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Author

Eira Nunes, C, Lamprianidou, EA, Zimmer-Gembeck, MJ, Van Petegem, S

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The relations between parents' gender equality values and (co)parenting: Examining actor-partner effects in an Australian community sample.

Cindy Eira Nunes¹, Elli-Anastasia Lamprianidou¹, Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck², & Stijn Van Petegem^{1,3}

¹Research Center for Developmental, Family, and Human Systems Psychology (DEFASY),
Université libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium

²School of Applied Psychology and Griffith Centre for Mental Health, Griffith University,
Southport, QLD, Australia

³F.R.S.-FNRS Research Associate, Brussels, Belgium

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Corresponding author: Cindy Eira Nunes, Service de Psychologie du Développement et de la Famille, Université libre de Bruxelles, Av Franklin Roosevelt 50, CP122, 1050 Bruxelles, phone : +32 2 650 32 91, cindy.eira.nunes@ulb.be

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Abstract

In most Western societies, parents' gender roles and values have shifted significantly over the past decades. However, it is not yet clear whether parents' gender-related values impact both their own and their partners' coparenting and parenting practices. This study examined the relations between parents' gender equality values, their coparenting, and parental warmth and hostility. Drawing 6745 families from an ongoing Australian panel study, we used actor-partner interdependence modeling to estimate the associations between mothers' and fathers' equality values and their (co)parenting. Results revealed a significant positive partner effect of mothers' gender equality values on fathers' warmth and coparenting, but no significant actor effects for mothers' or fathers' values. We also found that mothers' work status moderated the relationship between parents' values and coparenting. In conclusion, these findings suggest that it is important to consider mothers' gender values and its transactional influence on fathers' involvement for understanding contemporary parenting.

Keywords: Gender values; Parenting; Coparenting; Systemic relations

The Relations Between Parents' Gender Equality Values and (Co)Parenting: Examining Actor-Partner Effects In an Australian Community Sample.

In many present-day Western countries, we are observing important shifts in people's beliefs about the gendered division of different life spheres, where people increasingly value men's and women's shared responsibilities in the family and professional domain (Bianchi et al., 2000). Gender equality has become a main objective for policy-making as it is for example the 5th goal on the 2030 agenda of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. At the same time, significant progress is still needed to attain the objective of achieving gender equality (United Nations, 2022). In the context of parenthood specifically, mothers are often still considered as the primary caregiver, which is often also reflected in policies. In Australia, for instance, until recently, mothers of newborn children were entitled to 12 weeks of paid parental leave and an additional 30 days of flexible paid parental leave, whereas the other parental figure was entitled to only two weeks of paid parental leave. Although changes have occurred in mid-2023 and some workplaces provide additional leave for one or both parents, this historical system implicitly maintains the increasingly outdated gendered view of mothers as the natural principal caregivers. Furthermore, surveys have shown that most fathers in Australia do not take any paternity leave (Churchill & Craig, 2022). This suggests a certain paradox in the societal discourse about gender equality, especially in the family realm. It appears therefore essential to understand whether parents' adherence to gender equality values are related to their parenting and coparenting practices in the family realm. Indeed, parents' adherence to gender-egalitarian values and beliefs may be related to the way in which they coordinate parental responsibilities and raise their children, hence potentially affecting their child's development. Drawing data from an Australian representative longitudinal study of children and their parents, the aim of this study was to shed light on the way in which parents' gender values and their parenting and coparenting practices are interrelated. Thereby, focusing on heterosexual couples, we made use

of actor-partner interdependence modeling to consider the mutual dynamics between mothers' and fathers' gender equality values and their (co)parenting practices.

Gender Values: Between Equality and Disparity

Gender values include shared beliefs that men and women should be responsible for certain tasks and should behave in a definite manner (Meeussen et al., 2020). Traditional gender norms present women as more communal whereas men are expected to be more agentic (Meeussen et al., 2020). By extension, within the family domain, these traditional norms portray mothers as the primary caregivers, responsible for household chores and child-rearing, while fathers are portrayed as the primary income providers, mainly engaging in professional life (Huffman et al., 2014). However, due to numerous reasons, from changes in women's political rights to their increasing contribution to the labor force, Western societies have undergone several systemic changes in terms of gender relations (Perälä-Littunen, 2007). These changes are revealed in statistics that show, for example, that it is now more common for women and men to share the responsibilities of paid work and household labor (e.g., Bianchi et al., 2000).

