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The Gender Gap in the Religiosity of Polish Society

Abstract: A gender gap in the religiosity of men and women is one of the classical topic of sociology and psychology of religion. Until recently, however, most of the researcher were conducted in Western European and the USA, which calls into question the thesis about the universality of this phenomenon. Hitherto no systematic analysis of gender gap in the religiosity was conducted for Poland. The following text has one descriptive and one explanatory purpose. It seeks to provide answers to the following questions: (1) Does the GGR exist in Poland, and, if so, to which extent and in which dimension of religiosity? Which GGR is persistent, and which changes over time?; and (2) Do structural variables or ideology explain the observed GGR change in time and in which dimension of religiosity? Do we observe the same trend across all dimensions of religiosity?

Keywords: Gender, religion, sociology of religion, gender gap in the religiosity, men's religiosity, women's religiosity

Research carried out over the last 40 years based on a variety of data from different, mostly Western, countries has repeatedly revealed a gender gap in the religiosity of men and women (hereinafter: GGR). Almost universally, women go to church more often than men do (Field 1993), engage in religious organisations more often (Thompson 1991) and pray more (Greeley 1992). Women are also more likely to declare their faith in God and life after death (Ferraro and Albrecht-Jensen 1991). They tend to be more interested in religion, which is manifested for instance in the fact that they read the Bible more often (Harrison 1983), watch religious programmes on TV and listen to them on the radio (Svenning et al. 1988). Women are also more likely to have mystical experiences (Reinert and Stifler 1993). Moreover, women are generally less dogmatic (Schnabel 2018). Even though these findings are based on relatively recent quantitative research, they can be corroborated by historical studies (cf. McLeod 1996; Hof 2006).

In order to explain the gender gap in religiosity, a number of different theories have been put forward. What these have in common is a presupposition that men are less religious than women, which, as R. Stark aptly puts it, “is a generalisation that holds around the world and across the centuries” (2002: 495). Only recently certain doubts were voiced as to whether we are really dealing with a universal phenomenon. In this respect, it has been pointed out that the empirical foundations of the theory were based on data derived from Western Europe, the USA and Australia, which means that the observed differences concerned Christianity. Studies from non-Christian countries have shown that when it comes to Jews (Schnabel, Hackett and McClendon 2018) or Muslims, for example, the opposite

relationship is most common (Hackett 2016). One therefore cannot claim the universality of GGR across cultures. Furthermore, this allegedly universal gap was supposed to be resistant to change over time and independent of the context of cultural or social developments. However, a recent detailed analysis verified this assumption and forced researchers to come to terms with the fact that the observed differentiation is “a complicated mix of multiple factors” (Hackett 2016: 58) which also necessitates the consideration of the local context (cf. Sullins 2006).

The present body of research on GGR is largely based on cross-national data and focused on the selected aspect of religiosity. This literature, however, has not examined a differentiation within various dimensions of religiosity. Nor did it interrogate how GGR changes in time in the context of socio-demographic and structural variables. Such analyses of the GGR are based on data from a single point in time and are prone to error as they fail to take into the account the change over time (Stark 2002). In the absence of inspection of changes of GGR over time, the analysis of the relationship between selected indicators in one country is being replaced with an analysis between countries displaying different levels of selected indicators. This approach disregards the cultural context and *a priori* excludes the possibility that “religion’s influence relies on national religious context as well as individual beliefs and rituals” (Finke and Adamczyk 2008: 639). In most analyses based on cross-national data, the choice of dependent variables tends to be driven by practical reasons (i.e. the availability of data) rather than theoretical considerations. It also mostly focuses on service attendance, which runs the risk of making erroneous inferences about the nature of change which has taken place (cf. Brenner 2016).

This article aims to fill the above gaps and analyse the change of GGR across time in the specific context of cultural or social developments within one country. Poland is a particularly interesting country for such comparisons over time, due to at least two factors: (1) the spectacular economic growth, which has been ongoing since 1989; (2) the very high level of religiosity (as compared to other European countries) as well as the strong political position of the Roman Catholic Church. Although formally separated from the state, the Church has a moral authority as a representative of Polish national identity, which can be traded off for direct or indirect influence on the policy-making (cf. Grzymała-Busse 2015; Szwed 2019). Considering the economic growth, it was expected that Poland would become similar to Western European countries in terms of values (cf. Gorodnichenko and Roland 2011; Piątkowski 2018). However, this did not happen, as illustrated by the issue of gender equality. Poland ranks 24th among the EU countries on the Gender Equality Index.¹ Since Poland’s first inclusion in the index, its position has been steadily declining: by four positions in the ranking since 2005, and by six versus 2015. Gender inequalities are most evident in the area of power and availability of leisure time. Poland’s performance is lower than the average for EU countries in all areas. It should be noted that Poland’s low ranking is not caused by an increase in inequality but, instead, by the fact that other countries have been reducing inequalities at a faster pace, which translates into an increased gap between Poland and other countries, particularly those of Western Europe, despite the fact

¹ The index is developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality. For more on the methodology, see: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/about>.

that Poland has been systematically catching up with these countries in terms of GDP. Thus, economic growth does not easily translate into the recognition of gender equality, and research suggests that Catholicism is the factor that mediates the process of value change (Marody and Mandes 2017).

