Union Commitment, Parental Status, and Sibling Relationships as Sources of Stepfamily Fertility in Austria, Finland, France, and West Germany[1]

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We investigate the differential value of first and second births in a union for couples with and without a pre-union birth. In Finland and West Germany, we find support for the value of a first union birth to signal the couple's commitment. Birth rates are higher if the couple has no shared children, net of their total (hers, his) parity. No such effects are found in Austria or France. We find little support for the value of biological parenthood; in stepfamilies, birth rates are not higher if one partner is not a parent than when both have pre-union children. Except in Austria, we find evidence for the value of a full sibling; among couples with total parity two or more, those who have only one shared child are more likely to have another child than couples who already share two children.

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Dramatic changes in marriage, divorce and cohabitation during the last half of the 20th century have radically changed the context of childbearing decisions. Many, if not most young adults can expect to form more than one intimate partnership during their lifetimes (e.g., Bumpass, Sweet & Cherlin 1991; Haskey 1993). The number of children they have will be increasingly determined by reproductive decisions in a series of cohabiting and marital unions. And increasing numbers of couples will be making childbearing decisions in the context of the partners' differing parities.

These changes have implications for demographic models of fertility and for sociological theories of parenthood. Parity progressions are the keystone of fertility analysis (e.g., Feeney & Lutz 1991). Standard fertility models specify parity progressions entirely in terms of women's births, and do not distinguish births with prior partners from those with current partners. If men's pre-union children or the parenthood of a particular child influence couples' fertility decisions, parity effects must be respecified. From a sociological point of view, childbearing decisions by couples with stepchildren reflect and may alter ties between stepparents and stepchildren, and between parents and their nonresident children (Seltzer 1991; Booth & Dunn 1994).

Three key values of children underlie potential differences in parity progressions by couples with and without pre-union children (Griffith, Koo & Suchindran 1985): (1) children are symbols of the partners' commitment to their relationship; (2) the first child confers parental status; and (3) the second child ensures that each child has a sibling. The values associated with a first or second child are particularly important for understanding fertility variation and change in low-fertility societies.

Each of the values of a particular child must, of course, be weighed against the economic, social and psychological costs of a couple's total number of children. When one of the partners has pre-union children, the value of a first shared birth must be weighed against the costs of rearing two or more children, the value of a second shared birth against the costs of rearing three or more children, and so on. The question for our research is whether the costs of larger family sizes associated with stepfamily childbearing outweigh the commitment, parental status, or sibling value of one or two shared children.

Until recently, almost all the evidence on stepfamily fertility was based on women's pre-union children, marital unions, and U.S. data. Most studies reported lower risks of childbearing in remarriage, the more children a woman had when she remarried (e.g., Bumpass 1984; Lillard & Waite 1993). Similar findings were reported in the one study that included nonmarital unions (Loomis & Landale 1996). Some analyses have included data on men's previous unions or children, with similar or mixed results (e.g., Griffith et al. 1985; Haurin 1992; O'Keefe 1988). When no effects of pre-union children are found on births to couples, we can infer that some additional value is provided to stepfamily couples, because they are making higher-order parity progressions with higher costs than are couples without stepchildren. But we cannot be sure that lower conception rates in stepfamilies are not simply a result of their higher total parity.

More recent studies, conducted by several of us independently, provide somewhat better tests of the extra value provided by shared versus stepchildren. Vikat, Thomson & Hoem (1999) found that, in Sweden, the risk of a first birth in a union did *not* depend on the number of children the respondent had before the union and that the risk of a higher-order

birth was greater if it was the first in a new union. Both findings support the commitment value of a first shared birth. Unfortunately, the Swedish data do not include full information on partners' children; one knows only if one or more stepchildren lived with the respondent at union formation.

Thomson's (1997) analyses of panel data from the United States showed that childbearing intentions and risks were elevated when couples had no shared children and/or when the woman had no children. These results are consistent with the commitment and parental status values of first births. Thomson's analyses did not show stronger intentions or higher birth risks for a second shared child, given the presence of older half-siblings.