Changes in gender roles and values have led to a shift from a traditional approach of gender relations to a more egalitarian one. An egalitarian approach to gender relations implies that men and women should achieve equity in society—in both private and public spheres (Daniel et al., 2016; Perälä-Littunen, 2007). In Western countries, this valorization of gender equality is reflected in a greater adherence to egalitarian values (Buchler et al., 2017). Within the family context, this shift includes changes in family models, particularly regarding the models of fatherhood. Indeed, fatherhood is increasingly valued and seen as an important aspect of men's lives (Buchler et al., 2017), and at the same time we know that fathers also contribute in important ways to children's development and wellbeing (e.g., Pleck, 2010). As a consequence, fathers are expected to spend more time with their children (Schoppe-Sullivan & Altenburger, 2019), and men also report wanting to play an active role as fathers (e.g., Amato

& Fowler, 2002). More generally, surveys show that men tend to share more household and childcare tasks with women than in the past (Churchill & Craig, 2022; Garcia Roman & Cortina, 2016), and that parents who hold egalitarian values report a more symmetrical distribution of household tasks (Garcia Roman & Cortina, 2016; Huffman et al., 2014).

Nonetheless, one could also argue that gender equality within family-life can still be considered stagnant (Perälä-Littunen, 2007). Indeed, despite the changing division of paid and unpaid work between men and women, gender disparities continue to exist, and for example, domestic work and childcare are still mainly seen as women's responsibility (Sayer et al., 2009). For instance, mothers still spend two to three times more time with their children than fathers (Craig & Brown, 2017). In Australia specifically, fathers still work some of the longest hours in the world (Coles et al., 2018) and only a small portion take their paid paternal leave (Churchill & Craig, 2022). Researchers have also identified a tendency to go back to more traditional norms after the birth of a first child (Buchler et al., 2017; Katz-Wise et al., 2010), where it is argued that this shift could reflect a cognitive strategy to reduce the dissonance between parents' egalitarian values and their reality characterized by more traditional gender role divisions. Mothers may also adopt more traditional values to "excuse" fathers for not playing a more active role, contrary to the current expectations based on new models of fatherhood (Buchler et al., 2017).

Research on parental gender ideology has revealed that parents' gender beliefs and values are related to their views of shared parenting (Perälä-Littunen, 2007) and of the division of labor at home (Bianchi et al., 2000). By extension, parents' gender values may be related to certain qualities of parenting (in the self and in the other parent). Furthermore, the values of each parent may relate to their coparenting practices, potentially influencing the organization of the whole family system. Thus, we address the question here of whether parents' egalitarian values translate into their own and the other parent's (co)parenting practices. Indeed, little is

known regarding the relationships between gender values and the quality of parenting and coparenting, at least beyond the effects on paternal involvement in terms of time allocation and division of household tasks.

Parents' Involvement: The Role of Gender Values

Parents' gender equality seems to play a role in fathers' involvement in the lives of their children. In some research, fathers who report more values of gender equality also report spending more time with their children, as compared to fathers with more traditional values (Bulanda, 2004; Huffman et al., 2014). Although research on values about gender equality has tended to focus on time spent with children, mainly among fathers, research suggests that the quality of the parent-child relationship is more critical for children's socio-emotional development than the time spent in the presence of the parent *per se* (Pleck, 2010). Therefore, it is essential to consider parents' emotional involvement in terms of positive engagement and warm parenting, as opposed to hostile or coercive parenting (Philbrook & Teti, 2016; Pleck, 2010).

Moreover, research has shown that parenting characterized by support and warmth fosters children's emotional and social functioning (Daniel et al., 2016; Morris et al., 2017), whereas harsh parenting practices may undermine prosocial behaviors and may put children at risk for developing externalizing problems (Waller & Hyde, 2018). A positive emotional climate with high parental warmth is related to more positive affect in children (Robinson et al., 2009) and helps them express their emotions in adaptive ways (Houlberg et al., 2016). Further, warm parenting from both mothers and fathers also predicts increases in prosocial behavior over time (e.g., Daniel et al., 2016), and children are also less likely to present internalizing and externalizing difficulties (e.g., Amato & Fowler, 2002). On the contrary, hostile parenting behaviors can lead to children's poorer health (e.g., Brody et al., 2014), as it would undermine the development of emotion regulation, increasing the risk for mental and

physical health issues—such as depression and systemic inflammation (Brody et al., 2014). Because these parenting practices are of paramount importance for children’s functioning and wellbeing, we aimed to examine the extent to which gender values may be related to the key parenting outcomes of parental warmth and hostility, in particular.

Unfortunately, there have been few studies of the association between parents’ gender equality values and the quality of parenting, with the little evidence available indicating a positive association (Lee & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2023; Petts et al., 2018). Conversely, fathers’ adherence to more traditional gender norms was found to be associated with less positive engagement and more hostile parenting for fathers (Petts et al., 2018). In the present study, we expand on this research to test associations between parents’ reports of their gender equality values and their warm and hostile parenting behaviors using a large sample of Australian parents, thereby examining the interdependence between parents in these associations.

