family structure and anti-egalitarianism

the gendered nature of family structure and group-based anti-egalitarianism: a cross-national analysis

jim sidanius
yesilernis pena
department of psychology
ucla

working paper #188. russell sage foundation, 112 east 64th street, new york, ny 10021.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jim Sidanius, Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles, 405 Hilgard Avenue,
Family Structure and Anti-egalitarianism

Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563. tel: (310) 825-5432; Electronic mail may be sent to Sidanius@psych.ucla.edu.
Family Structure and Anti-egalitarianism

Abstract
Using four samples of adolescents from three nations (Australia, Sweden, United States), we explored whether the gendered nature of the family socialization environment affected young people’s level of group-based social egalitarianism. It was hypothesized that the greater the father’s influence the family, the greater the children’s level of group-based social anti-egalitarianism. The results were consistent with our expectations. Children from father-headed households had the highest level of group-based social anti-egalitarianism, children from mother-headed households had the lowest level of group-based anti-egalitarianism, and children from dual-parent households were in-between. Similarly, children from homes in which the father had the greatest decision making power tended to exhibit the highest levels of anti-egalitarianism, while children from homes in which the mother had the greatest decision making power displayed the lowest levels of social anti-egalitarianism. Family structure did not interact with either the nationality or gender of the child.

That males have higher average levels of social dominance orientation and group-based anti-egalitarianism than females is one of the most thoroughly and consistently validated research findings in contemporary social and political psychology (see e.g., Eisler & Loye, 1983; Ekehammar, 1985; Ekehammar & Sidanious, 1982; Eysenck, 1971; Furnham, 1985; Majoribanks, 1981; Nilsson, Ekehammar, & Sidanious, 1985; Sidanious, Cling, & Pratto, 1991; Sidanious & Ekehammar, 1980, Sidanious, Levin, Liu, & Pratto, 2000; Sidanious & Pratto, 2001; Sidanious, Pratto & Bobo, 1994; Sidanious, Pratto & Brief, 1995). Social dominance theorists have argued that unlike anti-egalitarian differences between different “races,” ethnic groups, religions and other socially constructed and
Family Structure and Anti-egalitarianism

hierarchically structured groups (i.e., what social dominance theorists refer to as “arbitrary sets”), male/female differences in group-based anti-egalitarianism are, to some significant degree, “evolved” behavioral and attitudinal predispositions and will therefore be relatively invariant across cultural, demographic and situational factors (see Sidanius & Pratto, 2001).

Since it is recognized that group-based anti-egalitarian attitudes will also, in part, be influenced by cultural and situational factors, it is not controversial to assume that the general socialization environment in which a child grows up is one of the factors contributing to the individual’s general level of group-based anti-egalitarianism. However, following the logic of social dominance theory, not only should we expect children’s levels of group-based anti-egalitarianism to be influenced by the broad socialization environment within the family, but also by the “gendered nature” of this family environment. This is to say that the relative influence of male and female parental figures should influence the general group-based anti-egalitarianism of their children. Specifically, because of the relatively higher level of social dominance orientation and group-based anti-egalitarianism found among males, the greater the overall relative influence of male versus female parental figures, the higher the average level of group-based anti-egalitarianism children should be expected to have.

In this paper, we intend to test this gendered-environment hypothesis in two ways. First, we will consider the gendered nature of family structure by inspecting three types of families: 1) “dual-parent families,” where the children are raised in the presence of both mothers and fathers, 2) “mother-only families,” in which children are raised with single mothers as heads of households, and 3) “father-only families,” in which children
Family Structure and Anti-egalitarianism

are raised in father only households. The second manner of examining the gendered nature of the family environment is to look at the decision making structure within families. Family decision making structure can be grouped into three categories: 1) families in which fathers have the most decision making power, 2) families in which mothers have the most decision making power, and 3) families in which the decision making power is evenly divided between mothers and fathers.

Furthermore, given that these male/female differences in social dominance tend not to interact with situational, cultural and demographic factors (see e.g., Sidanius, Pratto & Bobo, 1994; Sidanius, Pratto & Brief, 1995; Sidanius, Levin, Liu & Pratto, 2000), there is reason to expect no interaction between the gendered nature of the family environment and the child’s gender. In other words, relative exposure to paternal vs. maternal influence should have essentially the same effect on both boys and girls.

