

Evidence for Changing Gender-Role Attitudes in Slovenia in Comparison to the United States¹

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Abstract

A number of academic and popular writers have suggested that the changes in Eastern and Central Europe from a socialist or communist economy to a market-based economy, and the emergence of several independent countries in this region of the world have led to decreases in the largely egalitarian attitudes about gender found previously. These ideas were tested by comparing gender-role attitudes in 1991 with those in 1993, using samples of college students from Slovenia (n=371) and the United States (n=326). Results indicate that changes in college students in Slovenia are more complex than previously believed. Data show a significant increase in women's egalitarian ideas in Slovenia. Religion was found to predict traditionality, as expected.

1 Gender-role attitudes in a changing Slovenia

This research is concerned with changing attitudes about appropriate gender roles (gender-role attitudes) in Eastern Europe. Central and Eastern Europe are now in a state of rapid social and economic change. It appears that people are questioning

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values and attitudes associated with the communist governments that existed until recently. Under Soviet-inspired communism, it was assumed that all people, men and women, were equal under the law. Both women and men were expected to work outside the home. Thus, there was evidence for a widespread belief in the equality of women and men. But, in spite of this, women were not equal in the labor force or in other ways in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This may suggest that underlying attitudes about gender roles did not fully match the "official" view of complete equality for the sexes. Now, with the removal of the communist economic system and the associated values, it has been widely argued that many may be rejecting previously held beliefs in gender equality (Corrin, 1992; Funk and Mueller, 1993). However, this supposition has not yet been tested empirically.

This study assesses recent changes in beliefs about the roles of women and men in samples of college students from Slovenia, one of the countries undergoing a transition from a communist to a market economy. Comparable data was also collected from the United States. A cross-sectional longitudinal design was used. Attitudes were assessed in 1991 and again in 1993 to determine if there have been changes in gender-role attitudes large enough to be evident even in this short two year period.

Slovenia. Slovenia is one of the new countries formed with the dissolution of Yugoslavia. It is located between Italy, Austria, and Hungary, and borders on Croatia, another of the countries of the former Yugoslavia. It is a small country, with a highly homogeneous population. It has been completely independent of the rest of the former Yugoslavia since mid-1991 and is not involved in the war that has affected the other parts of the disintegrating Yugoslavia. Slovenia is undergoing a transition from a socialist system to a market economy and is now a democracy.

Like other (formerly) communist countries (Funk and Mueller, 1993), Slovenia has full legal equality for men and women. This is guaranteed in the new constitution that was created when Slovenia became independent (Commission for Women's Politics, Republic of Slovenia, 1992). The equality of the sexes is theoretically seen in both the workplace and in the family. Slovenia has had very high rates of female employment since the second world war. For example, in 1991, 47% of the labor force was female (Office of Statistics, Republic of Slovenia, 1992).

In Slovenia, the communist value system argued that female and male roles should be equal, with both sexes working outside the home as well as within the home (Ferligoj, Mežnarić, and Ule, 1980; Ferligoj, Ule, and Renner, 1991). Research supports that such ideas were widely held, at least among students. One of the first empirical studies of gender-role attitudes in the new country of Slovenia was done by Morinaga, Frieze, and Ferligoj (1993). Data were collected from samples of college students at the end of 1991 at a large urban university in

the United States as well as from students in Slovenia and Japan. Results indicated that Slovenian students did indeed have nontraditional attitudes about gender roles as compared to Japan. Although the Slovenian students were also less traditional than U.S. college students, this difference was not statistically significant.

There is evidence, though, that this theoretical equality in Slovenia has not always been true in practice. This may be partially explained by the continued adherence to ideas about the roles of women and men associated with Catholicism. Before World War II, the Catholic Church was quite strong in Slovenia, as it was in most other parts of Central and Eastern Europe. With the development of the Yugoslav state, incorporating Slovenia, Catholicism was seen as anti-socialist and active Church membership declined. But, some people continued to hold strong religious beliefs. It is believed that such beliefs are associated with more traditional (less egalitarian) attitudes about the appropriate roles of men and women (Hauser, Heyns, and Mansbridge, 1993; Jogan, 1993).

