



## Article

# Perceptions of Gender Equality among Icelandic Year 10 Adolescents: Population Studies 1992, 2006, and 2014

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**Abstract:** The aim of this research is to outline, for the first time, the changes in attitudes towards gender equality among 10th graders in Iceland based on data obtained from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) in 1992, 2006, and 2014. The sampling proportions were high (85.1% in 1992, 43.2% in 2006, and 77.9% in 2014), thereby reflecting parameters (population values) rather than statistics (sample values). Boys and girls are viewing gender roles as being more equal with time, while, concurrently, girls tend to have more gender-equal attitudes than boys. The present paper provides an unparalleled examination of changes in attitudes towards gender equality. After a backlash in adolescents' attitudes, revealed in the 2006 study, there are positive signs of more gender-equal attitudes in the 2014 results.

**Keywords:** adolescents; gender attitudes; household labor; Iceland; gender roles; equality



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## 1. Introduction

Attitudes towards gender roles in many industrialized societies have become increasingly egalitarian over time, e.g., [1–6]. Iceland is no exception, and has been ranked number one on the Gender Gap Index for ten years in a row (a higher ranking indicates a lower gap) and has the international reputation of being a paradise of gender equality [7,8]. For decades, female participation in the labor force has been among the highest in the Western world and their level of education is also high compared to males. Still there are also signs of stagnation, and research examining adolescents' attitudes on gender equality indicated quite a backlash among the cohort of 10th graders in 2006 [9], with findings revealing that younger people tend to have more traditional attitudes towards gender equality than older generations [10]. Hence, Iceland provides an interesting example to look deeper into issues of gender equality.

Research findings reporting on attitudes towards gender equality clearly show that women have more gender-equal attitudes than men [11–14]. However, men's attitudes have become more egalitarian, and the gap between men and women has decreased over time. It has been argued that the reason women are more invested in gender equality in general than men is because women have a more vested interest in gender equality than men [11,14]. This relates to the 'interest based' theoretical explanation of attitudes towards gender equality, which proposes that since women benefit more from gender equality, they are more likely to endorse feminist attitudes [14].

Modernity has brought some severe changes in people's lives. Inglehart and Norris [15] have argued that the modernization of societies, linked with economic development, has brought about changed gender roles and cultural attitudes towards gender equality. This entails two major dimensions of cross-cultural variation which are linked to the rise of gender equality in post-industrial societies: "(1) a transition from traditional to secular-rational values and (2) a transition from survival to self-expression values." (p. 11). Emphases on structural reforms and women's rights play an essential role in cultural

shifts towards greater gender equality, even though cultural shifts do not guarantee such alterations they are important in the process [15]. Research has revealed that from the 1970s to the early 1990s young men and women adopted more gender-equal attitudes, but from the 1990s attitudes towards gender equality have remained fairly stagnant [2,3,5]. These trends have been emphasized since they imply doubt in the accepted view of gender equality being a linear process towards greater gender equality [2]. Although there has been a big change in the lifestyle of women due to increased participation in the workforce and in combining the daily obligations of paid work with family responsibilities, changes in men's behavior has been more limited [3]. For example, participation in household chores by men has not kept up with the increased labor force participation of women [2,15–19].

The socialization of gender role attitudes starts early in life [12]. As Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz [20] have indicated, “identities are constantly shifting as we negotiate multiple and often contradictory roles throughout our lives” and how we sense “who we are” for the moment also structures “who we can become” (p. 2). Research findings have suggested that adolescents' ideas and perceptions of gender roles are limited by structural ideas and gendered stereotypes as there is a significant difference in how young men and women imagine their futures [21].

Parents play an important role in influencing their children's attitudes towards gender equality. Thus, the family signifies an important context in children's gendered ideas, and within the family an important gender socialization takes place and the attitudes of the parents and their education is a source of societal change when it comes to gender role attitudes [12,22]. Mothers' employment status and education seems to play an important role [11,23]. These findings are in direct line with the ‘exposure based’ theoretical explanation which suggests that lived experiences of women and when they are exposed with discrimination, for example in the workplaces, or early acquaintance and knowledge on feminist idea, leads to more progressive attitudes on gender and less acceptance of gender stereotypes [14].