On the other hand, while social dominance theorists might not expect an interaction between family structure and the child’s gender, given what we know about same-sex influence within families, such an interaction seems reasonable. Since we do have evidence that fathers are more influential on their sons, while mothers are more influential on their daughters (see e.g., Bussey & Bandura, 1984; Lueptow, 1980; Sidanius & Ekehammar, 1979), one could well expect that in two parent, egalitarian families in which both parents present equally powerful yet divergent, gender-roles to children, attitudinal differences between boys and girls might be greater than in families with only a single gender-role model.

To explore these questions, we re-analyzed archival data concerning political socialization effects collected by Sidanius, Ekehammar and their colleagues (see e.g.,
Family Structure and Anti-egalitarianism

Sidanius & Ekehammar, & Ross, 1979; Sidanius, Brewer, Banks & Ekehammar, 1987) in three (separate) nations in the late 1970s and early to mid 1980s.

Method

Subjects

The total data set consisted of 1,549 respondents from four independent samples of teen-agers and very young adults from three nations (Australia, United States, Sweden), with a median age of 18 yrs. The data were collected between 1979 and 1985. Each data set consisted of responses to set of items assessing socio-political attitudes and background variables.

Sample 1 consisted of 783 Swedish high school students recruited from several randomly chosen communities within metropolitan Stockholm in 1979. There were 397 boys, 375 girls and 11 students who did not indicate their sex.

Sample 2 consisted of 267 (135 boys, 131 girls, 1 missing case) undergraduates from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, assessed in the spring of 1982.

Sample 3 was composed of 274 (115 boys, 159 girls) Australian high school students from metropolitan Melbourne in 1985.

Sample 4 consisted of 225 (135 boys, 90 girls) randomly sampled undergraduates from the University of Texas, Austin in 1984.

Procedure

The survey questionnaire was originally constructed for the Swedish sample and subsequently translated into English for the American and Australian samples. The questionnaire was then back-translated in Swedish to assure item compatibility.
Family Structure and Anti-egalitarianism

Measures

Anti-egalitarianism. Each questionnaire contained four measures comprising what Sidanius and Pratto (2001) have referred to as the AE-1 Scale, a precursor to the Social Dominance Orientation Scale (see Pratto et al, 1994). This scale assesses the degree to which one supports or rejects social equality. Because two of these four items specifically refer to “race” and were also embedded in a series of other questions referring to “race” and social class (see Sidanius, 1976), this scale has a distinctly “group-based” flavor. The respondents were asked to indicated the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the following four stimuli: 1) “White superiority,” 2) “Racial equality,” 3) “Increased social equality,” and 4) “Social equality.” Each response was given on a 7-point scale from “1-Strongly agree” to “7-Strongly disagree.” All responses were then coded into the direction of anti-egalitarianism. The Cronbach reliabilities were considered adequate for a scale of this length and ranged from .63 in Sample 2, to .77 in Sample 4 (Mα = .73). Confirmatory factor analysis (using LISREL 8) and a maximum likelihood extraction showed reasonable support for a unidimensional factor structure (GFI = .94). The factor loadings were: .70, .77, .61, and .50 for each item, respectively. The fact that the two “racial” items had the largest loadings on this unidimensional factor confirmed the group-based nature of the dimension. Extensive item analysis of this scale not only supports its reliability, but validity as well (see Sidanius & Pratto, 2001).

Family structure was classified into one of three types: 1) dual-parent households (i.e., both parents present in the home; n = 1,209), 2) mother-headed households (n = 207), and 3) father-headed households (n = 48). There were 85 respondents who lived with neither parent and were thus not included in the final analyses. The distribution of
Family Structure and Anti-egalitarianism

each family type within each sample is found in Table 1. As can be seen in Table 1, despite some major differences between the samples (e.g., culture, age of respondents), the distribution of family structure was fairly similar across samples. Most importantly, while the number of father-headed households was small within each sample, the proportion of father-headed households was fairly consistent across samples (approximately 3%).