Analyses of French data showed that pre-union children lowered childbearing intentions and birth risks (Toulemon & Lapierre-Adamcyk 1995; Toulemon 1997), except when the man had pre-union children in which case the risk of the first union birth increased. Neither of these analyses, however, specified the number of pre-union children belonging to the woman only, the man only, or the couple together.

Buber and Prskawetz (1999) found that stepfamily couples in Austria had lower union first-birth rates than other couples only if one or the other partner had two or more pre-union children. That is, at low parities, the commitment value of a first shared birth may increase birth risks, but the cost of higher total parities eventually overcomes that value.

None of these studies specified parity effects in a way to directly test hypotheses about the three values of first and second births -- union commitment, parental status, and sibling relationships. Other differences in model specification also limit direct comparisons between the studies. In this paper, we conduct a more extensive and precise test of

differences in stepfamily fertility based on values of step- and own children, bringing together data from the Fertility and Family Surveys conducted in Austria, Finland, France, and West Germany. These countries provide comparisons of stepfamily fertility in different welfare regimes that may influence fertility decisions and all four FFS data sets include information on children of previous as well as current partners.

Data and Methods

All of the countries studied in this analysis have experienced decreases in marriage, increases in cohabitation and nonmarital fertility, and increases in divorce over the period covered by retrospective union and birth histories (Haskey 1993; Coleman 1998), with some variation in the degree or timing of these changes. They are also broadly representative of variations in systems of social insurance that support parenthood and/or gender equality, cultural beliefs about gender, and institutionalization of cohabitation as an alternative to marriage (Bosveld 1996; Orloff 1996).

We use Finland as a representative of countries with high social provisions for childrearing and supports for gender equality (Rönsen and Sundström 1997). Finland has increasing divorce and cohabitation rates, but non-union births are rare (Prinz 1995; Nikander 1998). West Germany provides an anchor on the "conservative" side of the demographic and policy continuum. Although transfers to parents are quite generous, child care is relatively limited and the organization of the school day makes it very difficult to combine employment and parenthood (Höhn 1991). For this reason, West Germany has relatively low female employment rates in comparison to other wealthy countries, especially among mothers of young children (UNECE 1995). Marriage rates are relatively high, while

cohabitation and nonmarital births are quite low (Prinz 1995).[3]

France falls generally in the middle of the Nordic countries and Germany in terms of policy and demographic behavior, and is sometimes classified with the former, sometimes with the latter, sometimes in a separate category with, for example, Austria (Bosveld 1996). The French welfare regime has long been focused on pronatalist concerns, but not on gender equality (as in Finland). Transfers to parents are generous, and child care is relatively well subsidized for toddlers but not infants (Toulemon & de Guibert-Lantoine 1998). Cohabitation and union dissolution rates are similar to those in Finland and births out of unions are also quite low.

Austria provides very generous supports for childrearing, and also reasonably good child care for two years prior to children's school entry (Findl 1991). Cohabitation and union dissolution rates are similar to those in Finland and France. What stands out for Austria is its high rate of non-union births – similar to rates for the United States (Prinz 1995).

Each of the FFS surveys in these countries obtained complete birth and union histories from the primary respondent. Respondent's pre-union children can therefore be identified by comparing union start and end dates to children's birth dates. Critical for our analysis, the union histories also include information on the number of children each partner had at the time of the union.[4]

Our specification for the risk of a birth at time t in the union can be written as:

$$h_b(t) = h_{b0}(t) \exp\{\gamma' p(t) + \beta' x(t)\}, \qquad (1)$$

where $h_b(t)$ is the birth risk at time t, $p(t)$ is the couple's parity, specified in ways to provide for tests of hypotheses linked to the three values of first and second births, and $x(t)$ is a

vector containing a set of other variables that characterize the woman, the man, or their partnership. As is suggested by the notation, $p(t)$ and $x(t)$ may change over time.