Interdependence Between Parents

Studying both fathers and mothers is essential to improve our understanding of family dynamics. According to family system theory, families are dynamic systems in which members are interdependent and mutually influence each other (e.g., Cox & Paley, 2003). Mothers’ and fathers’ beliefs and values may exert independent effects on their partner’s behaviors, in addition to the effect they can have on their own behaviors. For example, it could be expected that mothers with egalitarian values will encourage fathers to be more involved as a parent (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Thus, there can be both actor effects (i.e., one parent’s views, beliefs or attitudes will be associated with their own behavior) and partner effects (i.e., one parent can influence the other). Past research studies have found support for such family dynamics (Brenning et al., 2017; Ponnet et al., 2016) when they tested partner and actor effects using actor-partner interdependence models (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006). For instance, Brenning and colleagues (2017) explored the mutual influences between parents’ attachment representations,

their separation anxiety, and overprotective behaviors. They found a significant partner effect as mothers' anxious attachment was significantly related to more separation anxiety in fathers, which in turn was related to more paternal overprotection. In another study, mothers' beliefs about the father's role have even been found to be more strongly associated with paternal involvement than fathers' beliefs about their parental role (McBride et al., 2005). In the current study, we examined both partner and actor effects by testing APIMs linking mothers' and fathers' gender equality values to the other parent's parenting practices, while at the same time modeling mothers' and fathers' gender equality values as related to their own parenting practices.

The Coparenting Relationship: How Parents Work Together in Their Parenting

In addition to considering parents' interdependence in the relation between their gender equality values and their quality of parenting, we also aimed to explore parents' mutual influence by focusing on the relation between their gender equality values and the way they parent together through their coparenting. Coparenting refers to the level of support and solidarity between the adults that are responsible for the care and upbringing of a child (McHale et al., 2019). The existing literature broadly supports the importance of coparenting quality for the whole family (e.g., Liu et al., 2023). Studies have repeatedly confirmed that the quality of coparenting is important for other family relationships such as the marital relationship, the parent-child relationship quality and children's wellbeing (e.g., Martin et al., 2017; Morrill et al., 2010; Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). For example, Teubert and Pinquart (2010) revealed in their meta-analysis that high quality coparenting predicted children's and adolescents' adjustment, through better social functioning and less internalizing and externalizing problems. Other empirical evidence also supports the hypothesis that the quality of the coparenting relationship is associated to children's adjustment above the quality of the romantic relationship (e.g., Morrill et al., 2010) and parenting (e.g., Zemp et al., 2020).

Importantly, the quality of the coparenting relationship may depend on parents' gender values. Parents who believe that women and men are equal may also expect equal involvement from the other parent (Gaunt et al., 2022), and therefore may be more inclined to be mutually supportive within the coparenting relationship. The other parent may then be considered as a resource, because both men and women are believed to play an equally important role in family life (Gaunt et al., 2022; Petts et al., 2018). In line with this reasoning, past research indicates that parents who divided childcare tasks more equally also seemed to adhere more strongly to egalitarian values (Gaunt et al., 2022). Nonetheless, to our knowledge, only a small number of studies have addressed the relationship between parents' equality values and coparenting quality specifically (Kuo et al., 2017; Schoppe-Sullivan & Mangelsdorf, 2013). For example, Kuo and colleagues (2017) investigated the impact of parents' gender-role beliefs on coparenting among parents around the birth of their second child. They were particularly interested in the interdependence between mothers and fathers and tested for gender differences in the associations between beliefs and coparenting cooperation and conflict. Their results showed that mothers' egalitarian beliefs negatively predicted fathers' coparenting conflict as well as that fathers' egalitarian beliefs negatively predicted mothers' coparenting conflict. In other words, they found significant negative partner effects between parents' gender beliefs and coparenting conflict but no significant actor effects. They postulated that couples with more egalitarian beliefs may solve their disagreement more easily when they are committed to shared involvement in parenting, compared to couples with more traditional gender role beliefs (Kuo et al., 2017). However, research is still needed to verify and potentially extend these results outside the transition to (second-time) parenthood. Based on Kuo and colleagues (2017) findings, we expect that parents' adherence to equality values would be positively associated with both their own and the other parent's report of coparenting support among parents of older children as well.

Parents' Educational Level and Work Status as Potential Moderators

Finally, when studying parents' values and (co)parenting, it appears important to consider certain socio-demographic characteristics. For example, parents' educational level may be an important determinant of their adherence to gender equality values (Churchill & Craig, 2022) as well as of their involvement in childcare (Blair et al., 1994; Yeung et al., 2001). A higher educational level is typically related to stronger equality values and more egalitarian behaviors (Chatard et al., 2007; Garcia Roman & Cortina, 2016), potentially because highly educated parents are more often exposed to egalitarian values and views that challenge the traditional depiction of the family - that of a breadwinning father and a caregiving mother (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004). However, the results are mixed (e.g., Chatard et al., 2007); as for instance, Churchill and Craig (2022) found that for fathers, high educational attainment was associated with a stronger endorsement of the statement that "Men care more about being successful at work than meeting the needs of their children," which may reflect a more traditional vision of the paternal role.