_Family decision making pattern._ For those respondents growing up in dual-parent households, the respondents were asked to indicate which of their two parents had the greatest decision making power within the family: 1) fathers (n = 247), 2) mothers (n = 128) or 3) both parents equally (n = 808; 26 respondents had missing data on this question). As can be seen in Table 2, the general pattern of decision making power was similar across all four samples. The largest number of respondents reported that mothers and fathers had equal decision making power, the second largest reported that fathers had the most decision making power, while the fewest number reported that mothers had the greatest decision making power in the family. However, despite this overall similarity, there was also a slight distributional difference between samples. Swedish families tended to have slightly less male-dominated family decision making patterns, while Texas families tended to have slightly more male-dominated family decision patterns ($\chi^2(6) = 39.33, p < .0001$).

_Socioeconomic Status_ was assessed by use of three indices: a) asking the respondents to classify themselves into one of three social status categories (working class, middle class, and upper class), b) use of the mothers’ and c) fathers’ yearly income.
Family Structure and Anti-egalitarianism

Each of the variables was transformed to a standard scale and a final SES index was computed as the mean across all indices.

Results

We first examined the possible effects of family structure, child’s gender, and the sample used (e.g., Swedes, Australians) on anti-egalitarianism after controlling for the possible effects of SES. We controlled for SES by regressing anti-egalitarianism on SES and then computing the residual anti-egalitarianism scores. It was these residual scores that were then used in all subsequent analyses.¹ Using these residual anti-egalitarianism scores, we first performed a 3x2x4 ANOVA with: a) household type (female-headed, make-headed, dual-parent), the child’s gender, and the sample the data were taken from (i.e., Australia, Sweden, Wisconsin or Texas) as the independent variables.

Consistent with previous results (see e.g., Sidanius & Pratto, 2001; Sidanius et al, 2000), there was a highly significant and moderately weak relationship between the child’s gender and the level of anti-egalitarianism ($F(1,1407) = 84.88, p < 10^{-10}, \eta^2 = .24$). As usual, these results showed boys to have significantly higher levels of anti-egalitarianism than girls. More to the point here, however, is that the child’s level of anti-egalitarianism was also significantly related to the structure of the nuclear family ($F(2,1402) = 4.95, p < .007, \eta^2 = .08$). Children in female-headed households had the lowest levels of anti-egalitarianism ($M = -.208, SD = .97$), children in male-headed households had the highest level of anti-egalitarianism ($M = .184, SD = 1.07$), and children in dual-parent households had intermediate levels of anti-egalitarianism ($M = -.003, SD = 1.00$). However, Scheffé post-hoc analysis showed that the only pairwise contrast that was statistically significant was between children raised in mother-headed
versus father-headed households (p < .02); furthermore, there was no interaction between sample and family structure ($F(4,1402) < 1$). This shows that, despite the between-sample differences in when and where the data were collected, the relationship between household type and anti-egalitarianism was essentially the same. In addition, there was no significant interaction between family structure and the child’s gender, showing that family structure had the same effect on the children’s level of anti-egalitarianism regardless of the child’s gender ($F(2,1402) = 1.99$, n.s).

We also examined the possible effects of family decision-making pattern. We performed another 3x2x4 ANOVA in which the type of decision-making within the family (mother-dominated decisions, father-dominated decisions, equal decision-making) was crossed with the respondents’ gender and the sample from which the data were drawn. Naturally, the analyses were restricted to only those families with both parents present. Once again, the results were consistent with expectations. Besides the fact that boys continued to have significantly higher levels of group-based anti-egalitarianism than girls ($F(1,1134) = 73.02$, $p < 10^{-10}$, $\eta^2 = .24$), there was also a small but significant effect for parental decision-making power ($F(2,1134) = 4.34$, $p < .02$, $\eta = .09$). Children in families where the mother was the primary decision-maker had the lowest levels of anti-egalitarianism (M = -.049, SD = .90), children in families where the father was the primary decision maker had the highest levels of anti-egalitarianism (M = .067, SD = 1.11), while children in families with equal parental decision making power had intermediate levels of anti-egalitarianism (adjusted M = -.044, SD = .97). However, Scheffé post-hoc analysis revealed that the only significant differences were between father-dominated families versus mother-dominated and equal-power families. Once
Family Structure and Anti-egalitarianism

again, this trend was essentially the same across all four samples (i.e., no interaction effect: $F(6,1134) = 1.27, \text{n.s.}$), and for both boys and girls (no interaction effect: $F(2,1134) < 1, \text{n.s.}$).

