

**An Asymmetrical Gender Revolution:
Five Cohorts of Dynamics of Gender Role Ideology in China**

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Abstract

Using data from 2010 Chinese General Social Survey, this study examines to what extent gender ideology has changed by cohort, and how gender ideology is related to marital status and education level. Using Paula England's "uneven gender revolution" approach, we further examine how these dynamics are conditional on one's gender. Our preliminary findings are mixed. Consistent with the "uneven gender revolution" perspective, we have found that younger cohorts of women are becoming more progressive in terms of gender ideology while younger men did not make any improvement. Educated women are more gender egalitarian; whereas education does not necessarily make men more progressive. Contrary to our expectation, marriage women are less gender egalitarian, but married men are more progressive, compared to their single counterparts.

Introduction

In the 2010 influential paper on the "uneven gender revolution" in the United State, Paula England convincingly demonstrates that although women have made big strides in education and employment, and have entered previously male dominated occupations and fields of study, men lack the incentives to enter female occupation or fields of study. As England alleges that the uneven gender revolution along the one-way street is largely due to cultural devaluation of women's activities. However, her paper primarily focuses on the structural changes and did not tackle much about the ideological or attitudinal dimensions. An independent line of literature has well studied either changes in gender role ideology or gender difference in this regard in the Western context, although this topic is less studies in non-Western context. Yet, there is a lack of integration between the two lines of study; almost no studies use the approach of uneven gender revolution to investigate gender difference and changes in gender role ideology.

This study bridges the above two lines of literature to conceptualize and examine changes in gender ideology in a non-Western context, such as China where dynamics of gender ideology is less well studied and updated research is urgently in need. As a rapidly transitioning society, China has witnessed dynamic changes in gender equality in recent decades. Chinese women had enjoyed one of the world's highest level of gender equality concerning labor force participation and equal pay in the pre-1980 socialist era. Recent research shows deteriorating of gender equality, such as gender discrimination in the labor market and traditional gender role in the family. Yet, at the same time, Chinese women have experienced rapid improvement in educational achievement; females have overpassed males in college enrolment in the recent decade. Further, as China undergoes rapid socio-economic development, marriage is still near universal which is a contrast to many Asian and Western societies.

Using data from 2010 Chinese General Social Survey, this study examines to what extent gender ideology has changed by cohort, and how marriage as a social institution influences men and women's ideology, and how education empowers people in this regard. Using the "uneven gender revolution" approach, I further examine how these dynamics are different between men and women.

Research Question and Hypotheses

Although Chinese women had gained much progress in terms of education, and employment in the socialist time before the economic reformation beginning in 1980, much research states that the state policies encouraged women to join economic production, but more or less ignored the private sphere of the family. During the economic reformation period, gender equality is reported to decline in some dimensions in recent decades. Further, resurgence of patriarchal Confucianism can further support the less egalitarian ideology. Therefore, I expect that as the subordinate gender, women have more motivation to support more egalitarian

ideology. Therefore,

Hypothesis 1: Women are more progressive than men regarding gender ideology.

In 1980, the Chinese government initiated economic reformation and opening up to the world, China has transited from the socialist state to market economy. There are both forces to push/pull younger cohorts to/away from more gender egalitarian direction. The declining attention to gender equality from the state and the revival of tradition are clearly negative influence. The rapid socioeconomic development and Westernization (including Western feminist ideas) can be positive forces. However, considering the impressive educational and economic achievements by young women in present China, I expect younger cohorts are becoming more gender egalitarian. Therefore,

Hypothesis 2: Younger cohorts are more progressive regarding gender ideology;

Compared to many Western and Asian societies, marriage is relatively early and near universal in China, particularly so for women. As a patriarchal and gendered institution, marriage is still regarded as a must in the Chinese society. In recent decades, mass education has expanded rapidly in China. With the fast modernization and globalization in China, educated people not only have more economic opportunities, but also likely are exposed to more liberal ideology, including Western influences. Therefore,

Hypothesis 3: Married people are more conservative than single people regarding gender ideology;

and Hypothesis 4: Educated people are more progressive regarding gender ideology.