In addition to parents' educational level, work status may be an important determinant of parents' values and practices as well. Most studies investigating determinants of parental involvement in childcare have focused on labor-force characteristics such as educational level and work status (Gaunt, 2005). For instance, Gaunt and colleagues (2022) found that parents with more traditional work statuses (i.e., the mother as the primary caregiver and the father as the breadwinner) adhere less often to egalitarian values, compared to parents where the father was the primary caregiver and the mother was the breadwinner—role-reversed couples. Similarly, past research suggests that fathers' involvement in childcare depends on the number of working hours of both parents, with fathers' involvement increasing when their partner worked more, and decreasing when the father himself worked more hours and earned more (e.g., Yeung et al., 2001). Nevertheless, more research is needed to clarify the role of these

socio-demographic characteristics for parents' adherence to values and how they may color parenting and coparenting practices. Furthermore, most of these studies have focused on mean-level differences and direct associations (e.g., Yeung et al., 2001), failing to test the potentially moderating role of these socio-demographic characteristics.

Present Study

Adherence to gender equality values may have implications for individuals in their everyday actions across life domains. However, relatively little is known about the potential role of holding such values for parents' quality of child-rearing and coparenting practices, and whether mothers and fathers mutually influence each other through their values. In this study, we aimed to better understand the relations between mothers' and fathers' gender equality values and their own and the other parent's parenting and coparenting practices. We expected that parents' adherence to gender equality values will be related to more supportive parenting practices (in terms of more warmth and less hostility), and more coparenting support. Adopting a systemic perspective, we expected to find both actor and partner effects, as the literature seems to support mutual influences between parents (e.g., Kuo et al., 2017). In addition, we tested whether these associations were moderated by parents' work status and educational level, as past research indicated important differences as a function of work status and education.

Method

Participants

This study used a sample drawn from the *Growing up in Australia* study, an ongoing panel study of Australian children that started in 2003 (Mohal et al., 2020). A core part of the study has been the collection of survey data from parents every two years. Initially, a representative sample of families from rural and urban areas of Australia was recruited focusing on two cohorts: about 5000 children aged 0/1 years and 5000 children aged 4/5 years. We selected families with survey data collected from both mother and father at the fifth wave of

assessment (collected in 2011), as this is the only wave that included all variables of interest. One cohort included 3494 children (51% of boys; age of 8 or 9 years) and their parents, and a second cohort included 3251 adolescents (51% boys; age of 12 or 13 years) and their parents. Mothers and fathers were respectively 41.46 years old ($SD = 5.30$) and 43.80 years old ($SD = 6.34$), on average. The majority of parents were born in Australia (79% of mothers and 77% of fathers), of which a minority were First Nations people (2% of mothers and fathers). Our sample also included parents born in Europe (7%), Asia (6%), in another country from Oceania (4%; mainly in New Zealand), and in other countries around the world (3%). Regarding parents' educational level, most parents had a vocational training (40% of mothers and 47% of fathers) or a university degree (39% of mothers and 33% of fathers). Mothers mainly earned less than fathers with 36% of mothers earning less than \$500 per week, and 31% between \$500 and \$1000/week. Twenty-two percent of mothers earned between \$1000 and \$2000 and 5% of mothers earned more than \$2000/week. Fathers mainly earned more than \$1000 per week; only 10% of fathers earned less than \$500/week and 16% between \$500 and \$1000/week, whereas 41% between \$1000 and \$2000 and 24% over \$2000 per week. Moreover, 40% of mothers were working part-time, compared to only 4% of fathers. Fathers mainly work full-time, namely 90% of fathers and 38% of mothers. Included families counted 3 children on average ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.04$), and in most cases both parents (mother and father) were living with the child (92%); in 8% of the cases, biological/adoptive parents were separated.

Measures

Mothers and fathers responded to several questions assessing their gender equality values, parenting, and coparenting.

Gender equality values. Two items measured parents' gender equality values in the family and work domain. Parents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), regarding the following

two statements: “If both husband and wife work, they should share equally in the housework and childcare”; and “Ideally, there should be as many women as men in important positions in government and business”. The items were averaged to form a composite score, with higher scores corresponding to stronger egalitarian beliefs. In terms of reliability, we did not compute Cronbach’s alphas, because they are sensitive to the number of items and they decrease with fewer items (Iacobucci & Duhachek, 2003). However, as recommended by Clark and Watson (2019), we calculated the interitem correlation. These intercorrelations were 0.48 for mothers and 0.32 for fathers, which is in the recommended range of 0.15-0.50.

Warm parenting. Parents reported the frequency of warm parenting behaviors through six items (e.g., “In the last six months how often did you...” “... hug or hold this child for no particular reason?” or “... enjoy listening to the child and doing things with him/her?”). Parents responded on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Items were averaged to create a composite score, with a higher score corresponding to more warmth. The selected items have shown good construct validity in the previous waves of the panel study (see Zubrick et al., 2014). In the present sample, alphas were 0.89 for mothers and fathers.

