's discrimination and measures promoting women to reduce gender inequality, respectively: 3) "In Switzerland, women are penalized compared with men in certain areas" and 4) "Are you in favour of Switzerland taking more steps to ensure the promotion of women?".

While the first two items estimate the strength of essentialist beliefs about women's and men's separate spheres and the endorsement of traditionally gendered roles (i. e., "old-fashioned sexism" as labelled by Swim et al. 1995), the third and fourth items measure, respectively, the denial of continuing discrimination and the resentment over special favours for women (i. e., "modern sexism"). Swim et al. (1995) show that old-fashioned sexism is more overt but socially disapproved, while modern sexism is more subtle and thus may better predict sexist attitudes and behaviours. Individuals can both reject traditional gender roles and stereotypes and think that women have now reached equality and thus stand against special measures for women (Swim et al. 1995). Indeed, modern sexists "blame women instead of systematic disadvantage for [the continuing] gender inequality and contribute to the maintenance of the unequal gender status quo" (Becker and Sibley 2016, 319).

3 This enables us to take into account the existing correlation in the successive respondent's observations.

Research mostly analysed attitudes towards gender roles and thus old-fashioned sexism (see e. g. Davis and Greenstein 2009 for a review of US studies). The inclusion of items assessing modern sexism is therefore important.

As each of the four items measures a specific aspect of gender attitudes, analysing them separately instead of in a joint scale enables us to uncover differences in the evolution of attitudes for each aspect. For each item, respondents indicate their level of agreement on an eleven-point Likert scale. The first item was reverse coded so that a high value indicates egalitarian attitudes towards gender equality on every item, while a low value indicates traditional attitudes.

Among the independent variables, to disentangle the period (H2) and the cohort (H1) effects, we use the *interview year* to measure the influence of the overall context and create four *generational cohorts*: the Silent generation (individuals born before 1949), Baby-boomers (1950-1964), Generation X (1965-1979) and Millennials (1980 and subsequent birth years). To test the interest hypotheses (H3a-b), we account for *women's involvement in paid work*: not working, short part-time (1 to 20 hours), long part-time (21 to 37 hours) and full-time (38 hours and more). Then, we consider the *partner's attitudes* to assess the exposure hypothesis (H4). To evaluate the cognitive dissonance hypotheses (H5a-b), we allocate every individual (or couple) to one of the six *family life stages*: 1) pre-child individuals (childless individuals younger than 45; for couples, the woman's age is taken into account), 2) pre-school family (youngest child 0 to 4 years old), 3) school family (5 to 17 years); 4) post-school family (18 to 30 years); 5) post-children family (out-of-nest children); and 6) individuals without children (childless individuals older than 45).

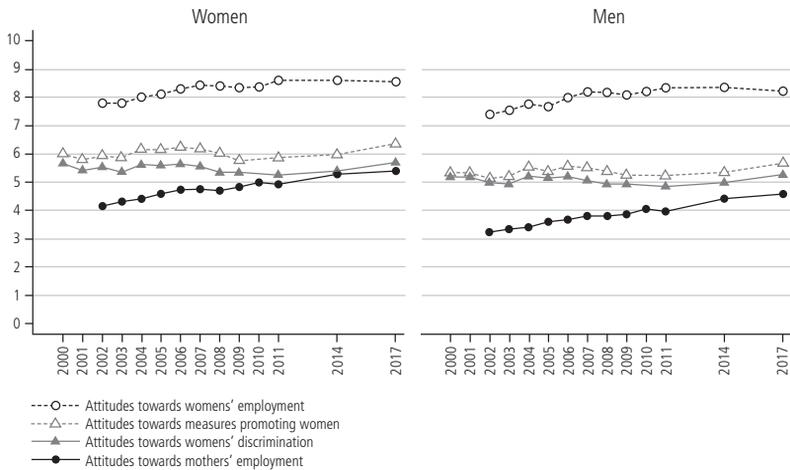
Finally, based on the literature on gender attitudes, we control for the *educational level* and *marital status* in each model. Indeed, previous studies have consistently shown that being less educated or married is linked to more traditional attitudes (e. g. Ryser and Le Goff 2015; Edlund and Öun 2016). Given the Swiss context, we also control for the linguistic region (German, French or Italian) and the residential context (urban vs. rural), as differences have been found in terms of cultural (voting patterns) and institutional (childcare infrastructure) settings. The results of education and linguistic region, on the one hand, and marital status and residential context, on the other hand, are used to further assess the exposure and cognitive dissonance mechanisms, respectively.

