
EXTENDED ABSTRACT

**Do Ideologies Really Affect
Fertility Intentions and Behavior?
A Cohort Perspective (1979-2004)**

Jennifer Buher-Kane

Department of Sociology
Population Research Institute
Pennsylvania State University
University Park PA 16802

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Abstract

Current discourse on low fertility regimes examines several explanations. One particular theory posits that ideational shifts have exerted a downward pressure on fertility rates. Using the NLSY79, this paper explores the influences of several ideational values (traditionalism, religiosity, job satisfaction, and hours worked) on the fertility intentions and behavior of a single cohort over time (1979-2004). Findings lend support to this hypothesis in several ways. While traditionalism and religiosity exert upward pressure on fertility behavior (which is especially strong in adolescence and early adulthood), job satisfaction and hours worked exhibit the inverse (which is strongest in mid-life). All but religiosity persist in their influence on fertility throughout the reproductive years, which emphasizes their continued importance over time. In addition, ideologies exert an independent influence on fertility behavior throughout the life course. That is, fertility intentions do not fully mediate the relationship between ideologies and fertility behavior.

Background/Introduction

Many researchers believe that the recent trend towards low fertility rates among several industrialized countries signifies an entry into a second demographic transition. Lesthaeghe and Neidert (2006) explored this topic in more depth and concluded that, in many respects, the US is following the same demographic trend as many European countries. In light of this assessment, it is interesting to consider why individuals in the US are *continuing* to have fewer children. Over the last century the total fertility rate in the US fell from 3.5 births per woman in the early 1900's to 1.7 during the mid-1970's (Kent and Mather 2002), and then steadily rose to 2.05 births per woman in 2004 (Martin et al. 2006). This most recent figure indicates a total fertility rate which is just slightly below replacement level.

On a larger level, this change has been accompanied by many other shifts within the family system since the 1970's including decreasing marriage rates, increasing cohabitation rates, increasing non-marital childbearing rates (Rindfuss and Brewster 1996). In addition, changes at the societal level are also apparent including increased individualism, secularization, egalitarianism, and rational choice concerning birth control. Preston (1987) explored how value systems (at the group-level) influence individual-level fertility. He defined a value system as "the means by which societies 'internalize the externalities' of social acts" (1988: 177). Thus, group values and individual behavior influence one another in a cyclical pattern. Taken together, these group-level forces are changing the way individuals consider having children and influence the number of children they are willing to have.

The foundation underlying these broad-brushed factors is a larger transformation. Lesthaeghe (1983) argued that this represents an ideational shift that has influenced fertility in a downward direction. He outlined three phases that comprise an ideational shift in Western values, while underlying each of these phases is an overall tendency towards increased individualism. The third phase (post-World War II) denotes a theme of particular interest to fertility, namely: "an even greater preoccupation with the welfare or self-fulfillment of individuals" (429). Thus, fertility changes are not just the result of cost/benefit analyses but rather a more complex mechanism. Lesthaeghe and Surkyn (1988) further argued that both economic and ideational factors (such as secularization

and individuation) influence cohort-specific fertility in unique ways, and that a combined approach to studying variation in fertility behavior can be productive. Cleland and Wilson (1987) further support the importance of ideologies. After reviewing several economic and demand theories of fertility, they concluded that “the probable importance of ideational rather than structural change is our most significant conclusion” (28). What is surprising is the lack of empirical exploration into the nature of ideational influences on fertility.

Project Description

Overall, it is clear that the last few decades represent an interesting and important period in US history. From this foundation, this paper explores the influence of an ideational shift on fertility intentions and behavior in the US between 1979 and 2004. More specifically, I focus on four ideological values that have been shown to influence fertility intentions: religiosity, traditional beliefs towards women’s role in the home, job satisfaction and hours worked (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 1988, Caldwell and Schindlmayr 2003, Brewster and Rindfuss 2000, Oppenheimer 1994, McDonald 2000, Myers and Booth 2002). Typically, religiosity and traditional beliefs drive fertility upward while job satisfaction and hours work push fertility downward. However, it is unclear if these values act on fertility in different ways throughout the life course. For example, do traditional beliefs show a consistent positive influence on fertility over time or is its effect limited to a certain life stage? Do fertility intentions fully mediate the direct relationship of values on fertility behavior? By exploring these relationships, this paper contributes to this literature in a unique way. No known study has tested these relationships within the context of the US, nor has observed the ways in which ideologies vary in their contribution to cohort-specific fertility throughout the reproductive years.