Hostile parenting. Parents also reported upon the frequency of hostile parenting behaviors. This scale was a 6-item measure (e.g., “How often do you feel you are having problems managing this child in general?”, “How often do you tell this child that he/she is bad or not as good as others?”). Parents responded on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (never/almost never) to 5 (always/almost always). Items were averaged to create a composite score, with a higher score indicating more hostile parenting. These items have shown good construct validity in the previous waves of the panel study as well (Zubrick et al., 2014). In the present study, Cronbach’s alphas were 0.72 for mothers and 0.73 for fathers.

Coparenting support. Parents completed three items to measure coparenting (e.g., “How often is your partner a resource or support to you in raising your child(ren)?”, “Are you

a resource or support to your partner in raising your child(ren)?”, “Do you feel your partner understands and is supportive of your needs as a parent?”). The scale used a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Items were averaged to create a composite score, with a higher score indicating more coparenting support. In this study, alphas were 0.80 for mothers and 0.69 for fathers.

Work status. Parents’ employment status was also assessed. Parents reported if they were employed full-time (30+ hours/week), part-time, unemployed looking for a job, or not in the labor force. We identified three groups of fathers and mothers: not in paid work (22% of mothers and 6% of fathers), working part-time (40% of mothers and 4% of fathers), and working full-time (38% of mothers and 90% of fathers).

Educational level. Participants were asked three questions about the years of schooling completed (i.e., from not/still attending to 12 years) and about post-secondary qualification (i.e., if they did complete post-secondary qualification and which highest qualification completed). We recoded those three items to obtain four different educational levels: (1) lower than high school (10% of mothers and fathers), (2) high school education (11% of mothers and 7% of fathers), (3) vocational training (40% of mothers and 47% of fathers), (4) and university degree (39% of mothers and 33% of fathers). (1) When they completed less than 12 years of schooling and did not obtain a post-secondary qualification, we recoded as lower than high school; (2) when they completed 12 years of schooling but did not obtain a post-secondary qualification, high school education. (3) We recoded as vocational training when they reported having an advanced diploma, a certificate I-IV, or another non-school qualification as their highest qualification, (4) and as university degree when they reported a bachelor, graduate or postgraduate degree as their highest qualification.

Data Analysis

Analyses were performed using R statistical software version 4.1.2 (R Core Team, 2023). As preliminary analyses, we explored descriptive statistics and correlations between our target variables. We also examined whether there were mean-level differences between the two cohorts in our target variables. To do so, we performed a MANOVA with cohorts as independent variable and the study variables as dependent variables (i.e., equality values and (co)parenting). Our principal analyses were conducted within a structural equation modeling framework with the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). Given the large sample size, significant results were only considered meaningful when the standardized coefficient was greater than .10. This threshold was chosen as it corresponds to an explained variance of 1%.

Actor-partner interdependence models (Kenny et al., 2006) were fitted to examine the dynamics between parents' equality values and parenting or coparenting practices. We created separate models for warm parenting, hostile parenting, and coparenting. Thus, we estimated three models in total (see Figure 1). Model fit was assessed by examining the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). A model with a good fit is characterized by CFI over .95, RMSEA under .06, and SRMR lower than .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). For each model, we followed two steps: (1) we fitted the saturated model with all associations between the variables freely estimated, and (2) we tested whether the associations of gender values with parenting (warmth, hostility) or coparenting were significantly different for mothers compared to fathers. To do this, we constrained the two actor effects to be equal across mothers and fathers, and we constrained the two partner effects to be equal. We then conducted a difference test comparing the χ^2 -values of the model with equality constraints to the model without these constraints. A significant difference in χ^2 -value (i.e., $\Delta\chi^2$ significantly different from zero) indicates that the actor and/or partner effects are significantly different for mothers and fathers.

Then, we conducted four multigroup APIMs to investigate the potential moderating role of mothers' and fathers' educational level and their work status. Regarding educational level, we compared four groups: high school not completed, high school education, vocational training, and university degree. For work status, our multigroup APIMs involved comparing three groups: the parent working full-time, working part-time, and not working. Moderation was tested for each of the three models presented in the main analyses. We first estimated all associations freely across groups, and then constrained the relationships to be equal across the different groups. We then compared the models with and without constraints using a χ^2 difference test. A significant difference between the two models suggests that at least one model pathway is significantly different across groups. In other words, this would indicate that model pathways are moderated by the socio-demographic variable.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the variables of interest are presented in Table 1. The MANOVA revealed differences between the two cohorts in some of our study variables. Cohorts differed in their reports of warm parenting (for mothers: $F(1) = 335.77, p < .001$; for fathers: $F(1) = 188.54, p < .001$), with parents from the cohort of younger children reported more warm parenting than parents from the cohort of older children. For mothers, we also found cohort differences in reports of hostile parenting ($F(1) = 5.69, p = .017$), with higher scores among parents with children from the younger cohort. These cohort differences were controlled for in all subsequent analyses.