6 Results

6.1 Attitudinal change over time: Cohort and period effects

Figures 1 and 2 show the descriptive trends by sex and cohort, respectively, for each of the four attitudinal items across all years in the study. If men score lower than women for all items, the overall evolution of attitudes is similar for both sexes

Figure 1 Trends in gender attitudes in Switzerland by sex

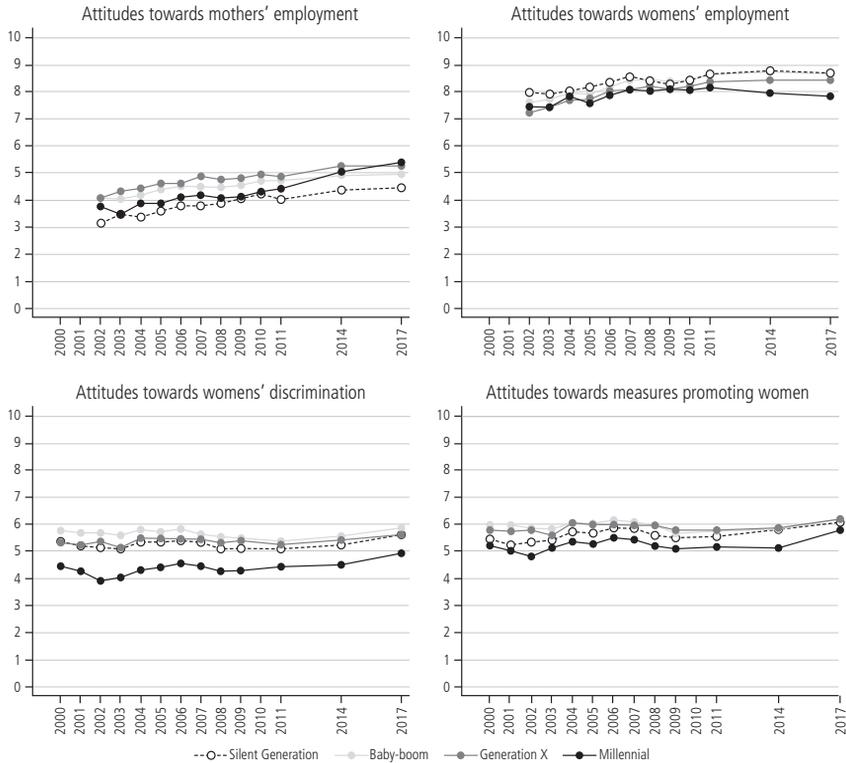


Note: Means by year and sex for the adult population (between 77 469 and 84 080 observations); higher values indicate more egalitarian attitudes. Source: SHP 2000–2017.

(Figure 1). Indeed, there is a slight increase towards more egalitarian attitudes for both women and men concerning gender roles. However, when attitudes towards gender equality achievement are considered, we observe a stagnation of attitudes for both sexes. The period effect thus differs for old-fashioned and modern sexism items, the first ones evolving as predicted contrary to the second ones (H2). If old-fashioned sexism items exhibit parallel upward trends, then interestingly, attitudes towards women’s employment are the most egalitarian (overall means over the period: women = 8.3; men = 8.0), while women and men are the most traditional concerning mothers’ employment (women = 4.8; men = 3.8). Respondents’ attitudes towards women’s discrimination (women = 5.5; men = 5.1) and measures promoting women (women = 6.0; men = 5.4) are slightly less traditional.

With respect to the decomposition of these trends over cohorts (Figure 2), quite surprisingly, the *Millennials* have more traditional gender attitudes than do the other cohorts, except for attitudes towards working mothers. This is particularly true for both modern sexism items. Making abstractions of the *Millennial* cohort, attitudes towards working mothers is the only item for which cohorts act as predicted by our hypothesis H1 (i. e., younger cohorts hold progressively more egalitarian attitudes than do older cohorts). However, for this item, the gap between the cohorts diminishes over the period, as there is a wider difference between individuals from the *Silent generation* and *Baby-boomers*, than between *Baby-boomers* and *Generation*

Figure 2 Decomposition of each gender-attitude item by cohort



Note: Means by year and cohort for the adult population (between 77 469 and 84 080 observations); higher values indicate more egalitarian attitudes. Source: SHP 2000–2017.