We begin observation at the respondent's first union occurring at or after her/his 14th birthday and estimate the birth risk in each union birth interval. In fact, we subtract 9 months from the child's birth date so as to estimate the risk of conceptions resulting in live births, and assign the child to a union based on its conception date. Thus, a birth interval may begin with a union or with a birth within a union. Observations are censored when a union dissolves or the respondent reaches the age at which childbearing is unlikely (45 for women, 50 for men). We also censor at 9 months prior to the respondent's interview, to exclude pregnancies reported at the interview which may or may not result in live births. Finally, we exclude observations after a multiple birth, reasoning that two or more children born at the same time have a different meaning for parents than the same number born at different times.

Births occurring outside of unions are not included in the hazard models, but are included in time-varying counts of the respondent's children. Children born no more than 12 months prior to union formation (coresidence) are assumed to be the children of the couple, unless the respondent reported a prior union at the time of conception. In such cases, we treat the couple as having one shared child at union formation, and specify the birth interval to begin at union formation. Couples in which the woman was pregnant at union formation are treated in a similar fashion, with duration for the subsequent birth interval beginning when the child is born. Note that because we subtract 9 months from the birth date to determine conception, pregnancies that precipitate marriage by a cohabiting couple are treated as cohabiting rather than marital conceptions.

Table 1 summarizes the target population, response rates, and number of male and female respondents for each of the Fertility and Family Surveys in our analysis. In Finland, samples were drawn from population registers; other countries relied on stratified household samples. Larger numbers of females than males were generally targeted. Response rates were all above 72 percent. The age ranges vary somewhat, but are centered on the reproductive years. The table also shows the number of respondents contributing to our analysis (having experienced at least one union and provided valid data for variables in our models), the number of union birth intervals produced by these respondents, and the proportions of intervals in which respondents or partners have pre-union children, the couple has shared children, and/or the couple conceives a child.

Table 1 about here

Although the ages at which we are able to observe unions and births vary across countries, the proportion of intervals producing a conception is half or more in Finland, France and Austria, somewhat less in West Germany. Pre-union children are uncommon but not rare; as many as ten percent of union birth intervals reported by French and Austrian women occurred in stepfamilies. Note that the proportion of spells in which the couple has a shared child is much lower in Austria than in the other three countries. Austria has a much higher rate of non-union fertility than do Finland, France and West Germany, which may account for the lower proportion of births that are the second or higher-order in the same union.

In order to test hypotheses about the value of first and second union births, we must first control for the total number of children (hers + his + theirs) a couple has at the beginning

of a birth interval. We want to know whether the risk of a birth is higher, net of total parity, if the birth is the first or second in a particular union and/or if one of the partners has no children of her/his own. In our models, we specify parity effects as dummy variables representing total parity one, two, three and four or more; couples having no children at all (hers, his or theirs) are the reference group.

The specification of stepfamily parity variables to test our hypotheses is somewhat complex and is outlined in Table 2. The value of a first union birth to express the couple's commitment is represented by a positive effect of having no shared children. The parental status value is represented by positive effects of one partner having no children. Note that for couples with total parity one, these two indicators are the same; in order to distinguish the commitment from the parental status value of stepfamily births, we rely on couples having two or more children altogether. Note further that if one partner has no children of her/his own, i.e., is not a biological parent but only a step-parent, the couple by definition has no shared children. We must therefore interpret the effect of one partner not being a parent as an effect that is *added* to the effect of the couple's having no shared children. Finally, we test the sibling value of a second union birth by contrasting couples with only one shared child to those with at least two shared children, among couples whose total parity is two or more. If half-siblings do not provide the same value as full siblings, we would expect the coefficient for this variable to be positive.