Main Results

The best fitting APIM models are shown in Figures 2–4. In the next section, we discuss the main results for warm parenting, hostile parenting, and coparenting support, and we then present the results of the moderation analyses.

Warm parenting. The APIM analyses for warm parenting revealed a partner effect of mothers' equality values on fathers' warm parenting, with mothers' equality values being positively related to fathers' warm parenting (see Figure 2). Actor effects were not significant or meaningful both for mothers and fathers, nor was the partner effect of fathers' equality values on mothers' warm parenting. Further, the models with and without equality constraints across mothers and fathers were significantly different from each other ($\Delta\chi^2(2) = 24.44, p < .001$), suggesting that the actor and partner effects were significantly different across mothers and fathers. We thus retained the saturated model presented in Figure 2.

Hostile parenting. Analyses including hostile parenting showed no meaningful relationship between parents' equality values and hostile parenting (coefficients were either not significantly different from zero or they were below .10). Actor and partner effects were also different across fathers and mothers ($\Delta\chi^2(2) = 15.51, p < .001$). Therefore, the final model included all associations that were freely estimated, indicating actor and partner effects of parents' gender equality values on hostile parenting were considered different (albeit not significant or meaningful) across mothers and fathers. The final model is presented in Figure 3.

Coparenting support. Regarding the model including coparenting support, we found a significant partner effect of mothers' equality values on fathers' perceived coparenting support. When mothers adhered more strongly to gender equality values, fathers reported more coparenting support. None of the other relations between parents' equality values and their coparenting were significant or meaningful. The model comparison revealed that the effects of equality values on coparenting were significantly different across mothers and fathers ($\Delta\chi^2(2) = 57.27, p < .001$). Therefore, we kept a final model with the actor and partner effect of values on coparenting freely estimated across mothers and fathers. This unconstrained model is presented in Figure 4.

Moderation

We first examined the potential moderating role of mothers' and fathers' educational level (four groups each). For parents' educational level, multigroup APIM analyses revealed no significant differences between the groups (p -values of the $\Delta\chi^2$ ranging from .09 to .90), for the analyses with both mothers' educational level and fathers' educational level. Then, we conducted multigroup analyses to investigate whether mothers' and fathers' work status (three groups) moderated the associations between gender equality values and (co)parenting. These models revealed one significant difference. Specifically, the model testing the associations between gender values and coparenting support revealed a significant moderation by mothers' work status ($\Delta\chi^2(10) = 21.42, p = .02$). We found that when mothers did not work, there was no significant association between gender equality values and coparenting support, in contrast to dyads composed of a working mother. Indeed, the partner effect of mothers' equality values on fathers' reports of coparenting support was no longer significant in dyads including a non-working mother ($\beta = -.02, p = .70$). Models including warm parenting ($\Delta\chi^2(14) = 19.43, p = .15$) and hostile parenting ($\Delta\chi^2(12) = 13.13, p = .36$) were not moderated by mothers' work status. Fathers' work status was also not a significant moderator (p -values of the $\Delta\chi^2$ ranging from .65 to .81).

Discussion

This study examined the relations between parents' gender equality values, on the one hand, and their parenting and coparenting practices, on the other hand. Thereby, we relied upon a dyadic approach by investigating the dynamics between mothers and fathers through actor-partner interdependence modeling. In addition to this main objective, we also pursued the complementary objective of exploring the potential moderating role of parents' work status and educational level in the relationship between gender equality values and (co)parenting practices.

Regarding the main objective, models revealed significant and meaningful partner effects only. Specifically, we found evidence for a significant positive relation between mothers' gender equality values and fathers' warm parenting and coparenting support. In other words, it appeared that mothers adhering to values promoting gender equality had a coparent who displays more warm parenting towards their child and who reports more coparenting support. This finding aligns with family system theory (Cox & Paley, 2003), because it supports the importance of parents' mutual influences within the family system. One parent's characteristics, such as parents' values, practices, and perceptions, appears to be related to the other parent's characteristics. Potentially, two underlying mechanisms may explain these transactional associations: (1) mothers' encouragement of father involvement and/or (2) mothers' cognitive adjustment to their family reality.

Indeed, a first mechanism could be that mothers adhering to gender equality values may perceive the father as an equally important care-provider for the children and as a valuable resource who is expected to be equally involved in childcare. They may therefore behave consequently and for example encourage fathers' involvement in childcare, in other words, by increasing gate-opening and reducing gatekeeping behaviors. Maternal gatekeeping corresponds to the extent to which mothers discourage or encourage fathers' positive engagement in child-rearing (Schoppe-Sullivan & Altenburger, 2019). Previous research indicated that mothers adhering to equality values display more gate-opening behaviors by encouraging fathers' positive practices and giving fathers access to the child (e.g., Zvara et al., 2013). In line with these studies, we found evidence that mothers' gender equality values also predicted a higher quality of parenting (in terms of parental warmth) and coparenting support, as reported by fathers. This result on coparenting support highlights that fathers with a coparent reporting more gender equality values, perceived greater maternal support within their

coparenting team. Indeed, they more frequently reported coparenting support through items such as “Do you feel your partner understands and is supportive of your needs as a parent?”.