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The Theory of GGR in the Context of Social Structure

The examples derived from the studies quoted above show that the religiosity of women differs from that of men in terms of intensity and also in the way it is experienced. These differences have no biological foundation: there is no convincing proof that some religious experiences might be restricted exclusively to members of one gender. On the other hand, there are clear differences in preferences (Suziedelis and Potvin 1981). In this text, I will rely on works inspired by interactionist and performative theories, which indicate that women construct their religious identity differently than men, and “they ‘do’ gender through modes of behavior and comporment that are shaped by regulatory discourses” (Avishai 2008: 412; cf. West and Zimmerman 1987). Women differently identify values that are important to them in various areas of religion. Women consider other theological content to be important because women live differently from men in a gendered society. Thus, the observed differences are not a result of women’s adaptation to the pertinent religious norms but rather constitute another manifestation of gender differences present in society (Schnabel 2018). For example, there is a gender gap in the labour market, expressed via gendered jobs (Siemieńska 1996; Pine 2003) or a pay gap (Gromadzki 2019).

The issue of gendered society should be separated from women’s attitude towards religious institutions (Neitz 1992). The reasons why women get involved and experience their religiosity in an institution that is unequivocally androcentric (Szwed 2019) and promotes the model of patriarchal culture almost without exception have long been a concern for feminists (cf. Yeaman 1987). This is intriguing, especially when one considers the fact that some women are aware of the different exclusion mechanisms prevailing in religious institutions, which was shown by Leszczyńska’s research (cf. 2016, 2019) on lay women employed in organizations of the Catholic Church. The results of relevant research suggest that women attach more importance to relations and relationships than to power, and that they find emotional support in the Church, which is why they are willing to accept exclusion from formal power (cf. Ozorak 1996; Whitehead 2013).

Both groups of issues have been intensively debated for several decades and have inspired a large number of theories relying on biological, psychological and social factors. Even a brief overview of most those theories would go beyond the scope of this work. In this paper, I will focus on sociological concepts that invoke the social structure and sta-

tus. Interested readers are referred to several works that offer a systematic and comparative overview of specific theories (e.g. Francis 1997; Davie and Walter 1998; Trzebiatowska and Bruce 2012).

According to Thomas Luckmann's classic idea (1967), women in industrial society have a lower social status and occupy weaker positions of power than men, which translates into different levels of religiosity. As the modernization process progresses, manifesting itself in industrialisation and urbanisation, women are increasingly better educated, enter the labour market and free themselves from the control of local communities. As a result, their religiosity diminishes and becomes close to that of men. This overall concept about the impact of modernization has taken the form of three theories which explain the causal relationships between these processes in more detail.

In the first version, having a job is the factor that drives a gap in religiosity. The relationship between jobs and religiosity is described in a variety of ways. The best-known explanation is offered by Glock et al. (1967), who claim that a job reduces the amount of leisure time and, consequently, religious practices. Lenski (1953) also draws attention to the fact that nonworking people have a narrower social network and are therefore less subjected to secularisation pressure. Based on these premises, one could expect that having a job will diminish religiosity among people who are employed vis-à-vis those without a job (regardless of reasons) and, therefore, the GGR will correspond to the difference in the proportions of men and women having a job.

Another version of the theory explaining Luckmann's idea points out that a job increases people's sense of security which, in turn, undermines religiosity. This kind of reasoning can be found, for example, in the works by Norris and Inglehart (2008, 2011). According to them, the "need for religious reassurance becomes less pressing under conditions of greater existential security" (2008: 4). Thus, according to this theory, the exposure to exclusion from the labour market should translate into greater religiosity regardless of gender. However, it is also known that women are more exposed to job loss and unemployment (Albanesi and Şahin 2018; Tomescu-Dubrow et al. 2019), which should translate into lower existential security. Based on the above theory, one could expect that the risk of unemployment will boost religiosity regardless of gender and, therefore, the observed GGR will correspond to the difference in the proportion of men and women at risk of unemployment.

In turn, the research undertaken by Feltey and Poloma (1991) goes beyond simply acknowledging the relationship between work and religiosity, indicating the importance of culture as a mediating factor. They argue that the early stages of industrialisation increased the economic dependence of women on men and reduced women's activity to the domestic sphere (cf. Thompson 1991). Running a household, giving birth and bringing up children were to be the main tasks for women, while religion has historically been one of the most important sources of the cultural definition of gender roles as well as the legitimacy of gender-based distinctions in traditional bourgeois families (McGuire 1994). Thus, the gendered industrial society does not only entail women's limited participation in the labour market, but also legitimises the social structure through specific values that are closely related to religiosity. These values, in turn, may persist for longer than the underlying labour market structure and become what Feltey and Poloma (1991: 182) call "gender role ideology", which should be taken into account in order to explain the GGR.

Other studies have found that the correlation between beliefs and traditional views on gender exists regardless of having or not having a job. For instance, Azzi and Ehrenberg (1975) argue that women are more likely than men to attend mass because participation in rituals is part of the extended division of labour at home and is treated as an essentially woman's task. Indifference to religion before childbirth does not necessarily reduce the influence of conservative gender role ideology, which gets "activated" with the arrival of the first child. Research by Michael Levitt (1995) has shown that non-practicing mothers see religious education as desirable for their children. Given the above, we can expect that conservative gender role ideology widens the gender gap in religiosity: women who identify themselves with the traditional family model will be more religious than men who share the same values in this sphere.