As Paula England argues that gender revolution in the West is uneven with women making much progress in education and labor market while men lacking the incentives to make progress towards more gender egalitarian or gender neutral

direction. It is likely that dynamics of gender inequality is similarly asymmetrical in China. The above effects of cohorts, marriage and education can be also differently associated to gender ideology for men and women. Therefore,

Hypothesis 5: There is an interaction between cohort and gender on gender ideology. Younger cohorts of women are more progressive regarding gender ideology; while men are making much smaller strides than women;

Hypothesis 6: There is an interaction between marital status and gender on gender ideology. As the dominant gender, men become much more conservative than women after marriage.

and **Hypothesis 7:** There is an interaction between education and gender on gender ideology. Education has a much stronger effect on women than on men.

Data and Methods

Sample

Data are from the 2010 Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS). CGSS, a cross-sectional survey, is the first nation-wide, comprehensive social survey in China. The first wave began in 2003, and the one used in this study is the fifth wave. The 2010 CGSS covers 11,783 households in both rural and urban areas in 31 provinces/districts (excluding Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau). The survey interviews one randomly chosen adult per household and collects data on basic socioeconomic and demographic information for respondents and family members, including family composition, education, ethnicity, health, psychological well-being, and personal opinions on various issues, as well as community administration data for the residence where the respondent resided at the time of the interview.

I include 10,144 men and women who were between 18 years and 65 years old

at the time of the 2010 interview. Further excluding 341 cases with missing values on the covariates of this study, the analysis sample size is 9,803 respondents.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variables are gender ideology in China. I operate it into two measures: gender role attitudes, and attitude regarding household labor division. Gender role attitudes are measured by the following four questions, “men should put career on priority and women should put family on priority,” “men are naturally more competent than women,” “to marry a good man is better than to have a good job,” and “at economic recession, women should be fired first.” The answers are 5 point likert scale, from “totally disagree” to “totally agree.” I recoded each answer so that the lower values indicate more conservative attitude and the higher values indicate more progressive attitude. Factor analysis shows that the four variables load into one factor. I therefore create a gender role attitude index by summarizing the four variables. Attitude regarding household labor division is measured by the question, “husband and wife should share housework equally.” I also recoded the 5 point liker scale answer so that higher values indicate more liberal attitude.

Independent and Control Variables

The main independent variables are cohort, gender, and marital status. Cohort is coded into five categories, the Founding generation (1945-1954), the Cultural Revolution cohort (1955-1969), the Post-70s cohort (1970-1977), the Post-80s cohort (1978-1984), and the Post-85 cohort (1985-1992). The Founding generation was born before and after 1949 when the Communist Party came in power. This cohort was fully exposed to the early Marxist ideology which promotes egalitarian gender ideology. The Cultural Revolution cohort was born right before the Cultural Revolution and had spent a substantial span of time growing up during the Cultural Revolution, when gender equality was still highly promoted. The Post-70s was the last cohort born before then one-child policy and grew up in the early reformation

period. During this period, the Marxist ideology was still promoted, but its role was not as prominent as before. For the Post-80s cohort, I also include those born after 1978 who were the first generation of the one-child policy. When this cohort grew up in 1990s, marketization was deepened, income inequality increased, the Confucius tradition came back while influences of Marxist ideology continued to degrade, and state-owned companies laid off large quantity of workers. For the Post-85 cohort, as they grew up, privatization is deeper, income disparity is further. In 2001, China entered World Trade Organization, and entered a rapid globalization era. In addition to the main independent variables, this study also controls for the following variables, ethnicity, Hukou, father's party membership, and parents' education.

Analytic Strategy

First, I describe the characteristics of the analysis sample by gender. Then I run OLS regression to estimate gender role attitude index, and ordered logistic regression to predict attitude regarding household labor division, respectively. Probabilities of more progressive attitude are modeled over the lower ordered values of being more conservative in the ordered logit model. For both regressions, I estimate four models in order: first model on main effects of cohort, gender, and marital status. Second model is on interaction effects between cohort and genders, third model on interaction effects between marital status and gender, and fourth model on interaction effects between education and gender.

Preliminary Results

Descriptive

Gender role attitude index is quite evenly distributed in the range between 4 and 20, and the mean is about 12. Regarding equal housework division, respondents are rather progressive, with almost three fourth who relatively or totally agree to the equal split

between husband and wife. There are slightly more women than men in the sample, 52 percent vs. 48 percent. Only 11 percent of the respondents are single. Close to one quarter have some college or above education while more than 60 percent have less than high school education. Close to 10 percent are ethnic minorities. There are slightly more respondents from the rural area than urban area, 52 percent vs. 48 percent. There are close to one fifth of respondents whose father is a party member. There are only 16 percent of respondents whose parents have high school or above education while 32 percent of respondents whose parents have no education at all.

