

I can't get no satisfaction: Gender Attitudes, Housework Divisions and Partnership Satisfaction

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Abstract

Couples' housework arrangements serve as a proxy for broader patterns of gender equality (Ferree, 1990). As such, scholars have long focused on individual and cultural characteristics that structure equality in couples' housework arrangements (Berk, 1985; Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Fuwa, 2004; Hochschild, 1997; Sayer, 2005). Across this body of research, housework is shown to be highly gendered and sensitive to individual-held and culturally-reinforced gender role ideologies. Specifically, respondents who hold or who are married someone with more egalitarian gender role ideologies report more equal housework divisions (Bittman, England, Folbre, Sayer, & Matheson, 2003). What is more, net of individually-held gender role expectations, respondents in more gender empowered countries, measured by women's economic and political status, report more equal allocations and less conflict over housework (Batalova & Cohen, 2002; Fuwa, 2004; Geist, 2005; Ruppner, 2010). Collectively, this research indicates that gender role expectations at the individual-level and gender empowerment at the country-level structure couples housework arrangements. What is less clear, however, is how inconsistencies gender role expectations and housework divisions impact reports of partner satisfaction. An underlying assumption across housework research is that unequal housework divisions should deteriorate marital quality and satisfaction. Indeed, respondents with more equal divisions of housework do report greater marital satisfaction (Piña & Bengtson, 1993) and less housework conflict (Braun, Lewin-Epstein, Stier, & Baumgärtner, 2008; Ruppner, 2010), yet the interaction process between gender role expectations and housework divisions is not explicitly modeled. What is more, respondents may be sensitive to inconsistencies in their and their partners' gender and housework expectations with direct implications for marital quality. As such, the exploration of these inconsistencies - for individual and couples reports - on partnership satisfaction is warranted.

This study bridges this gap in multiple ways. First, we apply couple-level data from the 2009 Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS) of Swedish youth to assess how gender role ideologies and housework divisions structure satisfaction with one's partner. We select this sample as we are particularly interested in how inconsistencies in gender role expectations and housework allocations (i.e. reporting egalitarian attitudes yet unequal housework divisions) impacts marital quality for respondents in a highly egalitarian context. We select this sample of Swedes as we expect them to be most sensitive to these inequalities as gender empowerment at the country-level consistently structures housework at the individual-level (Fuwa, 2004; Fuwa & Cohen, 2007; Ruppner, 2010). Second, we test for gender differences across these relationships. Finally, we will match our data with 2013 Swedish register data to determine whether dissatisfaction with housework allocations contributes to partnership dissolution. Our initial results indicate that women with unequal housework divisions, regardless of their gender role expectations or inconsistencies in attitudes and behaviors, report lower partnership satisfaction. By contrast, men who hold traditional ideologies and have traditional housework divisions (partners do more) report greater marital satisfaction. Collectively, these results indicate differential gender effects of attitudes and behaviors on partnership satisfaction. Linking these to the Swedish register, will build a dynamic component to the understanding of marital satisfaction and couples' relationship dynamics.

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