Evidence for incomplete acceptance of socialist ideals of gender equality can be seen in the types of jobs that women hold. Women were and are employed mostly in low-paying, labor-intensive industries such as textiles, footwear, and tobacco processing and in the service professions. Few women hold high status positions, even in these female dominated areas. At the same time, women did much of the work within the household (Ferligoj, Mežnarić, and Ule, 1980; Ferligoj, Ule, and Renner, 1991). This has resulted in many women feeling overworked and withdrawing from the political arena (Ferligoj et al., 1991). Writing as a journalist, Drakulić (1991) very vividly describes the difficulties of life for women throughout Eastern and Central Europe before the rejection of communism and still afterwards.

And, now, there appear to be even more pressures to enhance the position of men relative to women:

Slovenia has declared itself as having sexual equality. In many fields, legislation has been formulated which would be worth copying. But this is not enough for the prevention of marginalisation and discrimination of women, especially not in a period of economic and social crisis. Long-term crises effect specific groups of inhabitants, among which we will always find the youth, children and women. Their reaction is not usually explosive, with social revolt and protest at the worsening standard of living but rather implosive, with elements of self-destruction...the great changes in Slovenia in the field of employment with the introduction of the labour market, as well as the tendency to reinforce the traditional sexual division of work are sharpening. The hope for changes in the situation of women...does not look too promising for the time being. (Commission for Women's Politics, 1992, page 11).

The pressures for changes in life styles and in attitudes about the roles of women and men appear to be the result of two major factors. First, there has been a gradual transition from a state controlled communist economy to a market economy. This transition is still occurring and its full impact will not be seen for many years. But, one immediate effect has been that companies that are not profitable will no longer be indefinitely supported by the state. In many cases, this has led to some workers being laid off in order to reduce costs. Second, when Slovenia declared its independence, it lost its economic ties with the other parts of the former Yugoslavia, its main trading partners. Companies were forced to find new markets and many have gone bankrupt and have been forced to fire all their workers. The growing parts of the economy are small private businesses (Ministry of Small Enterprises, 1993). Many of them appear to be reluctant to hire women, claiming their family obligations prevent them from working as hard as men. Evidence for this is seen comparing the 47% of the general labor force that is female with the employee data for small enterprises. A recent study reported that only 37% of the workers in a sample of businesses in Slovenia with 1 to 50 employees were women (Prašnikar, 1994).

With all these transitions, we would also expect to find more acceptance of ideas associated with the West and with capitalism. And, those who are most supportive of these Western economic beliefs may also be less egalitarian (e.g., Funk and Mueller, 1993).

All this suggests that gender-role attitudes may be rapidly changing in Slovenia. Such changes should be most strongly seen in the young (e.g., Wilkie, 1993), with college students being an ideal sample for investigating such changes. In order to test this possibility, questions about gender-role attitudes were again asked of Slovenian college students in 1993, replicating an earlier study done in 1991 and allowing for a two-year comparison. It is predicted that even in the short time frame from 1991 to 1993, Slovenian students will now be more conservative in gender-role attitudes.

1.1 Beliefs about gender-role attitudes in the United States

To provide a basis for comparison, data from Slovenian students was compared to data from students in the United States. Cross-cultural comparisons of attitudes toward women's roles have shown significant differences among cultures (e.g., Gibbons, Stiles, and Shkodriani, 1991; Seginer, Karayanni, and Mar'i, 1990; Suzuki, 1991). In comparison to many other countries, there is relatively strong support for gender equality in the United States. As mentioned earlier, the previous research conducted in 1991 showed no significant differences in the gender-role attitudes between the United States and Slovenia, although the Slovenians were nonsignificantly less traditional. Although the popular media

suggests that people in the United States are developing more conservative attitudes about gender-roles, we did not anticipate that this change would be visible over the two year time period of this research. Thus, we expected that Slovenian students will be even closer to the United States students in 1993, with the Slovenians becoming more conservative.