Data/Methods

This paper utilizes data from multiple waves of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979 cohort), a longitudinal survey of over 12,000 male and female participants collected annually from 1979 to 1994 and biennially from 1996 to the present. The analysis utilizes data on this subgroup from five years: 1979 (participants were 14-22 years old), 1982 (participants were 17-25), 1990 (participants were 25-33), 1996 (participants were 31-39), and 2004 (participants were 39-47). After selecting respondents who completed a survey in each of these years of interest, the sample size was 7,507 individuals. Due to the age of respondents at the time of the last interview, the fertility histories contained within this time period are arguably close to complete. That is, many of the individuals have most likely experienced their total lifetime fertility. In the current context of delayed childbearing in the US, such information is essential in order to make statements about the relationship between fertility intentions and behavior.

Figure 1 represents a conceptual diagram that describes the nature of the proposed relationships. This model is estimated separately at each survey year and then together using structural equation modeling (SEM) in Mplus, which uses maximum likelihood estimation to identify parameters for each relationship within a path diagram. Mplus provides superior estimation for structural equation models where the dependent variable has a narrow range (such as fertility behavior, which often takes on values of 0, 1 or 2). Lastly, control variables are used *at each time point* to isolate the effect of the explanatory variables on fertility behavior net of educational level, residence in rural vs.

urban area, union status (marital or cohabiting vs. no union), household income, and birth control use.

Religiosity

In multiple survey years, participants were asked about the frequency with which they attended religious services on a scale of 1 to 6 (1=not at all, 6=more than once a week). High scores therefore reflect high levels of religiosity.

Traditional Beliefs

A set of measures regarding attitudes about women's role in the home and in the workplace are compiled into a scale representing traditional beliefs. Each question was rated on a 4-item scale (1=strongly agree, 4=strongly disagree). The questions were recoded so that high scores reflect high levels of traditional beliefs about women's roles.

Job Satisfaction

Participants were asked about their "global job satisfaction" in every survey year, and specific dimensions of their job satisfaction in some years. The first question asked participants, "How do you feel about your job?" and included 4 responses (1=like it very much, 4=dislike it very much). The second set of questions included six detailed aspects of their job (i.e., how much the job challenged them, how comfortable they felt in their work environment, etc.) Scales of these six questions were created according to guidelines set forth by the NLSY79 Users Guide (www.nlsinfo.org). All questions were recoded so high scores reflect high levels of job satisfaction.

Hours Worked

Participants were asked to estimate how many hours they worked in the year prior to the survey. This question was recoded according to guidelines set forth by the NLSY79 Users Guide (www.nlsinfo.org).

Fertility Intentions and Behavior

In every survey year, participants were asked to identify how many more children they expect to have. Since this number does not include the number of children the participant already has, it is used as a measure of current fertility intentions within each survey year. Fertility behavior is measured by the number of biological children reported by the respondent at the time of each interview. Both variables (intentions and behavior) are important to consider since previous research has shown that while they are correlated, they are not always perfectly associated with one another. In addition, incomplete pregnancies will not be considered because these often include pregnancies terminated by abortions which are typically underreported and often contain a unique set of contextual constraints. Excluding incomplete pregnancies simplifies the analysis so I can focus on the most reliable data.