Gender norms and how they are socially reproduced in institutions and through cultural practices are related to behavior and ensuing quality of life [24] in a way that might be more nuanced and complicated than previously understood [2]. Therefore, it is important to study children's attitudes towards gender equality and in what ways the construction of gender in society affects their ideas of gender and gender roles. As has been underlined by scholars, not only have gender attitudes changed since the 1970s, but our understanding of gender itself has also changed [13].

In this article, we introduce findings on attitudes towards gender equality that were examined across several gender roles among Icelandic 10th graders. The participants were Icelandic adolescents in Year 10 cohorts who participated the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey in 1992, 2006, and 2014. The findings reveal that after quite a backlash, discovered in the 2006 survey, the attitudes towards gendered division of labor in the home are on the rise again. This is in line with the social and economic changes in Iceland that emphasized individualism and transnational business masculinity before the economic crash in 2008, but the focus turned towards different and more collective values in the years to follow.

### *1.1. Iceland, the ‘Promised’ Land of Gender Equality*

Iceland is considered to be at the forefront of gender equality worldwide, being ranked number one 11 years in a row by The World Economic Forum's global gender gap report [8]. Female labor participation in Iceland was the highest among the OECD countries in 2017 [25]. In 2017, the labor force participation among Icelandic women peaked at 85.7% while it was 90.8% for men [26]. Since the early 1980s, university enrolments have risen much faster among women than men and women now comprise up to 70% of all university graduates [25,27]. Still the gendered division of the labor market in Iceland is notable. Men and women tend to enter different lines of work, with more women being employed in education, health, and welfare, and men occupying trades and craft jobs in higher

numbers [28]. Men are also more likely to occupy the higher ranked jobs in workplaces [29]. Not only is the workforce gender segregated, but it is also characterized by an ongoing gendered wage gap of around 15% in favor of men's salary [29,30]. Furthermore, gender equality rankings have limitations, focusing on health, education, economy, and politics, overlooking important institutional variables, such as social norms and values [31].

Gender roles and workforce participation within families is an important part of how children learn to 'do gender', as well as the sharing of chores within the family and the home. According to findings from research on the gendered division of household labor in Iceland, the main burden of daily household chores and the care of children is still more of a female responsibility [19,32,33]. However, since a new parental leave act came into effect in 2000, there have been some changes in fathers' participation in their children's upbringing. The parental leave act gave parents equal rights to parental leave for a total of nine months. What is new in the act is that three months are tied to the mother, three months are tied to the father, and the remaining three months the parents can divide at will. The three months tied to each parent are non-transferrable [34–36].

Research conducted before and after the new laws on parental leave reveal that fathers are, in increasing numbers, using their rights to take paternal leave and Icelandic fathers spend more days of paternal leave with their newborns than fathers from other Nordic countries. It has been argued that the law on parental leave has had a fundamental impact on fathers' participation in care and their participation has increased in the last two decades [35,36].

### *1.2. The Imagined Future of Young People in a Globalized World*

During the first two decades of the 21st century, Iceland has been going through rapid social and economic changes. These changes are, of course, not limited to Iceland but part of a global change including increased globalization and less restricted mobility of commerce, people, and capital [37]. Ideas about gender have also changed during this same period, with more weight being placed on 'transnational business masculinity', which in Iceland had its emphasis on so-called "outvasion Vikings" [37–40]. Much of this discourse was heavily gendered, with an emphasis on masculinity glorifying competition, hard work, nationalism, rationalism, and brilliance. In Iceland, in the discourse of the 'outvasion Vikings', men were usually portrayed as risk-taking actors, with women instead portrayed as icons [37,41–43]. This period ended harshly with an economic collapse in October, 2008 [44].

With its weight on marketization, privatization, and the weakened role of governments, the ideology of neo-liberalism began to make an impact on Icelandic discourse and society in the last two decades of the 20th century [37,41,45]. In line with this, while essential ideas about gender roles remain muted in Iceland, a new discourse has emerged that combines conservative gender attitudes with the principles of neo-liberalism. This ideological combination frames the gender pay gap and other inequalities in social outcomes as an aggregation of women's personal choices [9].

Raised in the era of transnational business masculinity, outvasion Vikings and the supposed 'paradise of gender equality', young men in Iceland talk about old and new masculinities. Ambiguously, they position themselves apart from traditional masculinity as they describe the new and modern masculinity as being influenced by feminism, narrowing the gap between men and women, and having changed expectations. They claim that they are aligned with some traditional ideas of masculinity but describe a new type of masculinity which they claim involves more freedom "to express friendship and positivity towards emotionally involved parental roles" [41]. These new values are especially prominent around fatherhood [41].