We are also predicting overall gender effects for gender-role attitudes. Research has typically shown that women are more liberal about gender-role attitudes than men in the United States (e.g., Jones and McNamara, 1991; King and King, 1990; Mason and Lu, 1988; Powell and Yanico, 1991; Wilkie, 1993) as well as in other countries (e.g., Gibbons et al., 1991; Seginer, et al., 1990). Men were found to be more conservative than women in all three countries sampled in 1991 by Morinaga, Frieze and Ferligoj.

1.2 Assessing gender-role attitudes

In measuring gender-role attitudes, we relied on two scales—one was the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Spence and Helmreich, 1972). This is one of the most widely used of all gender-role attitude scales (Beere, 1990). A subset of items was selected that were believed to be relevant in a cross-cultural context. After reviewing the items in this scale, we felt that they placed a strong emphasis on issues relating to legal rights for women. We also wanted to assess changes in beliefs about family issues and male-female interactions. These are the types of beliefs most referenced in theoretical papers about changes in gender-role beliefs in Central and Eastern Europe (Funk and Mueller, 1993). To study these types of gender-role attitudes, we employed the Macho scale (Villemez and Touhey, 1977). Other research has validated the Macho scale has been found to distinguish individuals with less traditional attitudes regarding gender roles from those who hold more conservative attitudes (Gayton, Sawyer, Baird, and Ozmon, 1982). Thus, both scales were used in this research.

1.3 Summary of design and hypotheses

To review, the design was a three factor design, using gender, country, and time as the three independent variables. We predicted main effects for gender and time, and an interaction for country by time resulting from larger changes over time for Slovenia than for the United States. First, an overall score for all the gender-role items combined was used. Next, there was an analysis of the effects of individual items. In addition, we tested the role of religion as a predictor of gender-role attitude traditionality (measured as the strength of religious service attendance). This was expected to be positively related to traditionality.

2 Method

Data was collected in 1991 and again in 1993. Surveys for each country varied slightly, but both included a series of items assessing career motivation and selected items from the Spence and Helmreich Attitudes Toward Women Scale and the Macho Scale (Villemez and Touhey, 1977). Items were translated by native speakers from English into Slovenian. A second person translated the surveys back to English to check the translations.

2.1 Slovenia study participants

The 1991 sample from Slovenia included 65 men and 92 women social science students from the largest university in Slovenia. Data was collected in late October and November of 1991. This was well after the brief war that developed in the summer of 1991 when Slovenia declared its independence from Yugoslavia. Students between the ages of 20 and 22 were anonymously interviewed through the use of computers.

The 1993 data was collected using the same procedures and during the same part of the year as the 1991 data. The sample consisted of 118 women and 96 men from the same university as used in 1991. About 43% of the students were 20, 27% were 21 or 22, 12% were older and 19% were younger. Nearly all were Slovenians.

2.2 United States study participants

The 1991 sample from the United States included 156 college students (108 women and 48 men) from a large urban university in Pennsylvania. Nearly 90% were between the ages of 18 and 22 and 85% were white. Twelve percent were black and the rest were of other races. Most were single (94%).

Students participated in the study as partial fulfillment of a research requirement for an introductory psychology course. Surveys were administered to groups of students and were done anonymously.

In 1993, data was collected again from the same University, using the same sample and procedures. The sample consisted of 92 women and 79 men. For this sample, 81% were between the ages of 18 and 20 and 11% were from 21 to 22. Six percent were older and 1% were younger. Race information was not collected, but there is no reason to believe that the racial composition had changed between 1991 and 1993.