(Table 1 about here)

Multivariate Analyses

Table 2 presents OLS regression to estimate gender role attitude index. Model 1 presents the main effects of covariates and control variables. The Cultural Revolution cohort and Post-70s cohort are not different from the founding cohort. The Post-80s and Post-85s are more progressive, 0.34 and 0.93 units higher than the oldest cohort respectively. Women are more liberal than men, which is not unexpected. Married people are not different from single people. Educated people are more gender egalitarian; those with college education are almost 2 units higher than those with less than high school education in terms of gender role attitude index. Ethnicity does not differentiate people concerning gender role attitude. Respondents with rural Hukou are more conservative than those with urban Hukou. Neither ethnicity nor father's part membership differentiates people in terms of gender view; whereas, those with better educated parents are more liberal. Models 2 through 4 show significant interactions between gender and cohort, gender and marital status, and gender and education. To better interpret the interaction effects, I plot three significant interactions in Figure 1.

(Table 2 and Figure 1 about here)

In Model 2 of Figure 1, we can see that women are becoming more progressive in

terms of gender role attitude for each younger cohort, but men did not make any progress, if not moving backwards. For the Founding cohort, men are slightly more progressive than women. However, for the three reformation cohorts, women become more liberal than men and gender difference rapidly increases for each younger cohort. Model 3 shows that women are more progressive than men. Yet marriage makes men and women more similar to each other: married women are more conservative than their single counterparts while married men are more liberal than single men. Model 4 clearly displays that education makes people more progressive in gender role attitude with college graduates holding the most liberal gender views. It is interesting that for those with less than high school education, women are more conservative than men, but the direction of association reverses for those better educated. Further, the higher the education level is, the bigger the gender difference is.

Table 3 shows results from ordered logistic regression to estimate attitude about household labor division between husband and wife. Model 5 demonstrates odds ratios of main effects of covariates. There is no cohort difference. Women are 44 percent more likely to endorse equal housework division. Marital status and ethnicity do not make difference. Rural respondents are 10 percent less likely to endorse even split of housework than urban respondents. Father's party membership and parents' education level do not have effects. Models 5 through 8 illustrate significant interactions between gender and cohort, gender and marital status, and gender and education. I plot odds ratios of these interaction terms in Figure 2.

(Table 3 and Figure 2 about here)

Model 5 of Figure 2 demonstrates that women are always more likely than men to endorse equal household labor division; the gender disparity is increasing rapidly as the cohort become younger. For example, the founding cohort women are only 7 percent more likely than men to endorse this idea, but for post-85 cohort women are almost 90 percent more likely than men to endorse it. In Model 6, women's odds of approving equal housework split are higher than that of men's. Gender disparity

decreases after marriage. Although married women become less progressive on this issue – women’s odds of approving this view decreasing by 26 percent after marriage, married men do become more progressive – men’s odds increasing by 33 percent after marriage. Model 7 displays a contrast gender pattern. Women are more likely to endorse equal housework split than men across all education levels. As expected, educated women are more liberal on this view. Surprisingly, all better educated men are even less progressive than men with less than middle school education.

Discussion and Conclusion

In terms of gender role attitude, the three reformation cohorts tend to be more liberal. Consistent with the “uneven gender revolution” theory, this seemingly progress is due to the fact that younger cohorts of women more and more disagree with the gender role attitudes. In contrast, younger men did not make any progress and they lag behind their female counterparts further away. The no effect of marital status on gender role attitudes is due to the fact that men and women converge rapidly after marriage, which seems to be opposite to what the “uneven gender revolution” approach would expect. Poorly educated women are even more conservatively than men; but for the better educated, women are always more liberal than men. Education has very strong liberating effects on women; but its effects on men are rather limited. Indeed, gender disparity increases as education level increase, which is also consistent with the “uneven gender revolution.”