Although young men express their ideas on new and old masculinity and place an emphasis on fatherhood being a big part of identifying with the new masculinity, new research on young women in Iceland reveals that they are becoming "fed up with patriarchy" [41,46]. To stand up to the subjugation of the social structure based on patriarchal ideas, many

young women in Iceland have actively participated in protest (e.g., #freethenipple) based on feminist ideology “centering on reclaiming the body from oppressive structure of patriarchy which, through shame and pornification, have taken their bodies and their ability to choose” (p. 133) [46].

One might assume that in a gender-equal country like Iceland, future generations would be even more invested in gender equality than older generations and children raised in one of the most gender-equal countries in the world would take gender equality as intrinsically part of their life and their ideas would constitute no differences between the gendered roles and participation in public and private life. On the contrary, though, research in Iceland has revealed that generations brought up in the ‘aura of gender equality’ [47] have more traditional attitudes towards gender equality than previous generations [9,10,48].

In this article, we introduce data to shed light on whether there is still any evidence of the backlash in attitudes towards gender division of household labor among Icelandic 10th graders, as was found in the 2006 study. Thus, the present study examines changes in attitudes towards gender roles to see if they have moved towards becoming more equal over time and whether girls express greater equality towards gender roles than boys.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Participants

Participants in Iceland were adolescents in Year 10 cohorts who participated the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey in 1992, 2006, and 2014, see Table 1. There were 3575 participants from 1992 (1780 or 49.8% girls), 1968 from 2006 (975 or 49.5% girls), and 3431 in 2014 (1696 or 49.4% girls). The participants represent samples of Year 10 (based on the number of 16-year-old Icelanders) in the corresponding year: 85.1% in 1992, 43.2% in 2006, and 77.9% in 2014 [49].

**Table 1.** Age by dataset.

| Dataset | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Min–Max |
|---------|----------|-----------|---------|
| 1992    | 15.35    | 0.49      | 14–17   |
| 2006    | 15.99    | 0.08      | 15–16   |
| 2014    | 16.00    | 0.14      | 15–18   |

### 2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Participants had to have indicated their sex as male or female and their class as Year 10 in each of the three HBSC samples.

### 2.3. Measures

Participants were asked about their sex (boy, girl), class, age, and other basic demographics across all three surveys. There were between one and seven questions about equality in three surveys. The questions are clearly heteronormative, which reflected society when the first questionnaire was employed in 1992. Although thoughts on sexuality have become increasingly liberal since 1992, and heteronormative questions would not apply to every student responding to the questionnaire, we found it important to keep the questions unchanged to enable comparison across surveys. The first question asked about separation of duties at home if both the husband and wife work outside the home. Ten duties were listed: Wash clothes, cook, clean, shopping (food), wake up to young children, attend parent teacher meetings, wash the dishes, look after the finances, minor house repairs, and car maintenance. Each duty was answered on a 5-point scale coded as: −2 (Always the wife), −1 (Rather the wife), 0 (Equal), 1 (Rather the husband), and 2 (Always the husband).

In addition to the first question, six additional equality questions were included in the 2006 and 2014 surveys. The second question asked, “Which statement best describes your attitude towards the general position of men and women in Icelandic society?” Response

options were as follows: 2 (The position of men is much better than the position of women), 1 (The position of men is a bit better than the position of women), 0 (The position of men and women is equal), −1 (The position of women is a bit better than the position of men), and −2 (The position of women is much better than the position of men).

The third question asked, “Do you believe that men and women with equal education have an equal salary?” answer options were 2 (No, men have a salary that is much higher), 1 (No, men have a salary that is a bit higher), 0 (Yes, women and men have equal salary), −1 (No, women have a salary that is a bit higher), and −2 (No, women have a salary that is much higher).

The fourth question asked, “In general, do you believe that women and men have equal opportunity in the job market?” Response options were: 2 (No, men have much greater opportunities), 1 (No, men have more opportunities), 0 (Yes, women and men have the same opportunities), −1 (No, women have more opportunities), and −2 (No, women have much greater opportunities).

