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Does Unequal Housework Lead to Divorce? Evidence from Sweden

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Abstract

The lack of couple-level data hinders direct exploration of how inconsistencies in couples' housework reports structure their relationship quality. We address this limitation by applying Swedish data from the 2009 Young Adult Panel Study (N = 1057 couples) matched with Swedish register data (2009–2014) to extend equity theory by estimating mismatch in couples' housework reports on relationship satisfaction and stability. We find women who report performing more housework are less likely to be satisfied with their relationships, and are more likely to consider breaking up. These unions are also more likely to dissolve. Using both partners' housework reports, we document discrediting women's housework contribution, or reporting she does less than she reports, is associated with lower relationship satisfaction. Women in these partnerships also consider breaking up, and the unions are more likely to dissolve. Our results identify the gendered impact of housework inequality on relationship stability.

Keywords

divorce, housework, register data, relationship satisfaction, Sweden

Couples' divisions of household labour have serious consequences for relationship quality. Unequal housework allocations are associated with depression, marital dissatisfaction and divorce (Baxter and Western, 1998; Bird, 1999; Coltrane, 2001; Glass and Fujimoto,

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1994; Kluwer et al., 1996; Yogev and Brett, 1985). The bulk of the scholarship on housework relies on single-respondent reports to identify these associations (Bianchi et al., 2000; Bittman et al., 2003; Brines, 1994; Gupta, 2007; Gupta and Ash, 2008; Lively et al., 2008, 2010). Yet, couples' housework reports can be inconsistent, which may create interpersonal conflict and deteriorate relationship quality. The impact of housework mismatch, or partners reporting different divisions of labour, remains largely untested. This is explained, in part, by the lack of couple-level data to unpack these processes. Yet, theory predicts these relationships are consequential. Equity theory posits that individuals attempt to create equity during social exchange (Adams, 1965; Carrell and Dittrich, 1978; Hegtvedt, 1990; Pritchard, 1969; Walster et al., 1978). When the exchange is inequitable, the respondent who receives more or less than their fair share will experience negative emotional distress. Equity theory is often tested among strangers, identifying that feeling under-benefitted (receiving less than one's fair share) and over-benefitted (receiving more than one's fair share) fosters feelings of injustice (Cropanzano and Folger, 1989; Hegtvedt and Killian, 1999; Krehbiel and Cropanzano, 2000).

Yet, as Steelman and Powell (1996) argue, equity theory has broad applicability in family scholarship, notably among intimate partners. Indeed, Lively et al. (2010) apply equity theory to a range of negative emotions, identifying that spending more than one's fair share of time in housework (feeling under-benefitted), has the greatest impact on feelings of anger, depression and unhappiness, with more severe effects for men than women (Lively et al., 2008). These studies rely on single-respondents' housework reports to identify feelings of injustice. We expand upon this research by investigating how inconsistencies in couples' housework reports structure relationship quality. We draw upon equity theory to test two broad concepts – credit and discredit. We estimate *credit* as those who report their partner does more housework than their partner reports (e.g. we share; my partner does more). Acknowledging the other's housework may create a 'surplus' or emotional credit within a partnership which may improve relationship quality and stability (Hochschild, 1989). At the other end of the spectrum, we estimate *discredit* or when one partner discounts the other's housework contributions (e.g. I do more; we share) which may deteriorate relationship quality and stability. Our couple-level design allows us to weigh whether crediting or discrediting partners' housework contributions structures relationship quality, paying careful attention to gender. This allows us to expand upon existing empirical applications of equity theory that rely on single-respondent reports of feeling under-benefitted (respondent does more housework than partner) and over-benefitted (respondent does less housework than partner) to a more dynamic system of credit/discredit (Lively et al., 2008, 2010).