The baseline time parameter for the birth risk is specified as a linear spline with nodes at 6 months, 2 years, 5 years, and 10 years. Several control variables are also represented as linear splines: union duration (nodes at 2, 5, and 10 years); respondent's and partner's ages

(nodes at 25, 30, 35, and 40 years of age), and calendar time (nodes at 1970, 1980, 1990 where possible). Union duration is specified only for spells that begin with a union birth; for the first birth in a union, union duration is identical to the underlying time parameter. Additional control variables include whether the respondent was born out of the country, union order, and union status (cohabiting, married after cohabiting, married directly). With the exception of nativity status, all variables vary across time, and union status may vary within a birth interval. All models were estimated separately for male and female respondents, using *aML* software (Lillard 1993; Lillard & Panis 1996; 1998).

Figure 1 graphs the baseline conception risks across time. Recall that birth intervals may begin at union formation or at a union birth. In general, the risk of conception increases or remains constant from the beginning of the spell through the second year, decreasing steadily thereafter. Differences in the intercepts have no intrinsic meaning.

Figure 1 about here

In Table 3, we present relative risks corresponding to regression coefficients for each parity variable. Figures written in bold are relative risks that are significantly higher or lower than that for the reference group. Full model parameters are available on request.

Table 3 about here

With the exception of France, couples with total parity one or more have lower birth risks than couples with no children; in France, risks are lower only at parities two and three. In Finland and West Germany, risks are substantially reduced from total parity one to two, and remain low at higher parities; in France and Austria, couples with two, three and four or more children (combined) have relatively similar birth risks.

Only in Finland and West Germany is the risk of a birth higher if it is the first in a union. No effects of having a shared child (or not) are found in France and Austria. Little support is found for the value of parental status. Only Austrian women report a significantly higher birth risk when one of the partners has no children, in comparison to partners who are both parents but have no shared children, and in West Germany, a childless partner *reduces* the conception risk in comparison to other couples with no shared children. Finally, there is considerable evidence for the value of a full sibling to a couple's first shared child. In Finland, France and West Germany (women), the risk of a second union birth is higher in stepfamilies than for couples without pre-union children. Parallel results are not found in Austria.

Discussion and Conclusions

The value of a first shared child to stepfamily couples is clear in Finland and West Germany. Their rate of first union births is much higher than that of couples with no children at all or with at least one shared child, net of their combined pre-union parity. This effect does not seem to be associated with generous state supports for childcare, because it is found in the most liberal and most conservative of our countries, but not in between. On the other hand, the effect in Finland could be due to generous parental leave and other subsidies, while that in West Germany represents a selection of non-employed women into new unions and a continuation of the full-time maternal role.

The latter interpretation is consistent with the reduced birth risk for West German stepfamilies in which one partner has no children. Putting together the relative risks for having no shared children and one partner not being a parent produces about the same birth risk as for couples whose children are all shared. If the childless partner is selected for low interest

in parenthood (relative to employment and other activities), this may balance the value of a shared child to express the couple's commitment.

In each country except Austria, the relative value of half- and full siblings is demonstrated by the higher birth rate for the second shared child in a stepfamily than for the corresponding parity progression among couples without pre-union children. Because a higher proportion of Austrian births occur outside of unions than do births in the other countries, we may simply not have sufficient observations to detect these effects.

In all four countries, we find some evidence of unique fertility patterns for stepfamilies, i.e., patterns that do not correspond to the standard parity progressions. As stepfamilies increase, a clear understanding of fertility variation and change requires us to specify parity in more complex ways, taking into account the separate and shared parities of the two partners.

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Figure 1: Baseline log-intensity