The fifth question asked, “Do you believe that either men or women are more able when it comes to bringing up children or do you think the sexes are equally able?” Response options were: 2 (Men are much more able), 1 (Men are a bit more able), 0 (The sexes are equally able), −1 (Women are a bit more able), and −2 (Women are much more able).

The sixth and seventh questions asked, “Do you agree or disagree that it is fair that the partner with the lower salary carries a greater responsibility for home duties?” and “Do you agree or disagree that fathers should take an equal part in the care of their children, equal to that of the mothers of said children?” Response options for both questions were as follows: 0 (Completely agree), 1 (Rather agree), 2 (Rather disagree), and 3 (Completely disagree).

#### 2.4. Procedure and Compliance with Ethical Standards

The study examined three Icelandic datasets (i.e., 1992, 2006, and 2014) from a survey program, the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC), that is a part of the World Health Organization’s (WHO) collaborative cross-national initiative [50]. This survey program gathers anonymous and private data. The Icelandic Data Protection Authority (Persónuvernd) approved these surveys (approval code S6463) to comply with relevant ethical standards. Participants were provided with appropriate privacy, anonymity, and the ability not to answer any questions and to withdraw at any time. The standard school survey methodology for questionnaires was followed as described in more detail by Arnarsson, Sveinbjornsdottir [51].

#### 2.5. Statistical Analysis

SPSS (version 24) was used to analyze the data. The question asking about separation of duties at home if both the husband and wife work outside the home was analyzed in two different ways. First, the 5-point scale was collapsed into three categories women’s job, equal, and men’s job and used to report the percentage of boys and girls in each category. Second, the full 5-point scale was used to show the distance from zero where zero would represent a job being seen equally for women and men. The large sampling proportions mean that the results reflect parameters (population values) rather than statistics (sample values), thus reducing the need for inferential statistics or statistical power considerations.

### 3. Results

Attitudes towards gender roles were examined in relation to several household chores. Table 2 shows adolescents’ attitudes towards different jobs (i.e., “Whose job is it?”). Looking at the percentage of boys who rated the jobs as being equally for men and women, it is clear that equality has increased from 1992 to 2014, despite a dip in 2006, for all of the jobs listed. There was a large increase in equality for ‘minor house repairs’ and ‘car maintenance’. For the girls, the results related to changes from 1992 to 2014 are mixed. Girls report higher equality to jobs like washing clothes, shopping, waking up to young children, looking after finances, minor house repairs, and car maintenance. However, a smaller percentage of girls



in 2014 rated some jobs as being equal for men and women compared with girls in 1992. These jobs included cooking, cleaning, attending parent–teacher meetings, and washing dishes. However, the reduced equality of the cooking jobs among girls can be explained by an increased view among girls that cooking is a men’s job (Table 2). Overall, Icelandic adolescents are moving towards equality over time with the 2014 measures being closest to equality for all but three items (i.e., wake up to young children, go to parent–teacher meetings, and handle finances). The differences between girls and boys across the three samples suggest that girls are, on average, closer to perceiving gender equality than boys on all of the different gender equality measures. When asked to evaluate perceptions of equality between men and women, the changes from 2006 to 2014 (see Table 3) suggest that both boys and girls see an improvement in general equality, equal salary for equal education, an equal opportunity job market, and equal ability to bring up children. A large majority of girls and boys think that fathers should take equal part in the care of their children, with little change from 2006 to 2014 (Table 4).