Summary and Discussion

Social dominance theorists have argued that one’s level of group-based anti-egalitarianism is not simply a function of one’s gender, but is also a function of the specific situational envelope within which one is placed (see Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). The specific nature of the situational envelope we were interested in here was the gendered nature of the family in which one is raised. We had reason to suspect that the greater one’s exposure to a male role-model during childhood, the higher one’s level of group based anti-egalitarian should be. We refer to this as the *gendered-environment hypothesis*. In addition, there is at least the possibility of an interaction between the specific nature of the gendered environment and the child’s gender.

We tested these ideas using the combined data from four independent samples of adolescents from three nations. The data showed consistent support for the gendered-environment hypothesis. Though the strength of the effects were relatively weak, the data indicated that the greater the father’s presence and decision-making power within the family, the greater the child’s level of group-based anti-egalitarianism. However, consistent with the invariance hypothesis (see Sidanius & Pratto, 2001), these family structure and family power factors did not interact with the respondent’s gender. In other words, these environments had essentially the same effects on both boys and girls. Thus, the gendered-environment effect appears to be relatively constant across both gender of the child and nationality, at least within the restricted populations sampled here.
Altogether, these results suggest that group-based anti-egalitarianism is not only affected by one’s own gender (or possibly sex), but is also a function of the gendered nature of the family environment. Not only do males have a tendency to display transsituationally higher levels of group-based anti-egalitarianism than females, but one’s degree of group-based anti-egalitarianism will also increase as one is exposed to male parental figures, regardless of one’s gender.

Nonetheless, despite the relative clarity of the empirical results, a few caveats are still in order. First, these data were collected in the 1970s and 1980s, an era when paternal custody of minor children was less common than it is today. The question that naturally arises is whether these results would hold using a contemporary sample. There is reason to expect that, if anything, these family structure results would be even stronger today. Because paternal custody was such a rare event a generation ago, there is good reason to believe that those fathers who volunteered to be primary caretakers were very much not a random sample of the population of all fathers. These paternal caretakers were likely to have held relatively more nurturant attitudes compared to the general male population of their day. Keeping in mind that nurturant attitudes tend to be negatively correlated with generalized anti-egalitarianism (e.g., Sidanius & Pratto, 2001), there is then strong reason to believe that the paternal caretakers in our sample were relatively more egalitarian than a sample of paternal caretakers would be today. In other words, a contemporary sample of paternal caretakers would most likely have more typically “male” social attitudes than a sample of paternal caretakers from the 1970s and 1980s. This would have the effect of attenuating differences between mother-only and father-only households in the sample used here.
Secondly, because these are correlational and self-report data, one is faced with the perennial “direction-of-causation” problem. Thus, rather than family structure affecting social attitudes, it is possible that it is the respondents’ social attitudes that are affecting their recollections of family life. On the other hand, this direction-of-causation problem is much more of a potential issue for the family power rather than the family-structure variable. It is possible that those with high levels of anti-egalitarianism, for whatever reason, recalled their fathers rather than their mothers as making most of the family decisions. On the other hand, it is rather unlikely that respondents’ anti-egalitarianism attitudes also affected their recollections of family structure, regardless of whether they were raised in single-mother, single-father or dual parents households.

Finally, one must also remember that we only used respondents from a small number of countries within the industrialized West and neither the respondents nor the nations sampled can be considered representative of their respective theoretical populations. Further work should be done to assess the degree to which these results are also generalizable across a broad spectrum of contemporary cultures.
Family Structure and Anti-egalitarianism

References


Family Structure and Anti-egalitarianism


Family Structure and Anti-egalitarianism


Table 1
Distribution of Family Structure Types for the Four Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Family Structure</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lives with both</td>
<td>Lives only with</td>
<td>Lives only with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parents</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>father</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm, Sweden</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison, Wisconsin</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne, Australia</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin, Texas</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1209</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1464</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
Distribution of Family Decision Making over the Four Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Family Decision Making</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm, Sweden</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison, Wisconsin</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne, Australia</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin, Texas</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Endnotes

1 Note that this residual procedure is equivalent to performing an analysis of covariance.