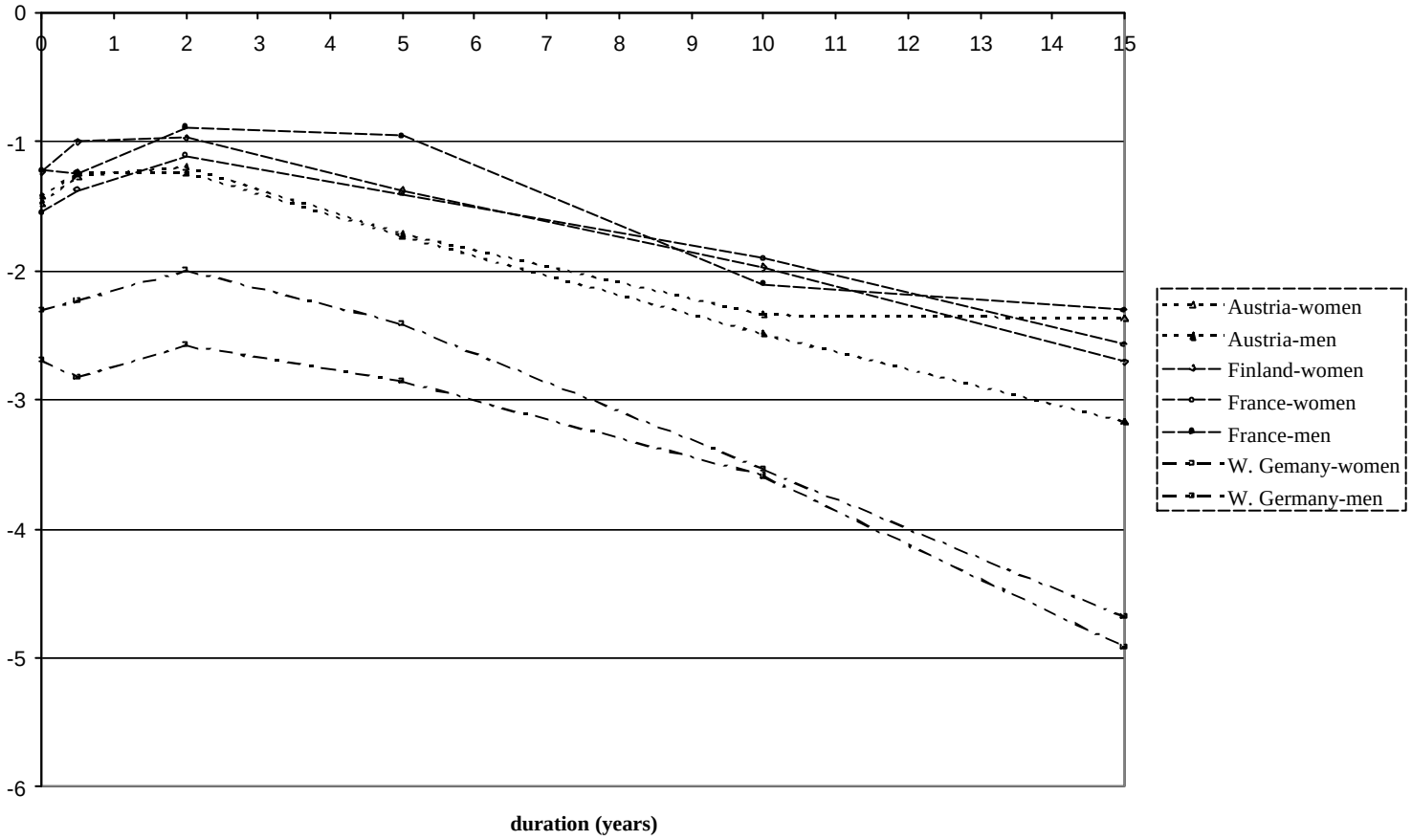

Table 1. Samples, Fertility and Family Surveys

	Country/Survey Year							
	Finland 19891982		**France 1994**		**Austria 1995-96**		**W. Germany 1992**	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Age at Interview	22-46	28-46*	20-49		20-54		20-39	
Total Sample	4,155	1,670	2,944	1,941	5,581	1,539	3,014	2,024
Analytic Sample**	3,571		2,387	1,402	3,515	1,010	1,499	774
# Birth/union spells	8,948		6,058	3,423	8,701	2,396	3,130	1,538
% spells ending in birth	55.4		56.5	54.3	54.8	49.2	45.1	41.0
% spells respondent has separate child	6.6		10.0	7.6	10.8	8.1	5.1	4.6
% spells partner has separate child	7.5		9.2	9.1	7.3	8.1	5.0	4.8
% spells couple has shared child	64.6		62.0	58.5	22.9	29.2	51.5	41.2

Sources: Prinz et al. 1998; Nikander 1998; Toulemon & de Guibert-Lantoine 1998; Henz 1999; original analyses.
*Selected ages: 28-31, 34-38, 42-46
**Respondents reporting at least one union, valid dates for births, union formation & dissolution, marriage, # partner's children at union formation, and nativity.