2.3 Measures of gender-role attitudes

Attitudes Toward Women Scale. A subset of items were selected from the Spence and Helmreich Attitudes Toward Women Scale (1972). Sixteen items were selected that were believed to be relevant for other cultural contexts. Some of the items were reversed in scoring. These are marked with a "*". Items were scores so that a higher score was more traditional. Individual items used were: *Vocational and professional schools should admit the best qualified students, independent of sex; *Both husband and wife should be allowed the same grounds for divorce; Telling dirty jokes should be mostly a masculine prerogative; *Husbands and wives should be equal partners in planning the family budget; *Under modern economic conditions with women being active outside the home, men should share in household tasks such as washing dishes and doing the laundry; *There should be a strict merit system in job appointment and promotion without regard to sex; The initiative in dating should come from the man; *A woman should be as free as a man to propose marriage; *Parental authority and responsibility for discipline of the children should be equally divided between husband and wife; Women should worry less about their rights and more about become good wives and mothers; A woman should not expect to go to exactly the same places or to have quite the same freedom of action as a man; Sons in a family should be given more encouragement to go to college than daughters; It is ridiculous for a woman to drive a truck and for a man to darn socks; It is childish for a woman to assert herself by retaining her maiden name after marriage; It is only fair that male workers should receive more pay than women, even for identical work; In general, the father should have greater authority than the mother in bringing up the children; There are some professions and types of businesses that are more suitable for men than women; The intellectual leadership of a community should be largely in the hands of men; The husband has in general no obligation to inform his wife of his financial plans; *The intellectual equality of women with men is perfectly obvious; *If both the husband and wife agree, there is no reason why both should not have extramarital affairs if they want to.

Macho Scale. Items listed below were also selected from the Macho scale: *A man is never justified in hitting his wife; Parents should maintain stricter control over their daughters than their sons; For the most part, it is better to be a man than to be a woman; *It is perfectly normal for a woman not to want to have children; I would be very uncomfortable in a situation where the woman worked and the man stayed home to take care of the house and children; *It would be a good idea to elect a woman as the President (of the United States); I would not want to be in a couple where the man was considerably shorter than the woman; *A woman is entitled to an abortion for reasons of personal choice; A wife shouldn't contradict her husband in public; *A wife who becomes a mother has no more reason to give up her career than a husband who becomes a father; It is more

important for a man to be successful in his career than it is for a woman; There are some jobs that women simply shouldn't have; I would be more comfortable with a male boss than with a female boss; Women who try to be independent of their families are just hurting themselves; *A wife who sacrifices her family to a career is no more to blame than a husband who does the same thing; A competitive woman is harder to get along with than a competitive man; *The decision about an abortion should be made by a woman, not her husband;

These items were answered on a 1 to 5 scale, scored so that 1 was more liberal and 5 was more traditional. The overall alpha reliability coefficient for the combined scale, using both sets of items, was .92. Additionally, individual alphas were computed for each time by country group and all were at least .89.

3 Results

3.1 Sample differences from 1991 to 1993?

A series of ANOVAs (Time by Country by Gender) was done to determine if the samples differed between 1991 and 1993. Looking first at age, the Slovene sample was older than the U.S. sample [$F(1,689)=47.77, p<.001$] and women were overall younger than men [$F=19.49, p<.001$]. Additionally, a time by country interaction [$F=21.42, p<.001$] indicated that the Slovenian students showed a larger difference in age over time than the U.S. students. The existence of these age differences led to our controlling for age in later analyses.

An additional demographic indicator was level of mother's education. Here, a significant main effect for time [$F(1,688)$] indicated that mothers for the 1993 sample were more educated than for 1991. This difference again led to our controlling for this effect in later analyses.

We also asked the students how often they attended religious services. It was found, not surprisingly, that U.S. students attended services more often on the average [$F(1,688)=100.70, p<.001$] and women attended more often than men [$F=10.79, p<.02$]. In addition, a gender by time interaction [$F=15.86, p<.001$] indicated that the more frequent attendance of women was true only for 1991. Women reported less attendance overall in 1993 while men reported more, making their means equal in 1993. The effects of religious service attendance were analyzed in more detail in a later analysis. It was also found that 47% of the Slovenian students reported being raised as Catholics and 51% reported having no special religion as a child. Now, the Slovenian students were 38% Catholic and 56% reported no special religion. For the United States, 52% were raised as Catholics, 26% in some other Christian religion, and 11% with no special religion. Currently, the U.S. sample was 43% Catholic, 20% some other form of

Christianity, and 20% with no special religion. There was no difference in the religious affiliations between 1991 and 1993.