**Table 2.** Percentage whose job it is if both work outside the home.

| Question                       | Women’s Job |       | Equal |       | Men’s Job |       |
|--------------------------------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|-------|
|                                | Boys        | Girls | Boys  | Girls | Boys      | Girls |
| Wash clothes                   |             |       |       |       |           |       |
| 1992                           | 46.5        | 28.6  | 53.2  | 71.2  | 0.3       | 0.2   |
| 2006                           | 57.3        | 44.7  | 42.1  | 54.8  | 0.6       | 0.5   |
| 2014                           | 34.7        | 24.6  | 64.5  | 75.0  | 0.8       | 0.4   |
| Cook                           |             |       |       |       |           |       |
| 1992                           | 28.8        | 11.0  | 68.6  | 87.4  | 2.5       | 1.5   |
| 2006                           | 31.5        | 17.8  | 62.9  | 78.2  | 5.7       | 4.0   |
| 2014                           | 22.1        | 11.2  | 73.0  | 86.0  | 4.9       | 2.8   |
| Clean                          |             |       |       |       |           |       |
| 1992                           | 31.5        | 11.0  | 67.8  | 88.4  | 0.7       | 0.5   |
| 2006                           | 43.6        | 21.9  | 55.2  | 76.8  | 1.2       | 1.2   |
| 2014                           | 27.0        | 11.2  | 71.8  | 88.2  | 1.2       | 0.7   |
| Shopping (food)                |             |       |       |       |           |       |
| 1992                           | 23.7        | 13.8  | 71.3  | 84.6  | 5.0       | 1.6   |
| 2006                           | 31.8        | 23.0  | 63.2  | 73.4  | 5.1       | 3.6   |
| 2014                           | 19.8        | 11.8  | 75.2  | 86.5  | 5.0       | 1.6   |
| Wake up to young children      |             |       |       |       |           |       |
| 1992                           | 22.5        | 12.6  | 75.8  | 86.7  | 1.6       | 0.7   |
| 2006                           | 24.0        | 14.6  | 72.3  | 83.6  | 3.7       | 1.8   |
| 2014                           | 16.5        | 6.1   | 80.9  | 92.8  | 2.5       | 1.1   |
| Attend parent-teacher meetings |             |       |       |       |           |       |
| 1992                           | 14.4        | 5.4   | 80.8  | 92.5  | 4.7       | 2.1   |
| 2006                           | 18.4        | 15.4  | 76.5  | 81.9  | 5.0       | 2.7   |
| 2014                           | 12.8        | 7.4   | 84.0  | 91.1  | 3.1       | 1.5   |
| Wash dishes                    |             |       |       |       |           |       |
| 1992                           | 16.1        | 3.1   | 79.0  | 92.6  | 4.8       | 4.3   |
| 2006                           | 23.2        | 8.3   | 69.2  | 82.5  | 7.6       | 9.1   |
| 2014                           | 15.1        | 4.9   | 79.4  | 91.1  | 5.5       | 4.0   |
| Look after finances            |             |       |       |       |           |       |
| 1992                           | 5.5         | 3.1   | 58.3  | 76.0  | 36.2      | 20.9  |
| 2006                           | 7.6         | 5.5   | 50.7  | 61.0  | 41.6      | 33.5  |
| 2014                           | 6.0         | 3.4   | 66.2  | 81.5  | 27.9      | 15.1  |

Table 2. Cont.

| Question            | Women's Job |       | Equal |       | Men's Job |       |
|---------------------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|-------|
|                     | Boys        | Girls | Boys  | Girls | Boys      | Girls |
| Minor house repairs |             |       |       |       |           |       |
| 1992                | 2.3         | 0.6   | 27.8  | 42.3  | 69.8      | 57.1  |
| 2006                | 2.7         | 1.8   | 16.3  | 24.4  | 81.0      | 75.7  |
| 2014                | 3.1         | 1.0   | 42.3  | 54.1  | 54.6      | 45.9  |
| Car maintenance     |             |       |       |       |           |       |
| 1992                | 2.3         | 0.8   | 24.5  | 45.9  | 73.2      | 53.2  |
| 2006                | 2.3         | 1.4   | 19.0  | 25.8  | 78.6      | 72.8  |
| 2014                | 2.6         | 1.0   | 43.7  | 51.6  | 53.8      | 47.4  |

Note. Adding up the percentages in each row for boys and girls separately will give  $100 \pm 0.1$  due to rounding.

Table 3. Percentage attitude towards the position of men and women in Icelandic society on various aspects.

| Data Set                                   | Women Better (Off) |       | Equal |       | Men Better (Off) |       |
|--|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|-------|
|  | Boys               | Girls | Boys  | Girls | Boys             | Girls |
| General position                           |                    |       |       |       |                  |       |
| 2006                                       | 2.8                | 1.8   | 31.8  | 16.1  | 65.4             | 82.1  |
| 2014                                       | 3.1                | 1.2   | 39.7  | 22.0  | 57.1             | 76.8  |
| Equal education thus equal salary          |                    |       |       |       |                  |       |
| 2006                                       | 2.5                | 1.8   | 18.4  | 9.8   | 79.1             | 88.4  |
| 2014                                       | 1.9                | 0.6   | 30.3  | 19.3  | 67.8             | 80.1  |
| Equal opportunity in the job market        |                    |       |       |       |                  |       |
| 2006                                       | 5.5                | 1.8   | 38.1  | 29.1  | 56.4             | 69.1  |
| 2014                                       | 4.6                | 1.1   | 52.1  | 39.8  | 43.2             | 59.1  |
| Able when it comes to bringing up children |                    |       |       |       |                  |       |
| 2006                                       | 45.3               | 41.9  | 49.9  | 56.1  | 4.8              | 2.1   |
| 2014                                       | 27.6               | 23.1  | 67.3  | 75.8  | 5.1              | 1.1   |