Research Design and Sample Selection

The vast majority of GGR research is based on a few selected questions from surveys. The European Values Study (EVS) data are unique in this respect as they allow for the analysis of how different aspects of religiosity change over time. In the article I will firstly discuss the change in the gender gap in religiosity based on all the EVS religiosity variables. I will discuss the data according to the classic division into four dimensions, as proposed by Charles Y. Glock (1964). What needs to be determined is which questions correspond to each dimension of his typology. In this regard, I will rely on the works by Segatti and Brunelli (2010) as well as Palmisano and Todesco (2019), who claim that specific dimensions correspond to the following questions:

- (1) the spiritual dimension: belief in God; belief in life after death; belief in hell; belief in heaven;
- (2) the identity/cultural dimension: self-categorisation as a Roman Catholic; self-categorisation as a religious person; importance of religion in life; importance of encouraging one's children to have religious faith; importance of shared religious beliefs for a successful marriage;
- (3) the behavioral dimension: frequency of attendance at religious services; frequency of prayer outside religious services; belonging to religious or church organizations;
- (4) the institutional dimension: trust in the Church; assessment of the Church's ability to give adequate answers to moral problems and needs of the individual, peoples' spiritual needs, the problems of family life and social problems; an index of acceptance of the teachings of the Church on abortion, divorce, euthanasia, suicide and adultery.

A problem discussed in the context of the GGR analysis is how to present the difference between men and women. The solution that first comes to mind—showing the differences in response rates to each question for women and men—will be misleading because it suggests, for example, that the difference between 90% and 80% is identical to the difference between 30% and 20%, since it amounts to 10 percentage points in both cases. Several solutions to this problem have been proposed. In my analysis, I will rely on the most common solution, i.e. showing the odds ratio. This measure, although not

without its weaknesses,² has the advantage of being relatively easy to interpret.³ Subsequently, I will perform an OLS regression analysis to verify whether the data confirm the expectations formulated above based on a theory about the influence of social structure and ideology on GGR. None of the above describe theories differentiated between the various dimensions of religiosity. Based on the Glock typology, we want to verify if observed differences are stable in time. We assume that the change will be differentiated across various dimensions of religiosity and that the gender differences present in society reappear in new forms rather than simply vanish. Sullins (2006) and Voas et al. (2013) showed that GGR is greater in the case of the individual dimension of religiosity and private religious practice than in the case of public religious practice. For the analysis, we have chosen the importance of God (spiritual dimension) and religion in life (identity/cultural dimension), the frequency of prayer (the behavioural dimension), and the attitude toward abortion (the institutional dimension). From the perspective of Sullins's typology, the importance of God and the frequency of prayer represents private religiosity, while the last two categories—public. Given the missing data and differences in fieldwork methods, the regression analysis will be limited to three EVS editions, namely from 1999, 2008 and 2017.

In order to analyse gender role ideology, I constructed a gender conservatism ideology index. Due to the differences in the questions asked in different edition of the EVS, it is not possible to use an index constructed in the same way. For the 1999 and 2008 data, the index is based on five statements: “A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work” (reverse scale); “Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay”; “Both the husband and wife should contribute to household income” (reverse scale); “A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works”; “A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children”. For the 2017 data, the gender conservatism ideology index is based on the answers to the following statements: “When a mother works for pay, the children suffer”; “A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children”; “All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job”; “A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family”. In each of the three cases, the mean of responses was calculated. In order to facilitate the interpretation, the index scale was reversed. The index takes values from 0 to 4: the higher the value of the index, the more likely the respondent is to accept the statements expressing a conservative vision of a woman's place in the family and society.

² For the advantages and disadvantages of the odds ratio, see [Hailpern and Visintainer 2003](#).

³ In the case of the 90/80 difference, the odds ratio is 2.25, while in the case of the 30/20 difference it is only 1.7. The odds ratio is therefore a function of the size of the difference and the proportion. The odds ratio is calculated as the quotient of two chances, which can be illustrated using a hypothetical example: the odds of finding a woman believer is 9 to 1 (90% of women are believers and 10% are non-believers), which equals 9. The odds of finding a man believer is 8 to 2 (80% are believers, 20% are non-believers), which equals 4. The odds ratio is a result of dividing the odds for women and the odds for men, i.e. 9 to 4, which equals 2.25. The odds ratio takes values from 0 to infinity. A value of 1 means that the proportions are equal. When the odds ratio is less than 1, this means that men (in this example) prevail. With a value above 1, women prevail.