Xers. This convergence of attitudes, at least among the three older cohorts, is also observable in the other items.

While these results describe the general changing pattern for each attitudinal item at the aggregate level, they hide the within-person variations. For instance, cohort differences could be related to the fact that individuals are in different stages of their life course, the youngest cohort not yet having experienced the same events and transitions (e.g., marriage, parenthood, divorce). To disentangle the period and cohort effects from other factors, we now turn to the results of multivariate analyses. Tables 1 and 2 display, respectively, the results from the pooled OLS (*between* models) and fixed-effects (*within* models) regressions for working-age individuals. A positive coefficient indicates that the variable is associated with more egalitarian attitudes, whereas a negative coefficient indicates that it is associated with more traditional attitudes.

Table 1 Pooled OLS regression coefficients on gender attitudes to account for variations between individuals (18–64 years old)

	Old-fashioned sexism				Modern sexism			
	Attitudes towards mothers' employment		Attitudes towards women's employment		Attitudes towards women's discrimination		Attitudes towards women promoting women	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Year	0.065***	0.079***	0.050***	0.057***	0.001	-0.001	0.002	0.011*
Cohort (ref: Millennial)								
Silent generation	0.285	-0.051	0.659***	0.478***	0.851***	0.564***	0.305	0.205
Baby-boom	0.342*	0.172	0.458***	0.380***	0.979***	0.911***	0.588***	0.529***
Generation X	0.183	0.100	0.263***	0.092	0.617***	0.586***	0.428***	0.325**
Employment (ref: Full-time)								
Not working	-0.578***	0.252**	-0.387***	-0.226***	-0.191**	0.190**	-0.082	0.125
Low part-time	-0.006	0.541***	-0.177**	-0.154	-0.155**	0.214*	-0.125	0.237
High part-time	0.479***	0.968***	0.029	-0.090	-0.031	0.189*	0.095	0.213*
Family life stage (ref: Pre-child individual)								
Pre-school family	0.665***	0.534***	-0.203*	-0.460***	0.213**	-0.057	0.195	0.007
School family	0.055	0.053	-0.101	-0.197**	-0.041	-0.223**	0.078	-0.134
Post-school family	-0.035	-0.041	0.048	-0.091	-0.108	-0.258**	0.029	-0.059
Family post-children	0.047	-0.171	0.092	0.040	0.109	-0.047	0.228	0.075
Individual without children	-0.240	-0.208	0.216**	0.255**	0.095	-0.074	0.333**	0.042
Education (ref: Intermediate)								
Low	-0.663***	-0.072	-0.134*	0.061	-0.305***	-0.240**	-0.217**	0.278**
High	1.298***	1.099***	0.322***	0.004	0.266***	0.164**	0.484***	-0.101

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	Old-fashioned sexism				Modern sexism			
	Attitudes towards mothers' employment		Attitudes towards women's employment		Attitudes towards women's discrimination		Attitudes towards measures promoting women	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Marital status (ref: Married)								
Single	0.435***	0.481***	0.163*	0.038	0.048	-0.458***	0.207*	-0.430***
Cohabitant	0.034	0.505***	0.387***	0.206**	0.120	-0.090	0.275**	-0.054
Divorced, widow	-0.092	0.068	0.195**	0.112	0.269***	-0.363**	0.352***	-0.290
Linguistic region (ref: German)								
French	-0.770***	-0.382***	0.343***	0.489***	0.677***	0.777***	1.755***	1.570***
Italian	-1.026***	-1.005***	0.634***	0.732***	0.456***	0.410**	1.627***	1.521***
Residential area (ref: Rural)								
Urban	0.539***	0.537***	0.088	0.103	0.130**	0.012	0.292***	0.219**
Constant	3.851***	2.182***	7.246***	7.062***	4.614***	4.452***	4.777***	4.554***
R ²	0.105	0.081	0.044	0.035	0.049	0.058	0.095	0.068
Individuals	7370	6456	7394	6490	7997	7006	7965	6989
Observations	32 293	26 831	32 717	27 147	35 516	29 302	35 286	29 144

Note: *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001. Scales range from 0 to 10, higher values indicate more egalitarian attitudes. Source: SHP 2000–2017.