When it comes to equal housework attitude, there is no effect of cohort and marital status. Again the no effect is due to gender difference on this gender attitude. For the Founding cohort, women are only slightly more than men to endorse the housework splitting idea. However, gender disparity is much bigger for the later cohorts; for the reformation cohorts, gender disparity increases for each younger cohort. Overall, men not only did not make any progress, but also move towards more

conservative direction. Again, marriage tends to make men and women move closer in terms of equal housework splitting attitude. Yet, gender difference is still substantial after marriage. Surprisingly, although educated women tend to be more progressive regarding housework split, education does not lift men in this regard. Further, neither female nor male college graduates, but women with some college and men with less than middle school education are most progressive concerning housework division.

The above discussion indicates that from the perspective of gender role ideology, the gender revolution in China is uneven and not without obstacles from the men's side. While women stride forward to the more gender egalitarian goal, men are hesitant, and can even move backwards sometimes. Education can tremendously empower women as the subordinate gender. However, it does not have the same effect on men as the dominant gender. It is likely that the resurgence of the patriarchal Confucius tradition in recent decades provides men more leverage to cling on. For younger women, it is a different story. On the one side, with more education, and also influences of western ideology including feminist influence, particularly after the China entered WTO in 2001, the younger generation of women are more confident and aware of their right. Therefore, gender disparity regarding gender role ideology can become enlarged for the young men and women in China.

The inconsistent effect of education on men and women may due to the following two aspects. First, education can influence individuals through the ideological venue. Its emancipating power for women as the subordinate gender is invaluable. However, men do not benefit much from this from the dominant side. Second, education can also pattern gender equality through the economic channel. Educated women likely also have good occupation and income, which booster their voice for gender equality. For educated men, their economic status can further help them enjoy their dominance in the society and inside family. Particularly men tend to benefit more from the existing system when gender discrimination in the market is deteriorating, which can further justify their dominance and gender inequality to some degree.

Marriage does bring men and women together. It holds women back in terms of gender role ideology. However, the institution of marriage is not always conservative, and its effect is contextually based. In the Chinese context, there may be several reasons why marriage actually liberates men along the gender egalitarian course. First, husband may be influenced by his more liberal wife as a type of continued socialization during his adulthood. The size of household is decreasing in China with declining parental authority. Further, double-winner family is the norm in China. Therefore, wife's status in the nuclear family can be as important as the husband. Second, due to the one-child policy, family is smaller and closer in nowadays China. A reverse socialization can happen, particularly when the family has a daughter. The father can then better understand the gender inequality from his daughter's perspective and experience. Third, educational assortative marriage has increased in recent decades. This indicates that a wife is usually much more progressive than a husband regarding gender equality. Wife can thus have more influence over the husband.

Table 1. Means and Frequencies of Covariates, CGSS, 2010.

Variable	Entire Sample N=9,803	Female N=5,127	Male N=4,678
Gender role attitude index	12.26	12.32	12.19
Equal housework			
Totally disagree	2.74	1.87	3.7
Relatively disagree	11.05	9.81	12.4
Neither disagree nor agree	12.72	11.55	14.01
Relatively agree	40.84	40.32	41.42
Totally agree	32.64	36.45	28.46
Men for work, women for home			
Totally disagree	24.76	24.67	24.85
Relatively disagree	41.23	40.3	42.26
Neither disagree nor agree	8.75	7.78	9.82
Relatively agree	18.54	19.84	17.11
Totally agree	6.72	7.41	5.97
Men more competent than women			
Totally disagree	12.19	13.2	11.08
Relatively disagree	29.6	28.83	30.45
Neither disagree nor agree	12.31	10.24	14.59
Relatively agree	32.78	33.14	32.38
Totally agree	13.12	14.59	11.51
Better to marry than to work			
Totally disagree	12.86	14.3	11.29
Relatively disagree	33.1	34.85	31.18
Neither disagree nor agree	18.84	17.16	20.68
Relatively agree	24.46	23.91	25.06
Totally agree	10.73	9.77	11.78
Fire women first			
Totally disagree	2.81	3.06	2.52
Relatively disagree	7.74	6.92	8.64
Neither disagree nor agree	17.4	15.08	19.95
Relatively agree	38.54	37.25	39.95
Totally agree	33.51	37.68	28.93
Cohort			
Founding generation	19.79	18.9	20.77
Cultural Revolution	38.03	38.15	37.9
Post-70s	19.62	20.3	18.86
Post-80s	12.02	11.86	12.19
Post-85s	10.55	10.79	10.29
Gender (Ref = male)	52.3		
Marital status (Ref = single)	88.93	91.13	86.53

Education			
Less than high school (Ref)	62.58	65.63	59.24
High school	14.08	12.81	15.46
Some college	15.2	14.47	16
College or above	8.14	7.08	9.3
Ethnicity (Ref = minority)	90.62	90.38	90.87
Hukou (Ref = urban)	52.25	52.88	51.56
Family background			
Father's party membership (Ref = non-member)	18.13	18.67	17.54
Parents' education			
No education (Ref)	32.08	32.79	31.31
Middle school or below	51.82	51.08	52.63
High school or above	16.1	16.13	16.06

Table 2: OLS regression of covariates on gender role attitudes, CGSS, 2010.