Table 1
Analysed variables

Variable	Descriptions	N	Mean	SD	
Sex	1—women	1999	1,095	0.55	0.50
	0—men	2008	1,510	0.56	0.50
		2017	1,352	0.54	0.49
Education	8—primary, lower secondary or incomplete primary	1999	1,091	12.32	3.04
	11—basic vocational	2008	1,333	14.15	2.93
	12—secondary	2017	1,344	12.64	2.95
	17—tertiary				
Age	Min: 18 Max 95	1999	1,095	47.74	16.97
	Min: 18 Max 87	2008	1,479	44.55	17.19
	Min: 18 Max 87	2017	1,352	49.84	17.64
Income	1—lowest level of income	1999	1,069	3.81	1.82
	10—highest level of income				
	1—below PLN 500	2008	1,163	4.15	1.83
	12—over PLN 36,500				
	1—up to PLN 1,497	2017	1,086	5.01	2.81
	10—over PLN 7,580				
Size of town	1—up to 5,000	1999	1,092	2.45	1.43
	2—5,000–20,000	2008	1,510	2.60	1.47
	3—20,000–100,000	2017	1,352	2.57	1.41
	4—100,000–500,000				
	5—500,000 and more				
Number of residents in the household	Min: 1	1999	1,078	3.33	1.74
	Max: 11 (1999)	2008	1,510	1.48	1.50
	Max: 7 (2008)	2017	1,350	3.21	1.67
	Max: 14 (2017)				
Paid work	1—full or part-time, self-employment	1999	1,095	0.48	0.50
	0—other	2008	1,507	0.50	0.50
		2017	1,349	0.52	0.50
During the last five years, have you experienced a continuous period of unemployment longer than 3 months?	1—yes	1999	1,093	0.08	0.27
	0—no	2008	1,446	0.19	0.39
		2017	1,338	0.16	0.37
During the last five years, have you been dependent on social security at any time?	1—yes	1999	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	0—no	2008	1,482	0.08	0.28
		2017	1,351	0.08	0.27
Gender index	Min: 1	1999	883	2.56	0.43
	Max: 4	2008	1,226	2.44	0.43
		2017	1,177	2.54	0.66
Dependent Variable					
Prayer	0—never prays	1999	1,067	224	156
	365—prays every day of the year	2008	1,364	178	154
		2017	1,318	192	163
Abortion	1—can never be justified	1999	1,037	3.58	2.96
	10—can always be justified	2008	1,460	3.32	2.66
		2017	1,293	3.73	2.90
Importance of religion in life	1—very important,	1999	1,085	1.74	0.80
	4—not at all important	2008	1,487	1.98	0.83
		2017	1,340	1.87	0.87
Importance of God	1—not at all important	1999	1,079	8.36	2.28
	10—very important	2008	1,477	7.92	2.30
		2017	1,329	7.75	2.67

Results

Changes in GGR over 30 years

When analysing the data for the entire population, we can see that the last thirty years have had little impact on the spiritual life of Poles. Faith in God has dropped from 97% to 93%, belief in life after death has declined by 1% and belief in heaven by 1.5%. Looking at the stability of these data, one can understand the meaning of the statement that religion is a permanent element in the life of Poles. However, there has been a change in some respects. During the last thirty years, the belief in hell and the belief reincarnation have undergone their respective corrections. In the former case, we observe an increase of 21%, with a decline by nearly 19% in the latter case. The decline in faith in reincarnation can be explained by the weakening of interest in Eastern religious movements and New Age spirituality, popular in the 1990s (Hall 2007). It is more difficult to explain the increase in faith in hell. There are no convincing studies on this issue. One of possible hypothesis will be that we observe the educational activity of the Church, which has consolidated the theological views of religiously engaged Poles.

The introduction of the gender dimension adds nuance to this picture (Table 2). Nowadays, the odds of finding a woman who is a non-believer versus a believer (1 to 21) is twice as high as in the case of men (1 to 10). This result is striking because men and women were not differentiated in terms of their faith in God in the 1990s, as was the case in the other aspects: with few exceptions, everyone equally declared their faith in God. The observed decline, therefore, is largely due to declining faith among men. The opposite process can be observed when it comes to belief in life after death: while women's beliefs have not changed much, there has been an increase among men. In the case of belief in hell and heaven, the trends have no clear vector. What is invariable, however, is that the gender gap in religiosity between men and women has remained more or less unchanged.

Table 2
The spiritual dimension—Odds ratios

	1990	1999	2008	2017
God	1.94	1.63	2.18**	2.09**
Life after death	2.41**	2.08**	1.93**	1.93**
Hell	2.00**	2.18**	1.65**	1.67**
Heaven	1.86**	1.88**	2.18**	2.00**
Reincarnation	1.48**	1.56*	1.58**	1.17
Importance of God	1.53**	1.56**	1.90**	1.67**

Note: The answer options in the questions concerning faith in God, life after death, hell, heaven, reincarnation were either Yes or No. The importance of God was measured on the 1–10 scale. It was recoded into a binary variable: 1 for 9–10, and 0 for 1–8.

*p < .05

**p < .01

This picture will become a little clearer if we consider the fact that we are observing changes in attitudes starting from different levels. In 1990, almost all Poles (97.5%) believed in God, with approx. $\frac{3}{4}$ believing in life after death or in heaven. This means that there was

hardly any room previously for the gender gap in the faith in God. In other cases, such unanimity was not found, and the gap did exist, consistent with what we know from other Christian countries. At present, these differences range from 5% to 13%, no matter if we observe an increase (believing in hell) or a decrease. In the 1990s, the gap was reduced in the case of belief in hell, with a slight change regarding the importance of God in life. Overall, the differences are statistically significant. However, reincarnation is an exception here. Recent data suggest that the proportions of men and women who believe in it have become more equal.