Table 2 Fixed-effects regression coefficients on gender attitudes to account for variations within individuals (18–64 years old)

	Old-fashioned sexism				Modern sexism			
	Attitudes towards mothers' employment		Attitudes towards women's employment		Attitudes towards women's discrimination		Attitudes towards measures promoting women	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Year	0.072***	0.076***	0.077***	0.078***	-0.009**	-0.005	0.000	0.011**
Employment (ref: Full-time)								
Not working	-0.062	0.149*	-0.185***	0.002	-0.023	-0.012	-0.014	0.027
Low part-time	0.041	0.158	-0.066	-0.007	0.015	-0.054	-0.106	-0.017
High part-time	0.115*	0.158*	0.053	0.044	-0.008	0.033	0.002	0.014
Family life stage (ref: Pre-child individual)								
Pre-school family	0.223**	0.304***	-0.170*	-0.236**	0.184**	0.058	0.189*	0.080
School family	-0.164*	0.107	-0.122	-0.058	-0.010	-0.130	0.034	-0.023
Post-school family	-0.203*	0.077	-0.061	0.082	0.031	-0.136*	0.107	0.015
Family post-children	-0.168	0.052	-0.179*	0.006	0.038	0.001	0.204*	0.039
Individual without children	-0.309**	0.056	-0.061	0.109	-0.041	-0.118	0.057	-0.059
Education (ref: Intermediate)								
Low	-0.089	-0.001	-0.078	0.061	-0.383***	-0.391***	-0.289**	-0.209*
High	0.359***	0.324**	0.047	0.085	0.177*	-0.112	0.222**	-0.009
Marital status (ref: Married)								
Single	-0.216*	-0.167	0.369***	0.033	-0.049	-0.319***	0.062	-0.126
Cohabitant	-0.064	-0.098	0.188**	0.106	0.018	-0.164*	0.098	-0.081
Divorced, widow	0.018	0.039	0.117	-0.006	-0.015	-0.207*	0.006	-0.268*

Continuation of table 2 on the next page.

Continuation of table 2.

	Old-fashioned sexism				Modern sexism				
	Attitudes towards mothers' employment		Attitudes towards women's employment		Attitudes towards women's discrimination		Attitudes towards measures promoting women		
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	
Linguistic region (ref: German)									
French	0.163	-0.137	0.797***	-0.080	0.456*	0.010	0.440	-0.040	
Italian	-0.544	0.143	0.362	0.083	0.011	0.229	-0.199	-0.200	
Residential area (ref: Rural)									
Urban	0.073	0.161	0.067	-0.016	0.078	0.040	0.065	-0.044	
Constant	4.282***	2.907***	7.260***	7.125***	5.493***	5.375***	5.897***	5.376***	
R ²	0.021	0.023	0.029	0.028	0.003	0.003	0.002	0.001	
Individuals	7370	6456	7394	6490	7997	7006	7965	6989	
Observations	32293	26831	32717	27147	35516	29302	35286	29144	

Note: * <0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001. Scales range from 0 to 10, higher values indicate more egalitarian attitudes. Source: SHP 2000–2017.

First, concerning the period effect, the multivariate results confirm the descriptive ones. Between and within models show that over the observed period, women and men became more egalitarian with respect to old-fashioned sexism items. For example, in examining the change in attitudes of different women over the years (between models), we observe that women are increasingly in favour of working mothers by 0.065 points on the 11-point Likert scale (see the first column of Table 1). In observing women who changed their attitudes over the years (within models), we find that their attitudes evolved towards more egalitarian views by 0.072 points (see first column of Table 2). Regarding modern sexism items, in between models most coefficients are not statistically significant, and in within models the significant coefficients have marginal effects and are indicative of different directions. Overall, we conclude that the period has no effect on attitudinal change measured with modern sexism items. Our period hypothesis (H2) is thus partly confirmed: in the recent Swiss context, historical time is associated with more egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles, but a stall in attitudes towards gender equality achievement is observed.