However, as our study is cross-sectional in nature, it is also possible that fathers’ (co)parenting predicted mothers’ equality values. In this case, cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) may help to explain why mothers would adopt more traditional attitudes about gender relations when being confronted with a greater gender gap at home. That is, when mothers have a male partner who is less involved in childcare (as reflected in lower levels of warmth and coparenting support), they may change their attitudes and adopt more traditional gender values in order to reduce dissonance between their values and their reality. Several studies have found this specific shift to more traditional values during the transition to parenthood and for mothers in particular (e.g., Buchler et al., 2017). These studies postulated that during the transition to parenthood mothers’ expectations about gender roles and parents’ involvement might be confronted to gendered practices after the birth of the first child that were not expected before, for example, the father might be less involved than expected. Therefore, they might adopt more traditional values, which are more consistent with an unbalanced involvement of mothers in relation to fathers. Importantly, our results were based on cross-sectional data so conclusive evidence cannot be provided regarding the question whether values influence behavior and/or whether behavior influences parents’ values. Further studies (e.g., longitudinal or experimental) is needed to verify the direction of these relations between parents’ values and practices.

Nonetheless, the significant association between mothers’ values and fathers’ perceived coparenting support was only significant for families where mothers worked (both full- and part-time). Indeed, for these families, mother’s equality values appeared as an essential predictor of coparenting practices. Researchers have underscored the importance of parents’ working hours in understanding parents’ involvement. When mothers work more hours, fathers

are more involved in child-rearing. However, when fathers earn more and work more, they are less involved (Yeung et al., 2001). Conversely, when mothers are not working, they are more available for children. They are then more likely to assume sole responsibility for childcare (Gaunt et al., 2022).

Furthermore, as for the models on the relationship between gender equality values and hostile parenting, we did not find any significant relationships. This indicates that gender equality values are not associated with hostile parenting practices. Potentially, these negative parenting practices might be related to other values and parents' characteristics, such as beliefs about discipline and child-rearing (Chen et al., 2021; Simons et al., 1993), traditional views of masculinity and fatherhood in particular (Petts et al., 2018). Researchers including Petts and colleagues (2018) have found that fathers' adherence to masculine norms promoting dominance, emotional control, etc., was associated to fathers' harsh discipline. Future studies could investigate how adherence to a more traditional or modern fatherhood ideal, by both mothers and fathers, may be related to parenting practices such as hostile parenting.

Limits and Future Perspectives

This study has several limitations that should be addressed in future studies. First, it should be noted that the measure assessing gender equality values only comprised two items, which involved general statements about gender equality in the context of work and the division of domestic tasks. Future studies should replicate our results using a measure with stronger psychometric qualities and maybe addressing gender equality values and beliefs related to specific domains of life such as parenting, family responsibilities, paid work. A more comprehensive measure of gender equality may allow identifying the influence of gender beliefs about gender roles in the private and public sphere respectively. In addition, future research could also focus on gender equality beliefs in the context of family life specifically, for instance by assessing parents' values related to family roles, such as their gender-essentialist

beliefs (Liss et al., 2013) and their vision of fatherhood (Buchler et al., 2017). Furthermore, this study relied upon panel data with measures over several years. However, because the measures of interest were only included at one wave, we were not able to conduct longitudinal analyses, precluding us from testing the directions of the effects. It would thus be interesting to further investigate these links with longitudinal data to examine the potentially bidirectional associations between values and (co-)parenting.

Conclusion

The results of the present paper underscore the importance of considering parents' gender equality values for understanding parenting and coparenting within a dynamic family system. Our results suggest that mothers' gender equality values may create a positive environment for children by promoting fathers' positive involvement in family life, especially when mothers are in paid work. Nonetheless, future studies are needed to further investigate the mechanisms underlying the relationships between parents' values and their practices. In conclusion, considering gender values when studying parenting and coparenting appears essential to better capture how changes in societies, such as the valorization of egalitarian values and the paradoxes they bring, may have an impact on the family and on children alike.

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Table 1.

Means (SD) and Correlations between Studied Variables.