Our approach is innovative, allowing us to investigate the dyadic nature of housework inequality on relationship satisfaction. We apply couple-level data from the 2009 Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS) to estimate associations between each partner's housework reports and relationship satisfaction for couples in one highly egalitarian context: Sweden. Through this methodological advance, we estimate the couple-level dimension of equity and gender display theories that remain untested in single-respondent studies (Bianchi et al., 2000; Bittman et al., 2003; Brines, 1994; Gupta, 2007; Gupta and Ash, 2008; Lively et al., 2008, 2010). We then investigate whether unequal housework divisions make relationships less stable by assessing reports of break-up plans and following

respondents over time. In a methodological advance, we link our sample to Swedish register data (2009–2014) to determine whether housework inequality is associated with partnership dissolution. Our modelling strategy identifies that housework inequality and inconsistency in couples' housework reports structure relationship quality, thus building a deeper theoretical understanding of relationship satisfaction and stability.

An Overview of Equity Theory

Equity theory posits feeling over-benefitted (receiving more than is equitable) or under-benefitted (receiving less than is equitable) in a social exchange fosters a negative emotional response (Adams, 1965; Carrell and Dittrich, 1978; Hegtvedt and Killian, 1999; Pritchard, 1969; Walster et al., 1978). This inequality – feeling either under- or over-benefitted – evokes a sense of injustice (Cropanzano and Folger, 1989; Hegtvedt and Killian, 1999; Krehbiel and Cropanzano, 2000). In response to this distress, individuals work to restore equity through altered cognition, behaviour or by terminating the relationship (Adams, 1965). These processes are often tested among strangers in experimental laboratory settings (Adams, 1965; Carrell and Dittrich, 1978; Hegtvedt and Killian, 1999; Pritchard, 1969; Walster et al., 1978). Yet, romantic relationships are often sites of inequality and thus the equity perspective has been extended to couples' housework divisions (Lively et al., 2008, 2010; Steelman and Powell, 1996). For example, Lively et al. (2010) test the impact of housework inequality across a range of negative and positive emotions, and find those who perform a larger than fair share of the couples' housework report greater distress, anger and fear. The authors also find those who feel their housework is unfair *to their partner* report greater negative emotions across these measures *and* greater self-reproach. Thus, as equity theory predicts, being under-benefitted (doing less housework than one's partner) or over-benefitted (doing more housework than one's partner) in domestic divisions contributes to emotional distress. Yet, these studies rely on single-respondents' reports and do not test for how respondents' *and* their partners' housework reports impact respondents' emotions. Emotional distress may be tied exclusively to one partners' housework reports (e.g. respondents' or their spouses' reports). Or, perceptions of injustice may be driven by inconsistencies in partners' housework reports (e.g. I do more; we share). Applying couple-level data, we investigate the association between each spouse's housework reports, inconsistency in housework reports and relationship satisfaction and stability.

Forms of Over- and Under-Benefitting

Couples' housework reports can take multiple forms. On one hand, they may be equivalent, reflecting parity in reports. Parity can include equity and inequity including: (1) consistent reports that one spouse is over-benefitted (both report one does less than half the housework); (2) consistent reports that one spouse is under-benefitted (both report one does more than half the housework); (3) consistent reports of housework equality (both report sharing housework equally). Equity theory posits that unequal housework divisions (under- or over-benefit) should deteriorate relationship quality, even when reports are consistent across couples. Alternatively, couples' reports may be disparate taking multiple

forms: (1) those that *discredit* the other's housework contribution, a form of under-benefitting (e.g. both respondents report doing more housework; one reports sharing, yet the other reports doing more) or *credit* each other's housework, a form of over-benefitting (e.g. one reports sharing equally or doing less but the other reports his/her partner does more). While these combinations may take multiple forms, equity theory is clear – inequality should be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (Van Yperen and Buunk, 1990). Thus, from equity theory, we develop our first hypothesis:

Equity Theory

H1: Respondents who report being under- or over-benefitted in housework will report lower relationship satisfaction than those who both report sharing housework equally.