3.2 Test of overall changes in gender-role attitudes

For the initial test of the basic hypotheses, an overall score was created, measuring the traditionality of gender-role attitudes. This was done by averaging the score on each of the individual items, creating a value that ranged from 5-very conservative to 1-very liberal. A 2 X 2 X 2 ANOVA was done with this score as the dependent variable. Results indicated highly significant main effects for country [$F(1,689)=17.74$, $p < .001$] and gender [$F(1,689)=138.43$, $p < .001$], but no main effect for time [$F(1,689)=1.20$, $p < .30$]. Results are shown in Table 1. Inspection of the means indicated that as predicted women were more egalitarian than men. In addition, the Slovenian students were more egalitarian than the U.S. students.

Table 1: Degree of Gender-Role Attitude Traditionality

	<i>Slovenia</i>		<i>United States</i>	
	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
<i>1991</i>				
Average traditionality	2.01 ₁	2.29 ₂	2.08 ₁	2.42 _{2,6}
Standard deviations	(.42)	(.48)	(.38)	(.41)
Sample size	92	65	106	49
<i>1993</i>				
Average traditionality	1.87 ₃	2.31 ₂	2.01 ₁	2.53 ₆
Standard deviations	(.38)	(.54)	(.46)	(.51)
Sample size	118	96	92	79

Means with different subscripts are significantly different on the basis of Duncan post-hoc test, at $p < .05$.

In order to test for any confounding effects of level of mother's education and student age, this analysis was first redone using mother's education levels as a covariate. Results were not affected; although the F levels varied slightly, none of the levels of significance for any of the effects were changed. In order to assess the effects of age, it was decided to use this as a factor in the ANOVA design, since age had been measured as a categorical variable. This led to a 2 X 2 X 2 X 3 design. In order to have sufficient cell sizes, those under the age of 18 were combined with 18 to 20. The next category was 21-22. For the third age category, the original categories of 23-30 and over 30 were combined. Thus, there were three age categories, along with the two genders, times, and countries. Results were essentially unchanged from the original analysis (main effects for country

and gender and a gender by time interaction). But, in addition, there was a significant three way interaction for country by gender by age [$F(2,673)=4.33$, $p<.02$] which indicated that for the Slovenian sample, the older students were more traditional. For the U.S. sample, the oldest group of women (23 and over) were most traditional while this group of men were least traditional, making both genders equal in this group.

There was also one significant interaction for gender by time [$F(1,689)=5.78$, $p<.02$]. Analysis of this interaction showed that in the two year time period studied, Slovenian women became *more* egalitarian, but that there was no significant change in U.S. women or in either group of men. Post tests using the Duncan Range test indicated that U.S. males in 1993 were significantly more traditional than Slovenian men at both time periods. But, the change in Slovenian men from 1991 to 1993 was not statistically significant. For women, the Slovenian women in 1993 were more egalitarian than any of the other three groups of women. Thus, the change in Slovenian women to become more egalitarian from 1991 to 1993 was statistically significant. The predicted interaction of country by time was not significant.

3.3 Specific gender-role attitudes

We next looked at whether these patterns found for the combined gender-attitudes scores would be found equally for different types of items. This was tested with a MANOVA with gender, country, and time as the independent variables and the individual ATWS and Macho items as the dependent variables. As with the combined gender-role attitudes score, there were significant multivariate main effects for country [$F(39,645)=16.29$, $p<.001$] and gender [$F(39,645)=12.36$, $p<.001$]. There was also a main effect for time, accounted for by changes over time for three individual items [$F(39,645)=1.70$, $p<.01$]. In addition, the multivariate interactions for country by gender [$F(39,645)=3.21$, $p<.001$], and gender by time [$F(39,645)=1.56$, $p<.02$] were statistically significant, but the country by time and the three way interaction of time by gender by country were not significant.