Variables	M1	M2	M3	M4
<i>Cohort (Ref = founding cohort)</i>				
Cultural Revolution	-0.16 (0.09)	-0.22 (0.13)	-0.16 (0.09)	-0.15 (0.09)
Post-70s	0.19 (0.11)	-0.10 (0.15)	0.21 * (0.11)	0.22 * (0.10)
Post-80s	0.34 ** (0.13)	-0.19 (0.17)	0.37 ** (0.13)	0.36 ** (0.13)
Post-85s	0.93 *** (0.16)	-0.15 (0.21)	0.87 *** (0.16)	0.96 *** (0.16)
Gender (Ref = male)	0.22 *** (0.06)	-0.26 (0.14)	1.69 *** (0.19)	-0.39 *** (0.08)
<i>Interaction term</i>				
Female*Cultural Revolution		0.14 (0.18)		
Female*Post-70s		0.58 ** (0.20)		
Female*Post-80s		1.03 *** (0.23)		
Female*Post-85s		1.88 *** (0.24)		
Marital Status (Ref = single)	0.16 (0.14)	0.01 (0.14)	0.81 *** (0.16)	0.20 (0.14)
<i>Interaction term</i>				
Female*Marital Status			-1.65 *** (0.21)	
<i>Education (Ref = less than high school)</i>				
High school	1.21 *** (0.10)	1.20 *** (0.10)	1.19 *** (0.10)	0.45 *** (0.13)
Some college	1.63 *** (0.11)	1.61 *** (0.11)	1.60 *** (0.11)	0.81 *** (0.14)
>= College	1.74 *** (0.14)	1.69 *** (0.14)	1.64 *** (0.14)	0.91 *** (0.18)
<i>Interaction term</i>				
Female*High school				1.54 *** (0.19)
Female*Some college				1.65 *** (0.18)
Female*College				1.80 *** (0.24)
Ethnicity	0.00	0.01	-0.01	0.01

	(0.11)		(0.11)		(0.11)		(0.11)
Hukou	-0.57 ***		-0.58 ***		-0.58 ***		-0.56 ***
	(0.08)		(0.08)		(0.08)		(0.08)
Father's party membership	0.12		0.14		0.14		0.12
	(0.09)		(0.09)		(0.09)		(0.09)
Parents' education (Ref = no education)							
<= Middle School	0.55 ***		0.55 ***		0.55 ***		0.53 ***
	(0.08)		(0.08)		(0.08)		(0.08)
>= High school	0.59 ***		0.59 ***		0.59 ***		0.51 ***
	(0.12)		(0.12)		(0.12)		(0.12)

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table 3: Odds ratio of attitudes regarding household labor division, CGSS, 2010.

Variables	M5	M6	M7	M8
<i>Cohort</i>				
Cultural revolution	1.00 (0.05)	0.88 (0.07)	1.01 (0.05)	1.01 (0.05)
Post-70s	1.01 (0.06)	0.89 (0.09)	1.02 (0.06)	1.02 (0.06)
Post-80s	0.93 (0.07)	0.70 (0.10)	*** 0.94 (0.07)	0.93 (0.07)
Post-85s	1.08 (0.09)	0.72 (0.12)	** 1.07 (0.09)	1.09 (0.09)
Female	1.44 *** (0.04)	1.07 (0.08)	2.09 *** (0.11)	1.25 *** (0.05)
<i>Interaction term</i>				
Female*Cultural revolution		1.32 ** (0.10)		
Female*Post-70s		1.30 * (0.12)		
Female*Post-80s		1.73 *** (0.14)		
Female*Post-85s		2.07 *** (0.14)		
Marital status	1.13 (0.08)	1.08 (0.08)	1.33 ** (0.09)	1.14 (0.08)
<i>Interaction term</i>				
Female*Marital status			0.66 *** (0.12)	
<i>Education</i>				
High school	1.02 (0.06)	1.02 (0.06)	1.01 (0.06)	0.87 + (0.08)
Some college	1.15 * (0.06)	1.14 * (0.06)	1.14 * (0.06)	0.95 (0.08)
>= College	1.05 (0.08)	1.04 (0.08)	1.03 (0.08)	0.86 (0.10)
<i>Interaction term</i>				
Female*High school				1.37 ** (0.11)
Female*Some college				1.48 *** (0.11)
Female*College				1.57 ** (0.14)
Ethnicity	0.90 (0.06)	0.90 (0.06)	0.90 (0.06)	0.90 (0.06)