The Link to Gender: Gender Display

The emotional consequences of housework inequality are not gender neutral. Men who feel under-benefitted in housework report greater emotional distress than do women (Lively et al., 2008). Yet, the equity perspective does not adequately theorize these gendered relationships (see Huseman et al. (1987) for a discussion of equity sensitivity on the impact of personal preferences). We fill this gap by applying the gender display perspective to account for housework as a gendered process. Rooted in the symbolic interactionist perspective, gender display identifies men and women's application of cultural scripts to display and reinforce gender identities through an interactive process (actor and audience) (Goffman, 1959, 1979; West and Zimmerman, 1987). These scripts often draw on gender traditionalism emphasizing women's responsibility for the housework and childcare (Ferree, 1990). It follows that women who report performing the bulk of the housework are enacting, at least partially, gendered scripts. Yet, whether their partner, or the audience, recognizes these contributions identifies housework as an interactive process and presents a point for interpersonal conflict. For some, the display and response are consistent, capturing gender display (both agree the woman does more), gender equality (both agree they share equally) or gender atypical (both agree the man does more) displays. Yet, others have inconsistent reports (e.g. we share equally; I do more) as the couples may be applying divergent scripts or they may be missing each other's performance (see Table 1 presented for the woman's perspective). We test whether acknowledging the other's performance is associated with relationship satisfaction. Here, we draw upon the equity theory to identify crediting and discrediting the other's housework contribution. We define credit as those who report their spouse does more housework than the spouse reports (e.g. we share; she does more). Qualitative research shows acknowledging the other's housework contributions buffers spouses against relationship dissatisfaction (Hochschild, 1989). We theorize that housework credit, or reporting one's spouse does more housework than reported by the spouse, may be positively associated with relationship quality. We also expect that spouses who discredit, or when one spouse discounts the other's housework contributions (e.g. I do more; we share equally) may jeopardize the couples' relationship quality. In this, we specify equity along an economy of credit/discredit and theorize that crediting the other's housework contribution will be positively and discrediting will be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction and stability.

Table 1. Economy of credit/discredit overview: Identifying the role of gender in parity and disparity.

Husbands' reports	Wives' reports		
	I do more	We share equally	Partner does more
I do more	Discredit	Discredit	Gender atypical display
We share equally	Discredit	Gender equality	Credit
Partner does more	Gender display	Credit	Credit

We expect these relationships to be gendered. Drawing on the gender display perspective, we expect the consequences of discrediting the woman's housework contribution (e.g. she reports she does more; he reports they share or he does more) to be most severe for women's relationship satisfaction. Women consistently perform the bulk of the household chores, even in highly egalitarian countries like Sweden (Bernhardt et al., 2008; Evertsson and Nermo, 2004; Fuwa, 2004; Geist, 2005). This inequality may create deeper feelings of resentment for Swedish women who expect egalitarian housework arrangements (Bernhardt et al., 2008). Indeed, inconsistencies in one's desired and actual housework arrangements increase the risk of divorce for Swedish couples (Oláh and Gähler, 2014). What remains untested is whether *inconsistencies* in couples' housework reports, notably men discounting women's housework contributions, impacts relationship satisfaction. Across a range of studies and nations, women consistently report spending more time in housework than do men (see Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard (2010) for a review). Applying gendered scripts, women often justify these unequal divisions as a way to exhibit 'care' in heterosexual unions, explaining why many women view unequal housework divisions as fair (Thompson, 1991). The consequences of housework inequality are less damaging to relationship satisfaction when male partners express gratitude (Hochschild, 1989). Yet, less is known about the consequences of men discounting these large and symbolic contributions. Failing to acknowledge women's housework contributions may create feelings of resentment and hostility and deteriorate relationship quality. From this, we develop our next hypotheses:

Housework Credit/Discredit

H2: Respondents whose housework contribution is credited by their spouse will report better and those whose housework contribution is discredited by their spouse will report worse relationship satisfaction.

H2a: These relationships will be stronger for women than for men.