Second, the multivariate results for the cohort effect also confirm the descriptive ones: *Millennials* have more traditional attitudes than do older cohorts,⁴ except for men's attitudes towards mothers' employment, for which the results are not significant. *Baby-boomers*, socialised during the peak of the second wave feminist movement, are the most likely to think that women are still discriminated against and to favour measures promoting women. The cohort replacement hypothesis (H1) is thus rejected: younger cohorts do not have more egalitarian gender attitudes.

6.2 Micro-level determinants of gender attitudes and factors in attitudinal change

In this section, we focus on the association between attitudes and the life course to uncover determinants of gender attitudes and factors of change within an individual. We rely first on results from Tables 1 and 2. Second, to test the mutual influence of the partners in a couple, pooled OLS and fixed-effects regressions are conducted for women and men in couple relationships (Tables 3 and 4). This also allows us to consider couples' specificities.

According to the interest hypotheses, we expect that women's higher participation in the labour force is related to more egalitarian attitudes for women (H3a) and, in couples, for men (H3b). Compared to women working full-time, those who are not occupationally active are the most traditional. Women engaged in low part-time work are also more traditional than those working full-time but to a lesser extent (between models; Table 1). There is no significant difference between women working full-time and those in a high part-time job, except for attitudes towards working mothers, in which women working part-time are more egalitarian than those working full-time. While this is generally consistent with hypothesis H3a, this result could not only be due to an interest mechanism but also to a selection effect:

4 This result holds when we assess 10-year birth cohorts.

Table 3 Pooled OLS regression coefficients on gender attitudes to account for variations between individuals (18–64 years old) in couple relationships

	Old-fashioned sexism				Modern sexism				
	Attitudes towards mothers' employment		Attitudes towards women's employment		Attitudes towards women's discrimination		Attitudes towards measures promoting women		
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	
Woman's employment (ref: Low part-time)									
Not working	-0.619***	-0.318***	-0.276***	-0.161*	0.077	0.010	0.179	-0.021	
High part-time	0.461**	0.567***	0.197**	0.255***	0.191**	0.177*	0.254**	0.296**	
Full-time	0.285*	0.449***	0.265**	0.226*	0.252**	0.061	0.108	0.175	
Partner's attitudes									
Family life stage (ref: Pre-child couple)	0.271***	0.266***	0.104***	0.108***	0.117***	0.132***	0.169***	0.185***	
Pre-school family	0.647***	0.675***	-0.093	-0.269*	0.386***	0.125	0.225	0.181	
School family	0.072	0.097	-0.050	-0.083	0.239*	0.038	0.147	0.121	
Post-school family	-0.242	-0.190	0.126	-0.087	0.125	0.077	0.106	0.190	
Family post-children	0.004	-0.289	0.100	0.108	0.307	0.209	0.296	0.253	
Couple without children	-0.214	-0.097	0.254	0.222	0.233	0.294	0.352	0.345	
Constant	2.952***	0.911***	6.011***	5.928***	4.107***	3.896***	4.034***	3.561***	
R ²	0.189	0.171	0.065	0.063	0.048	0.042	0.119	0.094	
Individuals	3717	3717	3740	3740	4067	4067	4052	4052	
Observations	14722	14721	15074	15073	16467	16466	16263	16262	

Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. Controlled for year, cohort, education, marital status, linguistic region and residential area. Scales range from 0 to 10; higher values indicate more egalitarian attitudes. Source: SHP 2000–2017.