Results of these multivariate analyses using all 49 separate items were quite complex and will not be discussed in detail here. (A detailed listing of the effects for particular items is available from the first author). Some noteworthy effects included the fact that although overall, women were more egalitarian than men on nearly every item, there were no significant differences for "I would not want to be in a couple where the man was considerably shorter than the woman."; "Vocational and professional schools should admit the best qualified students, independent of sex."; and "Both husband and wife should be allowed the same grounds for divorce." Another category or exceptional item patterns was seen in

the overall country differences. In general, Slovenians were more egalitarian than U.S. students. There was a reversal of this (U.S. students more egalitarian) for the following items: "I would be very uncomfortable in a situation where the woman worked and the man stayed home to take care of the house and children"; "It is more important for a man to be successful in his career than it is for a women."; "Vocational and professional schools should admit the best qualified students, independent of sex."; "It is ridiculous for a woman to drive a truck and for a man to darn socks."; and "There are some professions and types of businesses that are more suitable for men than women." Finally, one item was notable for showing an increase overall toward more traditionalism across all groups: "A man is never justified in hitting his wife."

3.4 Predictors of gender-role attitude traditionality

A final analysis examined which variables best predicted gender-role traditionality. It was hypothesized that religion (measured as attendance at religious services) would be a significant predictor, along with gender and country. In order to examine this question, we first looked at the patterns of correlations between the gender-role attitude variable and attendance at religious services, age, and mother's educational level. Since the patterns of correlations were highly similar across each of the country by time by gender groups, it was decided to do a combined regression analysis, using attendance at religious services, mother's educational level, age, country, and gender as the independent variables to predict the gender-role attitude traditionality variable. The regression results shown in Table 2 indicate that higher traditionality (less egalitarianism) was most associated with being male and with attending religious services more frequently. Other significant predictors were being a U.S. student, and having a mother with less education. Age was not a significant predictor.

Table 2: Regression Analysis to Predict Gender-Role Traditionality

<u>Independent Variable</u>	<u>Beta</u>	<u>t-value</u>	<u>p-value</u>
Gender (Male=0, Female=1)	-.42	12.24	<.001
Attend Religious Services	.18	4.79	<.001
Country (Slovenia=0; U.S.=1)	.08	2.17	<.04
Mother's Education Level	-.07	2.07	<.04
Age	-.01	.38	NS

Note: Multiple $r = .46$, Equation $F(5,690)=37.28$, $p < .001$

4 Discussion

This study was intended as a test of widely publicized ideas (Corrin, 1992; Funk and Mueller, 1993) about the impact of economic and political changes on gender-role attitudes in the formerly communist countries of Eastern and Central Europe. Authors of many papers in these books argue that people are becoming more traditional in terms of gender-role beliefs. Thus, our major finding of Slovenian women becoming *less* traditional was surprising to us. In attempting to understand this reversal of the accepted "wisdom" in this area, we speculated that perhaps the concerns about such changes have been widely publicized, and the women are reacting to them by feeling threatened and reacting against this possibility? In Slovenia, during the writing of the constitution for this new country, an attempt was made to insert a clause making abortions illegal. This generated a great deal of protest among women, and perhaps made their situation quite salient to them.

It is impossible to know on the basis of this research if the trend toward more egalitarianism in Slovenian women is an early reaction to possible future changes and will reverse itself in the years to come. More research in the coming years is needed to determine this.

Men were more traditional about attitudes toward women's roles than women across both countries. This finding supports previous research (e.g., Gibbons et al., 1991; Seginer et al., 1990). We also note that although the differences are not statistically significant, there was a trend for men in both countries to become more traditional in this two year time period. Again, more research is needed to determine if this trend will continue and if the genders will increasingly diverge in their gender-role attitudes.

It was interesting to note that the means for Slovenians indicated more egalitarianism for both men and women compared to the United States. Perhaps this is part of their earlier communist socialization? Thus, there is little evidence that such values are changing toward more traditional ones.

The use of college student samples does limit the generalizability of our findings (e.g., Frieze et al., 1991) and suggests the need for additional research on gender-role attitudes in older samples. In future research, we would also like to measure potential changes in gender-role attitudes using a wider range of items. For example, O'Neill, Egan, Owen, and Murray (1993) have developed a scale that assesses emotional aspects of gender-role beliefs. Such a measure may be more sensitive to subtle changes than the measures we used.

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