Hukou	0.90 *	0.90 *	0.90 *	0.90 *
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Father's party membership	1.03	1.03	1.03	1.03
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Parents' education				
<= Middle school	1.01	1.01	1.01	1.00
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
>= High school	1.05	1.05	1.05	1.03
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Figure 1. OLS regression of interaction between gender and cohort on gender role attitudes.

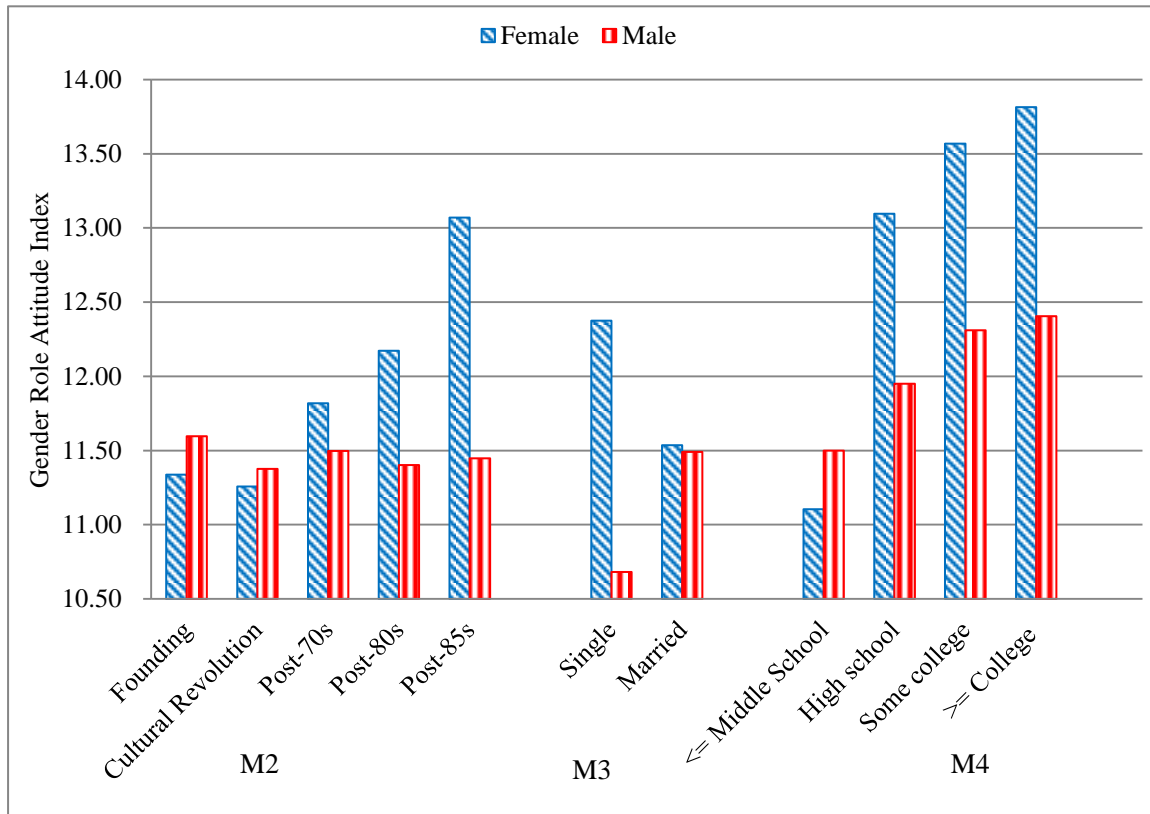


Figure 2. Odds ratio of interaction between gender and cohort on gender role attitudes.