Table 4 Fixed-effects regression coefficients on gender attitudes to account for variations within individuals (18–64 years old) in couple relationships

	Old-fashioned sexism				Modern sexism			
	Attitudes towards mothers' employment		Attitudes towards women's employment		Attitudes towards women's discrimination		Attitudes towards measures promoting women	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Woman's employment (ref: Low part-time)								
Not working	-0.099	-0.202**	-0.238***	-0.157*	-0.004	0.066	0.031	-0.007
High part-time	0.062	-0.032	0.136*	0.038	-0.051	0.082	0.074	-0.046
Full-time	-0.159	-0.178	0.123	0.061	-0.017	-0.032	0.012	-0.064
Partner's attitudes	0.048***	0.047***	0.029**	0.031**	0.016	0.016	0.043***	0.044***
Family life stage (ref: Pre-child couple)								
Pre-school family	0.354**	0.348**	-0.219*	-0.051	0.291**	0.258*	0.347**	-0.133
School family	-0.038	0.184	-0.262*	-0.034	0.239*	0.092	0.226	-0.321*
Post-school family	-0.140	0.299	-0.156	0.007	0.316*	-0.014	0.353*	-0.505***
Family post-children	-0.026	0.250	-0.227	-0.142	0.330*	0.045	0.372*	-0.569**
Couple without children	-0.305	0.354*	-0.119	0.087	0.181	-0.112	0.147	-0.485**
Constant	4.152***	2.994***	6.934***	6.739***	5.403***	5.440***	5.433***	5.914***
R ²	0.021	0.025	0.040	0.035	0.004	0.003	0.004	0.004
Individuals	3717	3717	3740	3740	4067	4067	4052	4052
Observations	14722	14722	15074	15074	16467	16467	16263	16263

Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. Controlled for year, education, marital status, linguistic region and residential area. Scales range from 0 to 10, higher values indicate more egalitarian attitudes. Source: SHP 2000–2017.

women who are more egalitarian work more. Within models reveal that exiting the labour force is related to a change towards more traditional attitudes about women's employment (-0.185 , Table 2; alternatively, women starting to work become more egalitarian). We then find further support for the interest hypothesis (H3a). Our results provide an additional finding concerning the interest mechanism and men's employment. We find that men working part-time are more egalitarian than those working full-time (between models). Starting to work part-time or exiting the labour market is also related to men's more egalitarian attitudes towards working mothers (within models). This further supports the interest mechanism: when they start to work part-time, men change their interest structure, leading to a change in gender attitudes.

The indirect interest hypothesis (H3b) also finds support in our data (Tables 3 and 4): in couples, women's more intensive involvement in the labour market is related to men holding more egalitarian attitudes (between models). Additionally, when a woman exits the labour market, her partner develops more traditional attitudes with respect to gender roles (within models).

In couples, we also find that partners' attitudes are significantly and positively associated in both between and within models. This means that individuals with similar attitudes tend to get together and stay together (between models) and that a change in women's attitudes is associated with a change in the same direction in men's attitudes and vice versa (within models). The couple exposure hypothesis (H4) is hence confirmed.

Our last hypotheses (H5a-b) predict higher traditionalism in early family life stages, especially for women, because of higher constraints and cognitive dissonance. To analyse the relationship between change in attitudes and change in family life stages, we concentrate on results from within models and from individuals in couples, as this group is more homogeneous (Table 4). To assess the effect of moving from one family stage to another, we also run the models each time with another stage chosen as the reference category (not shown). For women, a transition from being in a pre-child couple to being in a pre-school family is associated with more traditional attitudes on women's employment, but contrary to our expectations, women also develop more egalitarian attitudes towards working mothers and modern sexism items. Moving to the school family stage, women become more traditional with respect to working mothers. Transitions in subsequent family stages are not associated with further attitudinal changes. For men, a change from being in a pre-child couple to being in a pre-school family is related to greater support for working mothers and recognition of women's discrimination. Moving to the school family stage, men become more traditional with respect to modern sexism items. As for women, men's transitions in subsequent family stages are not significantly related to further attitudinal change. As predicted, attitudinal change is only related to the transition in the early family life stages. However, attitudes become more egalitarian

in pre-school families and then more traditional in school families. We thus find mixed support for hypothesis 5a, as we do for hypothesis 5b. Indeed, while women develop more traditional attitudes towards gender roles in early family life stages, they also develop more egalitarian attitudes towards modern sexism items (the opposite is true for men).