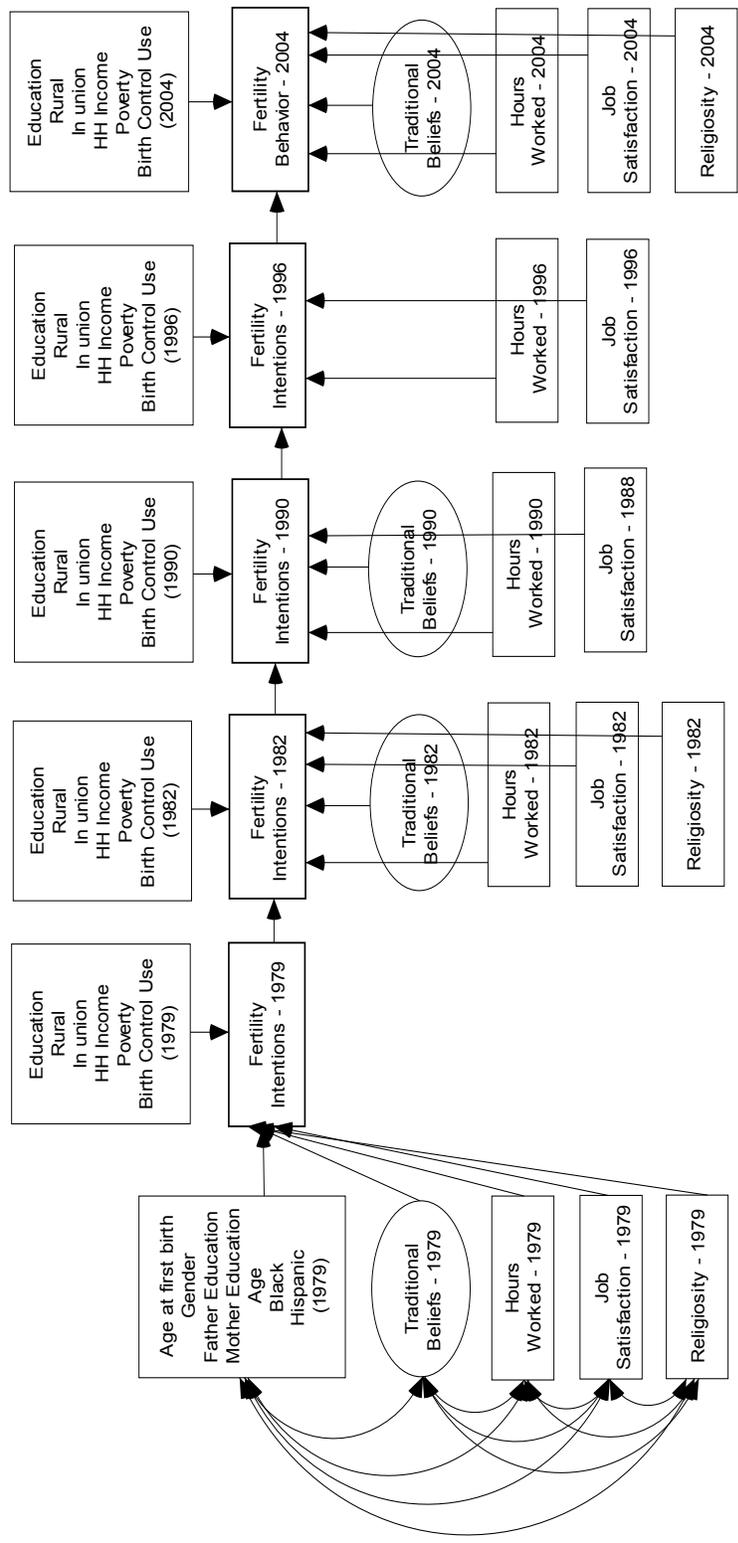
Preliminary Findings

The preliminary analysis shows that ideational values have distinct and interesting contributions to fertility intentions and behavior over time. Overall, each influences fertility behavior in the expected direction: high levels of religiosity and traditionalism are associated with higher fertility intentions and behavior, while high levels of job satisfaction and hours worked are negatively related to fertility. In addition, each influences fertility behavior differently across the life course. For example, religiosity influences fertility most strongly throughout adolescence, while traditional beliefs do not begin to exert a strong pressure until late-adolescence and show a substantial impact

through emerging adulthood. Job-related values such as job satisfaction and hours worked begin to strongly influence fertility behavior in the late stages of emerging adulthood and continue through early adulthood. By mid-life, each weakens in magnitude but remains significant. Interestingly, these preliminary results suggest that ideational factors *do in fact* influence fertility but that the influence of any one does not remain consistent in magnitude across the life course. Rather, different values matter at different stages in the life course.

More importantly however, traditionalism, job satisfaction and hours work each *persist* in their influence on fertility behavior across the life course. This lends strong support to ideational theory in that values not only influence fertility, but they continue to remain important over time as the total fertility of each individual unfolds throughout the life course. Lastly, fertility intentions do not mediate their influence on fertility behavior at any point in the life course. This suggests that each exerts an *independent* influence on fertility behavior. Overall, these results lend strong support to ideational theories of fertility. Traditionalism and job-related values not only directly impact fertility behavior at any one point in the life course – they continue to do so throughout the reproductive years.

Figure 1.
 The Impact of Ideational Values on Fertility Intentions and Behavior
 Over the Life Course: A Cohort Perspective (1979 - 2004)
 J. Buher-Kane, September 2007



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