Table 2: Stepfamily Parity Variables

Couple Parities	Total parity 1+ none shared	Total parity 1+ one partner not parent	Total parity 2+ one shared child
Neither partner has children	0	0	0
Total parity = 1			
Child shared	0	0	0
Child not shared	1	1	0
Total parity = 2+			
Both shared	0	0	0
One shared	0	0	1
None shared, each partner is parent	1	0	0
None shared, one partner not parent	1	1	0

Table 3. Relative Risk of Conception by Parity

	Country							
	Finland		**France**		**Austria**		**W. Germany**	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Couple has no children (omitted)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Total parity one	**0.57**		1.05	1.02	**0.43**	**0.45**	**0.63**	**0.40**
Total parity two	**0.23**		**0.65**	**0.52**	**0.41**	**0.53**	**0.22**	**0.13**
Total parity three	**0.21**		**0.65**	**0.43**	**0.50**	**0.54**	**0.26**	**0.10**
Total parity four or more	**0.27**		1.19	0.67	**0.51**	**0.40**	**0.09**	**0.17**
No shared children (parity 1+)	**2.22**		0.98	1.44	1.15	1.05	**4.19**	**8.09**
One partner not parent (parity 1+)	0.87		1.32	1.02	**1.43**	1.60	**0.41**	0.46
Only one shared child (parity 2+)	**1.83**		**1.45**	**1.64**	0.92	1.11	**1.67**	1.21

Source: Fertility and Family Surveys: Finland (1989, 1992), France (1994), Austria (1995-96) and West Germany (1992)
Note: All models include controls for union status and order, nativity, respondent's and partner's ages, and calendar time.
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

NOTES

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2. Authors are listed according to the timing of their involvement in this collaborative project.

3. The policy and demographic regime in the former East Germany was quite different than that in West Germany during the period we observe, so we do not include data from East German respondents in this analysis. In a subsequent paper, we analyze stepfamily fertility in the former socialist countries, including East Germany.

4. Because information on the deaths of partners' children is available only if the child lived with the respondent and remained in the household at the time of interview, and we want parallel data on respondent's and partner's children, we ignore child deaths in computing parity. The proportion of respondents reporting a child who died before the respondent reached the end of her/his childbearing years is exceedingly small.

In Austria, Chile, Germany, Lithuania and Romania (parental leave only), benefits are calculated based on previous net (post income tax and social security contribution) earnings, while in France benefits are calculated based on post-social-security-contribution earnings. Payment rates for these countries reflect the proportion of the appropriate net earnings replaced by the benefit. In Austria, Finland, France and West Germany, they found decreasing birth risks with increasing combined parity, particularly after the couple had at least two children, consistent with increasing costs of rearing larger numbers of children.Â The second shared birth provides only the value of a full sibling; in stepfamilies, the existence of at least one half-sibling may be sufficient.Â Finland and Austria provide variability in social provisions for childcare and gender equality, which enables us to test hypotheses about how these issues influence responsibility for rearing coresident and nonresident, womenâ€™s or menâ€™s children. Evidence for nation-states suggests that the long-standing negative relationship between fertility and economic development might turn positive at high lev.Â Changes in family policies also support recent changes in gender roles towards a higher degree of gender egalitarianism (Neyer and Andersson 2008). Esping-Andersen and Billari (2015) argue that fertility tends to decline when women enter the labour market in large numbers, but that it begins to increase if a society approaches gender egalitarianism.Â Migration is usually selective in terms of individual assets, such as health status and the resources to migrate (Abramitzky et al. 2012; Blau and Mackie 2017; Mehta and Elo 2012).