Considering the control variables, as shown in previous research, for women and men, a higher level of education is generally related to more egalitarian attitudes (between and within models), which supports the exposure and interest mechanisms. Similarly, single, cohabitating and divorced individuals have more egalitarian attitudes than do married individuals (between models), except regarding modern sexism items, for which married men have more egalitarian attitudes than do singles and divorced men. For women, a change in marital status from single to married is related to more egalitarian⁵ attitudes towards working mothers, whereas it is related to more traditional attitudes towards women's employment. These results offer mixed support for the cognitive dissonance mechanism. Finally, in the Swiss context, we could expect that individuals living in the French-speaking and urban areas would be more egalitarian. Concerning the linguistic regions, this is true for modern sexism items. However, the Italian-speaking area is associated with most egalitarian attitudes towards women's employment, while the German-speaking area has the most egalitarian views on working mothers (between models). Moving from the German-speaking to the French-speaking areas is, however, related to more egalitarian attitudes for women (within models). The linguistic region provides support for the exposure mechanism. Turning to the residential context, while women and men living in urban areas are more likely to be egalitarian (between models), moving to (or leaving) urban areas is not related to a change in gender attitudes (within models). This last control variable provides no further support for the cognitive dissonance mechanism.

7 Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we first examined the trends in gender attitudes in the Swiss resident population between 2000 and 2017, drawing on cohort and period effects. Second, we investigated the changes in women's and men's gender attitudes, relying on interest, exposure and cognitive dissonance mechanisms. Three main findings emerge from our work.

First, there is a diverging period effect according to the two dimensions of gender attitudes examined, i. e., attitudes towards gender roles (reflecting old-fashioned

5 As we are interested in the transition from being single to being married (and not the opposite, as stated in Table 2), we analyse the opposite sign of the coefficient. In this example, -0.216 should thus be understood as $+0.216$.

sexism) and attitudes towards gender equality achievement (reflecting modern sexism). Women and men are increasingly supportive of women's and mothers' employment, while attitudes about women's discrimination and measures promoting women to reduce gender inequality remain rather stable over the observed period. These differing trends confirm the idea of the multidimensionality of gender attitudes, as shown by Pepin and Cotter (2018) in the US context. Moreover, these differing trends could reflect the structural and institutional contexts in Switzerland. Indeed, women were increasingly involved in the labour market, leading to more acceptance of women's and mothers' employment, while simultaneously, the discourse on gender equality policy has changed since 2000, resulting in limited measures and progress in achieving gender equality (Lanfranconi and Valarino 2014).

Additionally, the observation of attitudinal trends and mean levels of each item reveals, on the one hand, that men have more traditional attitudes than women but that trends in women's and men's attitudes are similar. On the other hand, during the observed period, women and men and all cohorts strongly endorse women's employment, whereas the other items receive moderate support. Thus, women's employment is advocated as long as there is no (pre-school) child in the household. This underlines the persistence of a "gendered master status" characterised by the priority assignment of women to the family in Swiss society (Krüger and Levy 2001) and outlines the dominant "cultural leitbild" in this country (Lück et al. 2017). The general gender culture in Switzerland since 2000 could thus be described as "familial egalitarianist" (Knight and Brinton 2017) or "egalitarian essentialist" (Cotter et al. 2011), which are cultural frames that endorse gender equality while acknowledging innate differences, particularly with respect to the role of mothers. However, egalitarian essentialism cannot explain the rising support for working mothers. In addition to structural factors, one explanation could be economic: with increased costs of living, a supplemental salary could not only be an asset in families but also a need. Thus, by personal interest, as well as through exposure mechanisms, people could increasingly accept working mothers.

Our second major finding is that *Millennials*, despite being socialised in a more egalitarian context, hold more traditional or sexist attitudes than their predecessors do, mainly on modern sexism items. Indeed, younger individuals are less supportive of measures to promote women and believe that women are decreasingly penalised. This may be explained by the fact that the visible improvements made in numerous dimensions of social life regarding gender equality tend to hide the enduring process of gender differentiation and hierarchisation. *Millennials* might therefore deny old-fashioned sexism, which is more visible and socially less desirable, but they remain somewhat blind to new forms of sexism. In this truncated perspective, gender inequality may no longer be considered a major concern. This could result in the disinterest of *Millennials* regarding gender equality issues and a lack of protests (Ellemers and Barreto 2009), leading to the maintenance of gender

inequalities (Becker and Sibley 2016). Moreover, drawing on egalitarian essentialism, *Millennials* may believe that the remaining inequalities in public and private spheres are normal consequences of women's primary caretaker role and are thus not due to any form of disadvantage (Ellemers and Barreto 2009). Especially since the gender equality policy implemented during their adulthood consisted principally of non-state and non-binding measures (Fuchs 2019).