The second dimension refers to the importance of religion in constructing identities (Table 3). In each question, apart from identifying oneself as Roman Catholic, we see a gap between men and women. When interpreting the data concerning identification with Roman Catholicism, it is important to bear in mind that this question was preceded by the question on belonging to any religious denomination. The vast majority of Poles invariably answer “Yes” (96% in 1990, 92% in 2017) while men prevailed among the respondents who answered “No”. Only those respondents who answered “Yes” were asked which denomination they belonged to. In this case, there is no gap between men and women, which indicates that the genders are distributed fairly evenly between various denominations. In other words, no denominations in Poland are probably more masculine or more feminine.⁴

Table 3

The identity/cultural dimension—Odds ratios

	1990	1999	2008	2017
Belong to religious denomination (1—yes, 0—no)	2.04**	1.75	2.23**	1.73**
Defining oneself as Roman Catholic (1—Catholic, 0—other)	1.59	0.36	0.89	1.77
Defining oneself as a religious person ^a (1—religious, 0—other)	1.90	1.83*	2.46**	1.57*
Importance of religion in life ^b (1—very important, 0—other)	1.53**	1.71**	1.86**	1.86**
Important to encourage children to learn at home: religious faith (1—yes, 0—no)	1.64**	1.22	1.48**	1.30**

^a out of three options (other: Not a religious person, a convinced atheist);

^b a fourpoint scale: 1—very important, 4—not at all important.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

In the remaining cases, we see statistically significant differences, which range from 6% to 14% for the 2017 data. Worth noting is the question about the importance of religion in life, where the biggest and growing differences have been observed. In 1990, the gap was 11%, then it increased to 13%, and to 14% in the most recent survey, in a situation where the overall number of people declaring that religion is very important in their lives has been systematically declining (from 51% to 37%). The overall decline in self-defined identities based on religious categories has been occurring at different rates among women

⁴ However, it should be noted that the followers of other denominations are not numerous enough in Poland to confirm this claim at a reasonable error level.

and men, but the latter are quicker to soften their self-identifications in categories referring to internal experiences, while they retain self-identifications based on categories referring to the public aspect of religion for a longer time.

The third dimension concerns behavioural aspects (Table 4). There are fewer variables here to measure behaviour and to infer about this dimension of religiosity compared to the others but it is striking that this is the greatest difference.

Table 4
The behavioural dimension—Odds ratios

	1990	1999	2008	2017
Attendance ^a	1.95**	1.60**	1.40**	1.73**
Prayer ^b	—	2.51**	2.15**	2.92**
Organisations (1—yes, 0—no)	0.78	1.01	2.39**	2.89**

^a Attendance at religious services was re-coded: 1—at least once a week or more often, 0—other;

^b Pray to God outside of religious services was recoded: 1—every day or more than once a week, 0—other. The question about prayer was not asked in 1990.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

The odds of finding a woman who prays every day or more often than once a week is almost three times greater than in the case of men. This is observed in a situation of systematically decreasing frequency of praying. In the group of people who pray more often than once a week or every day, the respective percentages for subsequent years are as follows: 68%, 58% and 53%. This decrease has been observed mostly due to men, which resulted in a gender gap of 26% in 2017. The odds ratio is also very high in the case of involvement in religious organisations, but in this case one must remember that Poles generally show a low level of involvement in activities of organisations. In 2017, only 8% declared that they were actively involved in religious organisations. Those were twice more likely to be women. As regards attendance at religious rituals, the difference is not so great. However, also in this case we can see that the progressing secularization tends to affect more men than women. In 2017, the gap between men and women attending mass at least once a week or more often was 14%.

The last dimension distinguished on the basis of Charles Y. Glock's typology is the respondents' attitude towards the Roman Catholic Church as an institution and their attitudes towards selected behaviours where the Church preaches restrictive values (Table 5).

What draws attention in this table is that there are hardly any statistically significant differences between men and women (except for the 2008 survey and only at 0.05). These data can help to interpret the phenomenon of gender gap in religiosity, which is why it is worthwhile taking a closer look at them.

Since 1990, Polish women and men have referred to the Church, in relatively equal proportions, as a source of teaching and specific indications for individual behaviours and marriage. Interestingly, sometimes men turned out to be more supportive of Church teachings than women, although these differences are not statistically significant. In the 2008 data, we can see a slowing secularisation process reflected in almost all variables, which can be attributed, with a great deal of certainty, to the emotions associated with the death

Table 5
The institutional dimension—Odds ratios

	1990	1999	2008	2017
Trust in the Church	1.49**	1.61**	1.83**	1.26
Church gives adequate answer to: Moral problems (1—yes, 0—no)	1.14	1.12	1.31*	0.92
Church gives adequate answer to: Family life (1—yes, 0—no)	1.20	1.35	1.17	0.92
Church gives adequate answer to: Spiritual needs (1—yes, 0—no)	1.41	0.97	1.30*	1.11
Church gives adequate answer to: The social problems facing our country today (1—yes, 0—no)	1.10	1.33	1.35*	1.11
It can never be justified: Abortion ^a	0.88	1.18	1.31*	1.18
It can never be justified: Divorce ^a	0.84	0.86	1.01	0.72**
It can never be justified: Euthanasia ^a	1.11	0.91	1.38*	1.18
It can never be justified: Suicide ^a	0.81	0.90	1.11	0.89