Table 4. Percentage attitude towards home duties responsibilities and care of children.

| Data Set   | Completely Agree |       | Rather Agree |       | Rather Disagree |       | Completely Disagree |       |
|--|------------------|-------|--------------|-------|-----------------|-------|---------------------|-------|
|  | Boys             | Girls | Boys         | Girls | Boys            | Girls | Boys                | Girls |
| Fair that the partner with lower salary carries greater home duties responsibility |                  |       |              |       |                 |       |                     |       |
| 2006   | 9.6              | 3.8   | 30.2         | 13.1  | 39.2            | 44.0  | 21.0                | 39.1  |
| 2014   | 7.6              | 2.3   | 28.3         | 15.8  | 40.5            | 41.5  | 23.7                | 40.3  |
| Fathers should take equal part in care of their children                           |                  |       |              |       |                 |       |                     |       |
| 2006   | 57.7             | 77.1  | 33.1         | 17.9  | 5.6             | 1.2   | 3.6                 | 3.9   |
| 2014   | 60.6             | 76.9  | 32.5         | 18.7  | 4.4             | 1.4   | 2.5                 | 3.1   |

#### 4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to map the changes in attitudes towards gender equality among Icelandic 10th graders at three points in time: 1992, 2006, and 2014. Iceland provides an excellent example to look deeper into the issues of gender equality since it has been ranked number one on the Gender Gap Index for ten years in a row and has the international reputation of being a country of great gender equality [7,8]. In the midst of economic success in the first decade of the 21st century, led by the idolized 'outvasion Vikings' [37,52], and with Icelandic society on a fast track towards increased individualism

and marketization [41], the platform for collective struggle for any particular rights was limited and the struggle for gender equality was not excluded. At the same time, the dominant discourse in Iceland on gender equality has been mixed. Since the country is doing very well on issues of gender equality in comparison to other countries around the world, it can be said that there is a consensus on the importance of gender equality. At the same time, changes, such as the closing of the gendered wage gap and the inclusion of more women in executive positions, are happening at a very slow rate and there is no consensus on the scope of the remaining inequalities.

In line with the dominant discourse during the first decade of the 21st century, with its weight on economic success and individualism, the attitudes of 10th graders in 2006 were more traditional than they had been among the same cohort in 1992. Although the backlash in attitudes towards gender equality among 10th graders in 2006 compared with 10th graders in 1992 were in stark contrast with this dominant discourse in Iceland, it was congruous with trends in research findings showing stagnation among adults' attitudes from other Western countries [2,3,11]. This also confirms Knight and Brinton [2] proposition that attitudes towards gender equality are not a "single continuum between traditional and egalitarian" but rather a complex, non-linear process.

Research has revealed that the socialization of gender role attitudes starts early in life [12] and role models and social institutions play important roles in shaping ideas and attitudes among children and young people [11,22,24,53]. The data from the HBSC survey does not provide an opportunity to look more closely at parents as role models. However, in light of high educational levels and workforce participation among women in Iceland, as well as fathers participation in childbearing, it might be argued that Icelandic parents are good role models since, according to research, these factors play an important role in children's attitudes towards gender equality [11,12,53]. The notion of Icelandic women being good role models in general is in line with the exposure-based theoretical explanation of attitudes towards gender equality. Children who are exposed to women who defy typical gender stereotypes by being engaged in the labor force and who have higher levels of education will ultimately lead to less acceptance of traditional gender roles and an expectation of greater gender equality [14].