Housework Inequality and Relationship Dissolution

Housework inequality may have long-term consequences on relationship stability, increasing the odds of dissolution. Previous research documents that inconsistencies in one's *ideal* housework expectations and *actual* housework divisions increase the risk for divorce (Oláh and Gähler, 2014). Yet, less is known about how inconsistencies in

partners' housework reports contribute to union dissolution. Equity theory argues those experiencing the most distress alter cognition, change behaviour or terminate the relationship to mitigate this distress (Adams, 1965). Additional research shows inequity is a better predictor of relationship satisfaction than vice versa, with long-term effects (Van Yperen and Buunk, 1990). This research indicates that the stress of inequality jeopardizes relationship stability. Yet, whether equity theory replicates in intimate partnerships, where investments are greater than among strangers, requires additional investigation. To this end, we explore two dimensions of relationship stability: whether the respondent considered breaking up and whether the partnership is terminated. We expect the relationships to be consistent with our previous hypotheses and thus discuss our expectations briefly below.

Based on equity theory, we expect those who are under- or over-benefitted in housework to report relationship dissatisfaction and thus desire to dissolve the union. Indeed, unequal divisions of, and conflict over, housework are shown to contribute to lower relationship satisfaction and separation (Frisco and Williams, 2003; Piña and Bengtson, 1993; Yogev and Brett, 1985). We expect women to be more likely to consider breaking up when they report performing the majority of the housework, and when their partners discredit their contributions (e.g. male partner reports he does more or they share; female partner reports doing more). We expect these effects to be significant for considering breaking up, for which the threat point is lower than relationship dissolution. According to equity theory, 'leaving the field' is often the last resort (Adams, 1965) and thus we expect housework inequality to be a weaker predictor of relationship dissolution than plans to break up.

The Case for Sweden

The application of Swedish data has important consequences for our hypothesized relationships. Sweden is one of the most gender empowered nations in the world (United Nations, 2013). Discussions of gender equality are central in public debates and Swedish welfare policies are expansive, aimed at reducing gender gaps in employment and household responsibilities (Fuwa and Cohen, 2007; Gornick and Meyers, 2003; Leira, 1993). For example, parental leave policies mandate a fathers' quota to encourage shared parenting and, as a consequence, men account for a larger housework share (Geist, 2005; Hook, 2006; Pettit and Hook, 2009). Further, supported by generous welfare state benefits, Swedish women are more likely to challenge unequal housework divisions (Ruppanner, 2010, 2012). Swedes stand out relative to other Scandinavian countries, as young Swedish couples expect more equal housework divisions than their Norwegian counterparts (Bernhardt et al., 2008). As a leader in gender equality, housework inequality should be particularly damaging in the Swedish context (Evertsson and Nermo, 2004; Nordenmark and Nyman, 2004; Oláh and Gähler, 2014). Further, Sweden's expansive welfare state benefits mitigate the economic consequences of divorce, which may allow more Swedes to more easily dissolve partnerships (Esping-Andersen, 1990). These effects may be even more consequential as marriage is growing in importance. Since 2000, the Swedish marriage rate has increased with Sweden reflecting a higher than EU member state average; yet, Swedish marriage rates are largely comparable to other

Nordic countries (Nordic Statistical Yearbook, 2012, 2014; Statistics Sweden, 2015). The rise in marriage is tied to a subsequent rise in divorce (Statistics Sweden, 2015). Thus, while Swedes continue to cohabit at high rates, many more marry than in the past (Statistics Sweden, 2015). As more Swedes marry, investigating the impact of housework inequality on relationship dissolution through register data is an increasingly important question.

