

Abstract

This doctoral thesis examines contemporary dynamics of gender divisions in work and politics, and how these divisions affect attitude formation in the welfare state. The past decades have witnessed a gender revolution across Europe. Women have entered the labor market and politics in full force, gender norms have become more egalitarian, and men are more involved in household work and childcare than ever. However, there are still hurdles to overcome in order to complete the gender revolution, even at the gender equality frontier of the Nordic countries. In Norway, women make 75% of men's income, on average. This is indicative of structures where women come out at a disadvantage financially, such as a gender-segregated labor market in which female-typical jobs are generally less paid, and women working less hours compared to men. The gender revolution has occurred at the same time as, and partially because of, changes in family policy. Research shows that public opinion is crucial for defining future policy trajectories, which will shape the development of gender equality. While it may seem like gender equality is a societal goal with high levels of consensus, especially in gender-egalitarian contexts, not everyone agrees that gender role symmetry in the household should be strived for, at least not at any cost. There is still substantial variation in family policy attitudes – debates concerning measures that regulate mothers and fathers' participation in the household, like cash-for-care or father quotas in parental leave, are particularly contentious. This thesis hones in on remaining gender divisions in labor and politics and attitudinal consequences of those divisions, in order to understand where the gender equality frontier stands and how it can be pushed forward. It therefore asks: *To what extent does the division of unpaid work cause gender divisions in public participation in advanced welfare states, and what are the attitudinal consequences of these divisions?*

The first part of the dissertation examines the causes of gendered divisions in public participation, more specifically in paid work and politics. It does so by looking at drivers of participation in both domains. Here, cognitive household labor – the organizational dimension of household work often referred to as the mental load – is an independent variable in particular focus. This theoretical interest builds on research showing that while the division of physical household labor has become more equal, the division of cognitive household labor remains gendered, even in otherwise egalitarian couples. It may therefore represent a substantive gender equality frontier. Yet, the effects of a disproportional cognitive labor burden among women on public participation are severely under-researched, which this part of the thesis aims to address. It does so through two articles. The first one looks into the sustaining factors of feminized part-time work in Norway, measuring the impact of both supply- and demand factors of individual work-

ing hour preferences through a vignette experiment, including cognitive labor. It finds that working time decisions are most prominently based on material concerns. However, results from the cognitive labor dimension suggest that disproportional cognitive labor burdens can also affect working time decisions. This is further investigated in article II, in which a priming experiment fielded in the UK tests the impact of priming parents with their own mental loads on their ambitions in the labor market and in politics. In this less egalitarian context, the results are clear: priming parents' mental loads decreases their intentions to advance public participation.

The second part of the dissertation investigates attitudinal consequences of gender divisions in paid and unpaid labor, in the form of family policy attitudes. One article therefore builds further on the previous articles' dependent variable (gender division in paid labor) and the other on their main independent variable of interest (gender division in household labor). Together, they examine mechanisms of public support for family policy constellations, which facilitate different divisions of labor within couples from a structural standpoint. As family policy has gained serious foothold in European welfare states, systematic research on what influences preferences for different family policy approaches is still in its infancy. Better understanding the drivers of differing family policy attitudes is nevertheless crucial, as the resulting measures affect the division of labor itself. The first attitudinal article – article III – examines whether the gendered division of paid labor structures an attitudinal cleavage in the family policy realm. Applying a family policy lens to the established insider-outsider framework, findings from a structural equation model show that part-time workers are more likely to prefer an optional familialism approach in family policy. The preference is mediated by their experienced partner dependency risk. Finally, article IV demonstrates that family policy attitudes in the general population are structured by perceptions of justice in the division of physical household labor, whereas cognitive household labor seems not to be politicized. In sum, the two articles highlight the consequences of gender divisions in paid and unpaid labor on family policy attitudes through both risk and fairness perceptions.

Overall, the thesis finds that the causes of gender inequality in public participation are multidimensional. On the one hand, the division of paid labor seems to be structured by material concerns in gender egalitarian Norway. However, cognitive household labor may be an additional dimension that impact women's lower working hours. In a less gender egalitarian setting, the UK, unequal mental loads seem to affect public participation in both paid work and politics in a more straightforward way. Descriptive findings show that both countries have substantial gender inequality in mental loads. However, the effect of cognitive household labor may depend on family policy regime. In sum, the findings indicate that cognitive household labor constitutes a key aspect of gender inequality. Second, in terms of attitudinal consequences, the thesis finds that family policy attitudes are driven by both risk and justice perceptions related to gendered divisions of paid and unpaid labor. It further argues that these factors are distinct for the family policy realm. Partner dependency risk and household justice perceptions are inherently intertwined with the division of labor itself, indicating that causes and expressions of gender divisions of labor, and attitudinal consequences thereof, may in reality intimately connect to each other. They in fact may constitute a potential feedback loop that makes pushing the gender equality frontier heavy, but doable.