As can be seen from the 2014 result, attitudes towards gender equality are moving towards more equity and more boys and girls think that parents should share the household chores equally than in 2006. After the economic crash in 2008, there were several changes in the dominant discourse around gender roles and gender equality in Iceland. Now the 'outvasion Vikings' are not valued, and transnational business masculinity and competition are emphasized far less. The value of the family became more prominent, as can be seen in the discourse of young men in a study by Jóhannsdóttir and Gíslason [41]. In their study, the researchers found that young men situate themselves within ideas related to new masculinity which they claim appreciates fatherhood and the 'softer' side of men than traditional masculinity has done. The boys who participated in the HBSC survey seem to relate to these new ideas of masculinity as they are more likely than in the 2006 survey to think it is normal for parents to share the household chores equally. The girls who are 'fed up with patriarchy' [46] also talk about these new ideas as they contradict mainstream ideas of the female body and behavior. They have displayed the courage to stand up and make their voices heard in a society that has more tolerance for feminist ideology and diversity than at the turn of the 21st century.

Passing new laws relating to gender equality, though, does not always manage to actuate real changes in attitudes as the perpetual gender pay gap in Iceland has shown. On the other hand, the laws on parental leave, passed in 2000, seem to have influenced attitudes on childrearing among fathers [36]. Research findings on fathers' involvement in caring for their children seems to have influenced the ideas of the 10th graders participating in the HBSC research in Iceland since they were most likely to claim that parents should divide childrearing equally.



Given that participants in the current study were 10th graders in Icelandic schools, it is likely that their questionnaire responses could, in some ways, reflect the situation in their own homes and how their own parents share household duties. Research among adults in Iceland has revealed that despite being the most gender-equal country in the world, women still bear the burden of household chores and child rearing [19,32,33]. The findings introduced here appear to support this contention since most of the participants were more likely to claim that women should do a greater share of the household labor.

In all three surveys, girls had more gender-equal attitudes than boys. This is in accordance with research findings among adults which has revealed that women in general have more gender-equal attitudes than men [11,12,14]. These findings also support the ‘interest based’ theoretical explanation of attitudes towards gender equality [14] suggesting that girls are knowledgeable about their vested interest in gender equality. In fact Hjalmsdottir [54] findings from focus group interviews with 10th graders in Iceland indicated that girls as young as 15 years are very well aware of their gendered position in society and their vested interest in gender equality. Additionally common to adolescents in the current study, and adults in other research, is that attitudes are becoming more equal over time and the gap between the attitudes of boys and girls has decreased over time [11].

Things are certainly moving in the right direction when it comes to attitudes towards gender equality among 10th graders in Iceland. Still, it is interesting that in a country which has been at the top of gender-equal measures for such a long time, attitudes towards the gendered division of household labor have not become more equal. One might assume that Iceland would be raising children who see no gendered difference in their abilities to share household labor equally. However, continued work and vigilance is needed in this field. Given the history of struggle for gender equality, as with other equalities, it is a reminder that social changes still need to be fought for and protected. The socialization of future generations plays a key role in such changes; therefore, it is important to map their attitudes to be able to make plans about how to work with their ideas towards change.

#### *Limitations and Future Studies*

Cross-sectional studies give a limited idea about potential causal factors. However, the parameters presented are from three large population studies showing what the situation actually is, rather than presenting inferential statistics. The results shown here rely on data that have been gathered using large time intervals to capture what may be slow changes in society. The statistics cover the latest HBSC data available on equality and attitudes in Iceland and, thus, give a clear trajectory that future studies need to examine further using shorter time intervals to examine current developments (e.g., #MeToo) in more detail.

#### **5. Conclusions**

Attitudes towards gender equality are moving in the right direction in Iceland though they seem to be moving slowly. Notwithstanding, the findings from these three time periods show that attitudes towards gender equality do not follow a linear continuum but is a more complex process. Girls have more gender-equal attitudes than boys in relation to gender roles. However, both boys and girls are viewing gender roles as becoming more equal with time.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study examined three Icelandic datasets (i.e., 1992, 2006, and 2014) from a survey program, Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC), that is a part of the World Health Organization’s (WHO) collaborative cross-national initiative [50]. This survey program gathers data that is anonymous and private. The Icelandic Data Protection Authority

(Persónuvernd) approved these surveys (approval code S6463) to comply with relevant ethical standards. Participants were secured appropriate privacy, anonymity, and ability not to answer any questions or withdraw. The standard school survey methodology with questionnaires was followed as described in more detail by Arnarsson, Sveinbjörnsdóttir [51].

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data are not publicly available.

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