Data

Analyses are performed using data from the 2009 wave of the Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS, www.suda.su.se/yaps). The YAPS is a three wave panel with surveys in 1999, 2003 and 2009 of respondents born in 1968, 1972, 1976 and 1980. Three groups of respondents are sampled: Swedish born individuals with Swedish born parents; Swedish born individuals with Turkish born parents; and Swedish born individuals with Polish born parents. In 2009, all respondents who had participated in any of the previous waves (1999 or 2003), were again contacted to participate in a final wave of the survey, and for the first time they were also asked to give their cohabiting or married partner a questionnaire. Out of the 1528 respondents who participated and who were married or cohabiting at the time of the survey, 1074, or 70 per cent, had participating partners. We find that among couples with missing partners, almost 16 per cent end the union between 2009 and 2014, compared with 13 per cent of our current sample. These couples also appear to share housework slightly less equitably. These results suggest that our models are underestimating the effect of housework inconsistencies on relationship dissolution, because the couples whose relationships suffer the most from these inconsistencies are likely not included in our sample. The inclusion of the missing data would probably increase the risk and impact of inconsistencies on divorce. Unfortunately, we are bound by the data present and cannot adjust for this analytically. Given our interest in couple-level dynamics, we apply data from this final 2009 wave which, after excluding respondents in same sex relations ($N = 21$) who are shown to allocate housework differently (Solomon et al., 2005), produced 1058 couple dyads for our analysis.

Using the YAPS, we examine two outcomes: (1) relationship satisfaction; and (2) break-up plans. We structure the data at the couple level so that analyses distinguish between the man and the woman in each couple. To assess relationship termination, we match respondents from the YAPS with Swedish register data (2009 to 2014) to assess a third outcome: (3) relationship dissolution. The register data, attached to identification codes, are collected by the Swedish government and capture respondents' major life transitions (marriage, birth and divorce). Sweden is one of only a few countries in the world that has individual-level survey data linked to the Swedish register (here, the YAPS data), a major advantage of this survey. Our innovative data design allows us to determine whether both partners' attitudes and reported behaviour, collected in 2009, are linked to union dissolution between 2009 and 2014, as discussed in more detail below.

To analyse the data, we perform five sets of logistic regressions on each of the three outcomes (the man's and the woman's relationship satisfaction; the man's and the woman's break-up plans; and the couple's relationship dissolution). This couple-level approach enables us to assess not only how, for instance, the man's reported sharing

affects *his* relationship satisfaction, but also how it affects the relationship satisfaction of *his partner*. We estimate these experiences for both partners (the man and the woman). An alternative approach would have been to perform seemingly unrelated regressions in order to adjust for any correlation in the error terms between the woman and the man in the couple. Note, however, that if both models have the same set of independent variables (as is the case here) the results from a seemingly unrelated regression (in terms of coefficients and standard errors) are the same as if we estimate the models separately (Stata, 2013). Thus, while we do not account for the clustering of standard errors at the couple level, the results from our regression models are identical to more advanced modelling strategies (results available upon request). Hence, we keep our more intuitive modelling strategy. Throughout the article, we present our results as odds ratios. Note however that average marginal effects that adjust for possible different levels of unobserved heterogeneity in the male and female models provide similar results (see Mood (2010) for discussion; results available upon request).

Dependent Variables

Relationship satisfaction is measured by the question: 'Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your relationship with your partner?' Responses are on a five-point scale: (1) 'very dissatisfied'; (2) 'somewhat dissatisfied'; (3) 'neither dissatisfied nor satisfied'; (4) 'somewhat satisfied'; and (5) 'very satisfied'. In initial analyses, we explored the distribution of respondents by relationship satisfaction (Table 1). We found most respondents report satisfaction with their relationship (90.2% of men and 88.9% of women report being somewhat or very satisfied). When coded as *very satisfied*, we find a different pattern with roughly 60 per cent of men and women falling within this group. Given our interest in those with the greatest relationship instability, we apply the measure for those who are *very satisfied* dichotomously coded. Note that our results remain robust if we instead perform regressions including the full five-point scale outcome.

Break-up plans are measured by the question: 'Have you or your partner considered ending the relationship during the last year?' Main respondents and partners chose between pre-defined alternatives: (1) Yes, we both have; (2) I think my partner has, but I haven't; (3) Yes, I have but I don't think my partner has; and (4) No. Our break-up measure captures those who report that they themselves have considered breaking up (values 1 or 3). In sensitivity tests we also ran the models including respondents who reported only their partner had considered breaking up in the group who are considered to have had break-up plans (values 1, 2 or 3); the results are equivalent. Thus, for ease in understanding, our dependent variable reflects the respondent's own thoughts of considering breaking up (value = 1) or not (value = 0).