Overall, we observe both a cohort and a period effect, the former being a stronger determinant of gender attitudes than the latter, which corroborates previous findings (Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004). That said, our results also show a convergence of attitudes among the three older cohorts, which indicates the strength of the diffusion and exposure mechanisms of the period effect. Moreover, according to Cotter et al. (2011), the period better reflects trends in the gender attitudes and culture of a population. Finally, similar to previous research on attitudinal trends (Pepin and Cotter 2018), our results suggest that despite a long-standing trend of increasing support towards gender equality in Switzerland, there are signs indicating a slowdown, if not a reversal, of this trend among the youngest generation surveyed. At this stage, it is difficult to assess whether this finding is an age, period or cohort effect. There is therefore a need to follow the younger cohort members as they age and experience new life transitions to assess the extent to which their attitudes towards gender equality are actually weakening.

Third, our results underscore the importance of one's own experiences in changing gender attitudes and indicate a substantial role of interest and exposure mechanisms, while the cognitive dissonance mechanism does not have the expected influence. Indeed, women's and men's attitudes become more egalitarian in the pre-school family stage and more traditional in the school family stage, which indicates that the cognitive dissonance mechanism is not effective immediately but rather only after some years of exposure to constraints. This is contrary to findings on the transition to parenthood (Baxter et al. 2014; Grinza et al. 2017). Instead of cognitive mechanisms, the exposure and interest mechanisms could be at play here. Focusing on the change in attitudes around the transition to parenthood in the Swiss context would provide more accurate insights on the cognitive dissonance mechanism than the observations we made regarding the family life stages.

Consistent with the interest and exposure mechanisms, not only women's but also men's employment levels are related to their own attitudes towards gender equality, while a change in their involvement in the labour market is mainly related to an adaptation of their gender role attitudes. If the relation between women's employment and their attitudes was known (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Corrigan and Konrad 2007), our results shed new light on this relation for men. Furthermore, within couples, men's attitudes are related to their female partners' employment status. Additionally, individual attitudes reflect a process of exposure and mutual influence between partners. These two results corroborate previous findings (Kroska

and Elman 2009). In future analyses, more detailed attention should be given to couples' functioning with respect to their attitudes. Indeed, while we found that both partners' attitudes evolve in the same direction, further research should assess whether partners' attitudes also converge over time.

Our analyses present some limitations due to the data at hand. While studies in other countries have compared trends in attitudinal changes before and after the mid-1990s, it was not possible to do this for Switzerland. Additionally, attitudes towards gender roles were only assessed through the items reflecting support for women's and mothers' employment. However, accounting for attitudes concerning men's and fathers' involvement in housework and childcare or, more generally, concerning the division of tasks within the couple would have rightly completed our results. Similarly, attitudes about measures to reduce gender inequality targeting men (e. g. men's involvement in childcare) could produce interesting comparison with those targeting women. Moreover, the inclusion of a statement on the negative reactions to complaints about equality would allow us to measure attitudinal changes in the third and last component of contemporary forms of sexism (Becker and Sibley 2016).

To conclude, consistent with previous research in other conservative gender regimes (e. g. Baxter et al. 2014), our results show that in the Swiss context, gender attitudes are not stable over the life course. They are likely to change with specific life transitions and adapt to the associated (gendered) types of social integration. Our results suggest that this occurs mainly through interest and exposure mechanisms. Finally, concerning the attitudinal change at the population level in Switzerland, while the period effect is related to an increase in egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles (and a stall of attitudes towards the achievement of gender equality), cohort replacement would suggest a reversal of gender attitudes in the future. If time will tell how gender attitudes change in Switzerland, some measures could be taken to prevent the reversal of gender attitudes. Broad communication regarding the state of gender inequality in Switzerland and the process of doing gender in family, school, workplace and, more generally, the public sphere, as well as the implementation of national and binding policies to promote gender equality in the private and public spheres, are important in exposing women and men to persisting gender inequality issues and changing their interest structure.

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