^a Answers to selected moral issues were measured on a 10-point scale: 1—never, 10—always. They were recoded into a binary variable: 1 for 1–3, 0 for 4–10.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

of John Paul II (cf. [Marody and Mandes 2017](#)). Importantly, however, the 2017 EVS data and other available studies show that this was a short-lived reversal of the trend and it concerned attitudes towards abortion, divorce and euthanasia, but not the attitudes towards the Church as the source of the right answers in the four domains mentioned above. In the case of divorce, the reversal of trend among women was so strong that the odds ratio for 2017 became statistically significant. As regards the measured percentages, 36% of men were in the 1–3 range (“can never be justified” on a 10-point scale), while the corresponding figure for women was 28%. Based on the available data, it is difficult to identify the possible cause behind this effect, and caution should be exercised given the fact that no similar situations have been observed in case of the remaining issues, which means that other studies should be invoked to confirm any such results.

GGR in the social structure

In order to verify the expectations established in the sociological theories explaining the GGR, I performed a linear regression analysis, model 1 verifies how the observed gap depends on sociodemographic variables. Next, I supplemented the model 2 with variables that verify the expectations concerning the labour market position and gender conservatism ideology index.

Socio-demographic variables are moderately good predictors of prayer frequency: in 1999, the proportion of variance explained in this case was 16%, increasing in subsequent

Table 6
Regression models

	2017						2008									
	Importance of God		Importance of religion		Prayer		Abortion		Importance of God		Importance of religion		Prayer		Abortion	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Female	0.59***	0.73***	-0.20***	-0.22***	67.78***	77.32***	-0.09	-0.25	0.74***	0.76***	-0.26***	-0.24***	65.27***	63.16***	-0.37*	-0.26
Education	-0.03	0.02	-0.01	-0.03*	0.65	0.93	0.04	0.02	-0.01	-0.02	0.01	0.01	-1.14	-0.75	0.02	0.02
Age	0.04***	0.02***	-0.01***	-0.01***	3.47***	2.77***	-0.02***	-0.01	0.03***	0.02***	-0.01***	-0.01***	2.65***	2.40***	-0.02**	-0.01*
Income	-0.11***	-0.06	0.02*	0.01	-4.91**	-2.75	0.13**	0.13**	0.05	0.07	-0.01	-0.03	-7.37**	-6.65*	0.06	0.03
Size of the town	-0.38***	-0.29***	0.15***	0.12***	-15.93***	-13.21***	0.37***	0.33***	-0.23***	-0.17**	0.11***	0.09***	-9.82**	-10.11**	0.13*	0.16*
Number of residents in the household	0.24***	0.26***	-0.07***	-0.08***	9.37**	7.89*	-0.22**	-0.2**	0.18**	0.18**	-0.03	-0.02	8.71*	6.98	-0.13*	-0.12
Employment	-0.33		0.16*		-11.48		-0.22		-0.07		-0.01		-17.00		0.14	
Unemployment	-0.22		0.19**		-13.36		0.47		-0.42		0.07		-5.34		-0.37	
Social support	0.5		-0.02		15.11		-0.01		0.16		-0.18		-15.37		0.31	
Gender Conservatism ideology index	1.00***		-0.28***		28.04**		-0.62***		0.7***		-0.27***		15.73		-1.0***	
Intercept	6.28***	2.841***	2.60***	3.22***	5.81	-77.31	3.5***	5.05***	6.36***	4.9***	2.4***	2.91***	81.04*	59.32	3.62***	5.8***
Observations	1069	935	1071	937	1064	930	1046	923	1035	826	1036	823	964	775	1017	820
R2	0.188	0.217	0.166	0.183	0.234	0.236	0.092	0.111	0.098	0.107	0.145	0.152	0.178	0.183	0.039	0.079

Notes: ***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.1.
Full results including standard errors and p-values are available from the author on request.

Table 6 (Continued)

	1999							
	Importance of God		Importance of religion		Prayer		Abortion	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Female	0.65***	0.82***	-0.22***	-0.23***	80.03***	71.53***	-0.31	-0.18
Education	-0.15***	-0.10***	0.03***	0.03**	-4.57**	-3.48	0.04	0.01
Age	0.01*	0.01	-0.01*	-0.01	2.16***	1.52***	-0.03***	-0.03***
Income	-0.02	-0.06	0.01	0.01	-0.99	-3.15	-0.02	-0.01
Size of the town	-0.09	-0.13*	0.04*	0.05*	-9.28**	-9.36*	0.36***	0.37***
Number of residents in the household	0.17***	0.17***	-0.04*	-0.04*	7.01*	4.82	-0.15**	-0.15*
Employment		-0.29		0.09		-35.13**		0.16
Unemployment		-0.41		0.01		-49.02*		-0.13
Social support		n.a.		n.a.		n.a.		n.a.
Gender Conservatism ideology index		1.11***		-0.25***		38.97**		-0.94***
Intercept	9.10***	6.29***	1.62***	2.24***	139.7***	97.14	4.22***	6.7***
Observations	1031	841	1039	842	1020	831	990	816
R2	0.104	0.165	0.072	0.095	0.159	0.164	0.079	0.104

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Full results including standard errors and p-values are available from the author on request.

editions to 23%, which indicates an increase in the importance of the variables selected for analysis. When comparing betas—standardised coefficient—we can see that age was the most important variable, while gender followed later. Only these two variables explained, respectively, 12%, 14% and 17% of variance in subsequent years. One can also see that the importance of age, which is an increasingly better predictor of prayer frequency, has been steadily increasing, controlling the remaining variables. At the same time, the average frequency of prayer has been decreasing.