Actual break-up is estimated by linking data derived from registers on civil status changes. For married couples we estimate break-up by whether a divorce has taken place after the survey (2009–2014). For cohabiting couples, we can only estimate break-up if the partners have at least one common child in 2009. For these couples, break-up is estimated as whether the partners no longer live in the same property (*fastighet*) in 2014. Cohabiting individuals with no common children are excluded from analyses on actual break-up due to these data limitations. If a married couple no longer live in the same

Table 2. Distribution of dependent measures.

	Men (%)	Women (%)
Relationship satisfaction (5 vs 1–4)	59.6	62.7
Relationship satisfaction (4–5 vs 1–3)	90.2	88.9
Break-up plans	14.8	17.9
Actual break-up of couple 2009–Dec. 2014 (n = 803, couple-level measure)	12.6	

property in 2014, they too are considered to have experienced a break-up. As indicated in Table 1, only a small segment of our sample terminated their relationship during this time period (12.6%). Our models may underestimate the true effect, as we have also excluded those cohabiting without a child (24% of the original sample). Thus, a higher percentage of our total sample has separated but our data do not capture their experiences.

Main Independent Variables

Gendered division of housework is derived from the question: 'How do you [and your partner] divide housework?' with pre-defined alternatives: (1) I do the most; (2) we share equally; (3) my partner does the most. We investigate these measures for the respondent and partners' reports alone (Table 3) and for mismatch in couples' reports (Table 4).

Individual Controls

We control for *gender attitudes* of the respondent and his/her partner through the following measure: (1) a society where men and women are equal is a good society; (2) men can do as well as women in caring jobs; (3) women can do as well as men in technical jobs; (4) it is as important for a woman as for a man to support herself; (5) men can be as good as women at housework. Responses are on a five-point scale with higher values reflecting more egalitarian gender role ideology. As most Swedes report high normative gender egalitarianism, we identified our gender attitudes measure through multiple steps. First, we identified measures that produced the highest internal consistency; these measures produce an alpha of 0.71. Then, we recoded our gender attitude measure so that egalitarian respondents are those who reported the maximum values (value = 5) on all of these questions to be consistent with previous research (Oláh and Gähler, 2014). Our traditional respondents are those with a mixing of values on these measures. We also control for a number of confounding characteristics that stabilize marriages including the presence of a child, income and duration of partnership (Belsky, 1990; Waite and Lillard, 1991). *The length of the union* is measured in months at the time of the 2009 survey, calculated from the year and month the respondent reported their relationship started. *Income* is individually reported by each respondent in 2009, as their crude income before taxes but after the deduction of social-insurance fees. The presence of *children in the household* is included as a combined variable of the presence and age of children living in the household in five categories: (1) no child in the household; (2) youngest child in the household is 0–2 years

Table 3. Self-reported housework, relationship satisfaction, break-up intention and relationship dissolution (2009 YAPS; Swedish register data).