	Mean (SD)	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Mother's gender equality values	3.72(0.68)	-						
2. Father's gender equality values	3.99 (0.74)	0.13***	-					
3. Mother's warm parenting	4.30(0.61)	0.05**	0.05***	-				
4. Father's warm parenting	3.92(0.67)	0.14***	0.02	0.31***	-			
5. Mother's hostile parenting	1.94(0.54)	-0.03**	0.01	-0.39***	-0.20***	-		
6. Father's hostile parenting	1.96(0.55)	-0.06***	0.03**	-0.20***	-0.39***	0.43***	-	
7. Mother's coparenting support	4.49(0.61)	0.07***	-0.03*	0.23***	0.21***	-0.20***	-0.17***	-
8. Father's coparenting support	4.46(0.57)	0.10***	-0.04**	0.12***	0.29***	-0.12***	-0.26***	0.34***

Note. * $p < .01$ ** $p < .05$ *** $p < .001$

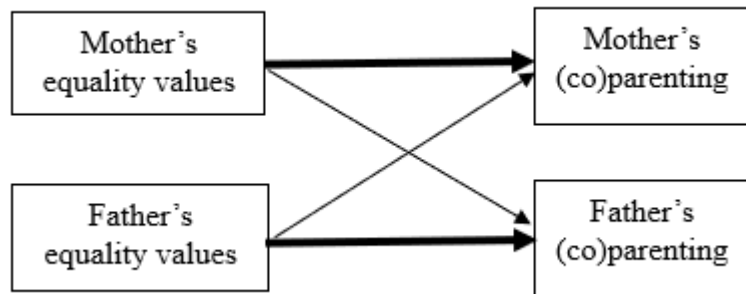


Figure 1.

Theoretical Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM)

Note. Bold arrows represent actor effects and diagonal arrows correspond to partner effects.

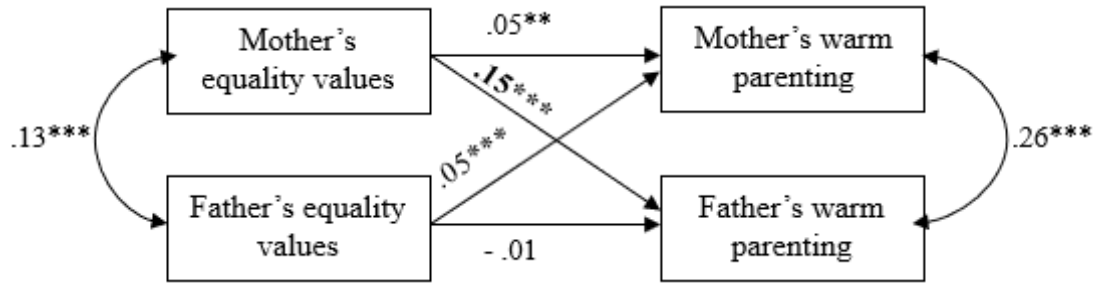


Figure 2.
APIM for Warm Parenting

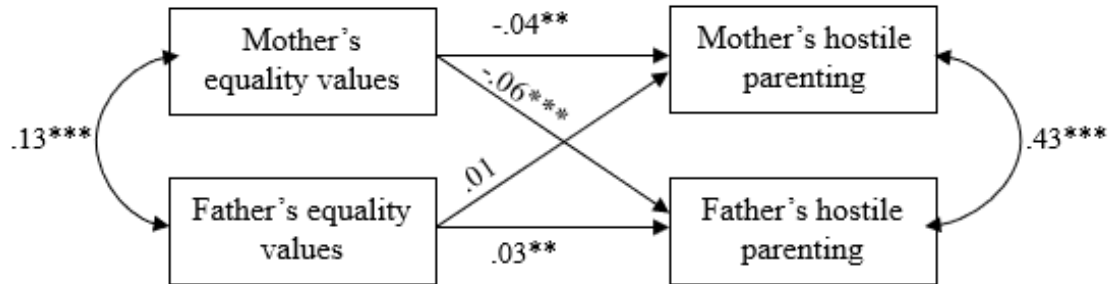


Figure 3.
APIM for Hostile Parenting

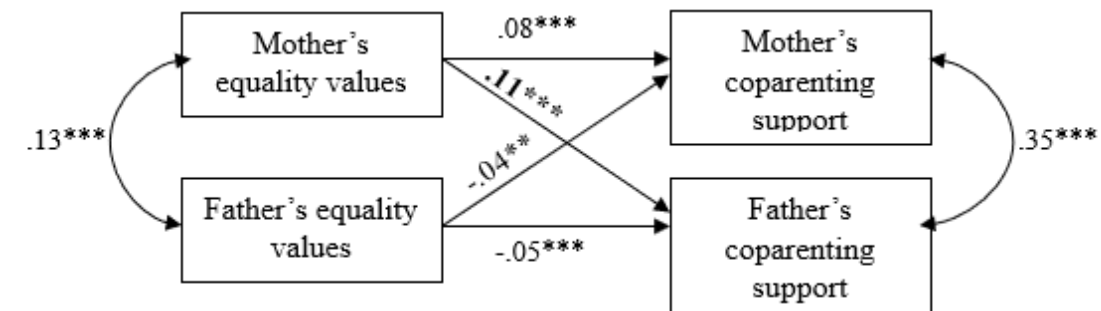


Figure 4.
APIM for Coparenting Support