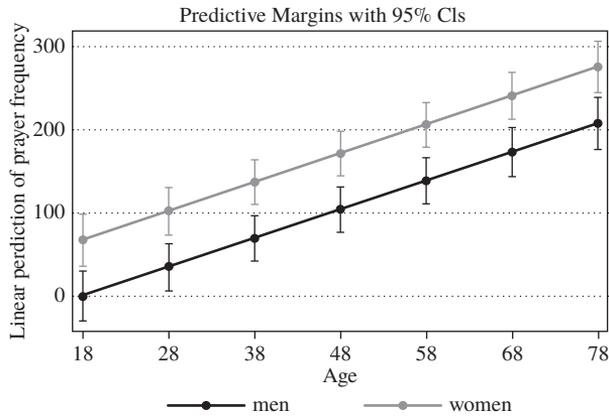
Successive EVS rounds show that the frequency of prayer will systematically increase with age. This applies in equal measure to men and women. As a result, after a certain time, the prayer frequency among men will reach the level of their female peers from several years ago. Invariably, however, women born in the same year will pray much more frequently. This phenomenon is well illustrated by the graph below.

The lines in the graph show the expected value of prayer frequency calculated on the basis of the basic model, for city residents, for the 2017 data. The model predicts that an 18-year-old man will hardly ever pray while his female peer will pray 67 days per year. However, the frequency of praying will increase with age and, as a result, the same man will reach the level of his female peer after twenty years, but then she will already be praying 136 days a year. The starting level of prayer frequency and the gap will depend on the generation, the place of residence, and household size. The gap remains relatively unchanged with the control variables included in the model. The interaction analysis shows that both of these variables independently influence the frequency of prayer. In other words, men begin to pray more often as they get older but so do women and, as a result, the gap is maintained.

Other independent variables which have remained statistically significant throughout three EVS rounds are the size of domicile and the household size. Residents of small towns,

Fig. 1

Expected prayer frequency for residents of cities of 500,000+. Calculations for the basic model for the 2017 data



especially villages, pray more than city dwellers. In the case of 2017 data, one additional household member translates into an additional 9.27 more days of praying. An interesting change is observed in the case of education and income. The level of education was significant in 1999, while the subsequent EVS rounds show that its significance has been diminishing in favor of income.

Compared to prayer, the attitude towards abortion, the importance of God and the importance of religion in life turn out to be less efficiently explained by socio-demographic variables. However, all variables (in 2017), or almost all variables, turn out to be statistically significant. Age is the leading predictor: the older someone is, the greater their readiness to reject abortion and acknowledge the importance of religion and God. However, the size of the variance explained only by age ranges from 1% to 3%. The size of domicile, which is the second explanatory variable, reveals an interesting phenomenon: residents of villages and towns/cities up to 500,000 are fairly negative about abortion. Only the fact of living in a city with more than 500,000 residents has the opposite effect. As can be seen from the data, gender is a good predictor of the importance of religion and God, but not abortion. Similar results, with the exception of attitudes to divorce in 2017, are for regression conducted for other measurements of the institutional dimension of religiosity.

The inclusion of variables (model 2) concerning labor market position and the gender conservatism ideology index in the model has hardly increased the prediction power with regard to four selected dependent variables. Employment and being unemployed are statistically significant as predictors of prayer only in the 1999 data and importance of religion in 2017 data. This fact does not seem to be related to the unemployment rate, which was 11.6% in June 1999,⁵ 9.4% in 2008 and 7% in 2017. There was a downward trend but not sufficient enough to say that the risk of unemployment disappeared.

⁵ <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/rynek-pracy/bezrobocie-rejestrowane/stopa-bezrobocia-rejestrowane-go-w-latach-1990-2020,4,1.html>

Generally speaking, we can say that the adopted expectations regarding work and unemployment have not been confirmed. Although unemployment translated into an increased prayer frequency in 1999, this applied equally to men and women. In the case of the risk of unemployment, we are even dealing with a situation that contradicts theoretical expectations: as it turned out, unemployment reduced the frequency of praying. This situation can be explained by the fact that unemployment affected relatively young people who generally pray less frequently than older respondents and/or retired people, who are not at risk of unemployment.

The expectation regarding the impact of gender role ideology was also not confirmed. Although the gender conservatism ideology index proves to be a good predictor of all dependent variables except abortion, it does not reduce the GGR. Traditional views on the woman's place in the family and social life are related to religiosity, but this index does not differentiate between men and women. Again, the attitude toward abortion shows that the institutional dimension of religiosity is constructed differently than the three other dimensions, at least without the GGR.

Conclusions

Over the last 30 years the GGR in Poland has been observed in three dimensions: spiritual life, identity and behaviour. However, the dynamics of change within each dimension is not consistent. Specific indicators within a single dimension are subject to opposite changes over time. When we analyse individual variables collectively, summing up the coefficients and computing a mean for each, we can see that the greatest gap was found in the case of prayer⁶ (mean: 2.52, total: 10.09). What came second and third was the belief in life after death (2.09; 8.34) and belief in heaven (1.98; 7.91). Further on, we see faith in God; self-identification as a religious person and a believer; and the belief in hell. In all other cases, these gaps, even if statistically significant, were small.

At first glance, this confirms the observation made by Walter and Davie that “men engage in religious practices when they are publicly acceptable or even required, but tend not to bother with private devotions when there is no social pressure” (1998: 643). While the distinction made by Walter and Davie is useful, it was not developed further by the authors and runs the risk of creating a vicious circle: men engage in the publicly acceptable aspects of religion because they (men) are engaged in them. It is not clear which of these is the cause and which one is the effect. Sullins suggests only a slightly better explanation, writing that “men being more *active*, that is, oriented to action, and women more *affective* in their expression or understanding of their own religiousness” (2006: 847). The criteria proposed by Sullins are not fully clear, which creates a problem in the classification of certain answers, notably prayer as the main variable: Glock classifies prayer into the behavioural category, including participation in rituals, while Sullins refuses to see it as an activity. Besides, Sullins includes volunteering as an active dimension, and in Poland this

⁶ The question about prayer was not asked in 1990, which is why I assigned the mean from the three other surveys to 1990 in order to achieve comparable results.

aspect has long been a women's area. The division gives the impression of an *ad hoc* classification, which additionally reproduces the stereotype of emotional women and rationally acting men.

The presence of gaps is just as important as their absence. The issue of identification with religious institutions is almost absent in literature (exception: [Palmisano and Todesco 2019](#)). One can think of more than one way to explain this phenomenon. Contrary to the previously quoted studies, Polish women are critical of their exclusion from the Church as an institution, which, in effect, eliminates the fact that they are more religious than men in this aspect. It can also be argued that the fact that women, to some extent, pursue their religiosity independently of religious institutions is one of the distinguishing features of women's religious identity. This explanation may be interpreted as universal, but one may also argue that it is a manifestation of the secularization of women's religiosity, which follows a slightly different path versus the secularization of men's religiosity. Finally, it can also be argued that the attitude towards the Church is independent of, or poorly connected with, other dimensions, at least in Poland.

This result also has important implications for GGR research. First of all, that it cannot be assumed in advance that the presence of GGR proven by a few measurements automatically indicates its universality. Secondly, these data show that explanations based on the public versus private division do not take into account the specific position of the Catholic Church in the public sphere and in the private life of Poles. On the one hand, the Church's teaching on spiritual needs and family life will place its functions in the private sphere. On the other hand, the Church's public and political commitment, for example, its demand for a complete ban on abortion, will place it in the public sphere. Identification with or rejection of the Church preserves this ambivalence. Such an explanation, however, would require verification with comparative data from other Catholic countries.

The example of Poland shows that religiosity can weaken without a significant reduction in the GGR. Subsequent age cohorts included in the EVS are ever less religious but, at the same time, they reproduce an almost identical GGR to that observed in earlier generations. I have not confirmed the claim made in sociological theories that the reduction of the GGR results from the changing position of women in the social structure, especially in the labor market. Despite spectacular GDP growth, Poland continues to be a gendered society, where men and women 'do' practice gender in various social systems, which is consistent with the results obtained for Poland in the Gender Equality Index quoted in the introduction. The persistence of the GGR shows that the way religion is practiced in Poland and its role in the identity of believers remains unchanged.

With their higher-than-average religiosity (compared to other European countries), Poles maintain conservative values concerning the role of women in the society despite the modernization processes, which is reflected in the results presented here and in the generally low gender equality in all spheres of life. Individual variables change in subsequent editions of the EVS, but these changes do not fit into the theories which directly link the reduction of the GGR to the change in women's position in the social structure and to the overall increase in wealth. Of the 24 analyzed variables, GGR has been systematically shrinking only in the case of belief in life after death. As regards the frequency of prayer, the change has the opposite vector. The expectation that an increased wealth of Poles will

reduce the gaps is not confirmed by the data, and this contradicts, for example, the findings of Voas et al. (2013) based on the ESS and ISSP data.⁷

It seems naïve to expect that women and men will become more similar in how they practice religion and in the role of religion in their identities if these differences are present in other spheres of life, affecting relations between individuals. The theory which explains the GGR should show the relationship of the GGR with the gender gap elsewhere, for instance in the labour market or political life. The study of various systems of gendered society in isolation means that one loses sight of the processes that organise the social relations at the intersection of various areas.

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⁷ Voas et al. analysed the EVS data which, however, they did not confirm the ESS findings, which was commented upon as follows: “Unfortunately no consistent pattern is apparent across the four waves for the countries that participated in the first survey, whether one looks at affiliation, attendance or self-description as a religious person. The fluctuations in the size of the gender gap within countries from one wave to the next are too great to give us any confidence that differences between 1981 and 2008 are genuine.” (277–8).

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