		Relationship satisfaction		Break-up intention		Relationship dissolution
		Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Couples
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Equity						
Man	I do the most	0.60	0.60	2.04	1.42	0.54
	We share equally (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–
	My partner does the most	1.28	1.64**	0.82	0.93	0.51*
Woman	I do the most	0.55***	0.40***	1.07	1.59*	2.16**
	We share equally (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–
	My partner does the most	0.84	1.22	1.29	1.70	0.94
Gender role ideology						
Man	Egalitarian (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–
	Traditional	0.65**	0.82	1.25	1.29	1.40
Woman	Egalitarian (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–
	Traditional	1.06	0.91	1.09	1.45*	0.91
Stabilizing characteristics						
Length of partnership (2003)		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.99*
Man's income per 1000 sek		0.93	1.02	1.07	0.97	0.86
Woman's income per 1000 sek		1.02	0.98	0.98	0.92	1.09
Presence of children (compared to no child present)						
Child under 3 present		0.87	0.87	0.63	0.52*	1.17
Child 3 to 6 present		0.46***	0.50**	1.81*	1.49	2.05
Child 7 to 12 present		0.74	0.87	3.39***	1.56	2.26
Child 13 plus present		1.39	1.43	2.83	1.53	3.29
Destabilizing characteristics						
Cohabiting (compared to Married)		0.55***	0.56***	2.39***	1.65*	1.61
Controls						
Man's year of birth						
−1968 (ref.)		–	–	–	–	–
1969–1972		1.33	1.39	1.16	1.13	1.04
1973–1976		1.18	1.11	1.55	1.00	1.12
1977+		1.40	1.93*	1.40	0.71	0.57
Woman's year of birth						
−1968 (ref.)		–	–	–	–	–
1969–1972		1.45	1.17	0.75	0.93	1.20
1973–1976		1.22	1.24	0.79	0.96	1.52
1977+		2.09**	1.35	0.88	0.82	1.23
Ethnicity (compared to Swedish)						
Polish		0.83	0.73	2.17*	1.84*	1.06
Turkish		0.52	0.54	1.57	1.76	0.38
Man's work status (compared to Full-time)						
Part-time		0.39	0.92	1.55	0.50	0.59
Parental leave		0.27**	0.64	0.91	0.73	0.42
Student		1.12	0.87	4.75**	1.01	0.88
Other		1.23	0.68	1.71	1.45	1.26

Table 3. (Continued)

	Relationship satisfaction		Break-up intention		Relationship dissolution
	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Couples
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Woman's work status (compared to Full-time)					
Part-time	1.04	0.94	1.05	1.13	1.17
Parental leave	1.14	1.16	0.83	0.74	0.60
Student	0.96	0.65	0.70	1.17	2.73*
Other	0.63	0.82	2.10*	1.00	2.78*
Man has university degree					
Yes (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–
No	0.70*	0.98	1.33	0.99	0.70
Missing	1.31	1.10	1.60	0.40	2.24
Woman has university degree					
Yes (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–
No	0.86	0.57***	1.70*	1.51*	1.36
Missing	2.62	3.13	1.41	0.51	2.88
Intercept	4.73***	5.64***	0.03***	0.17**	0.13*
N	1049	1055	1041	1050	789

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

old; (3) youngest child in the household is 3–6 years old; (4) youngest child in the household is 7–12 years old; and (5) youngest child in the household is 13 years or older. Those without a child in the home serve as our reference group. We also estimated these models with the number of children in the home which produced equivalent results. To reduce issues of multi-collinearity, we utilize age dummies exclusively to provide more detailed measures of family composition. From register data we derive information on whether the couple is in a *cohabiting* or *marital union* (reference group), dichotomously coded. Age is captured through the birth year of the woman and man. As this survey relies on a cohort design, *birth year* is included as categorical variables distinguishing between being born in: (1) 1968 or earlier (*comparative group*); (2) 1969–1972; (3) 1973–1976; or (4) 1977 or later. *Ethnic background* is measured for the respondent and distinguishes between: (1) Swedish born to two Swedish parents; (2) Swedish born to at least one Polish parent; and (3) Swedish born to at least one Turkish parent. We include a measure of self-reported *work status* to distinguish between: (1) full-time, at least 30 hours per week; (2) part-time, 10–29 hours per week; (3) on parental leave; (4) student; and (5) other. Full-time workers serve as our comparative group. Finally, we include two dichotomous variables indicating whether the man and/or the woman have a *university education*. Appendix A presents the descriptive statistics for our measures.

Results

Table 3 provides the odds ratios for reporting very high relationship satisfaction, having had break-up plans during the last year and ending the relationship between 2009 and 2014. All

Table 4. Between couple housework parity, relationship satisfaction and break-up intention reports for couples (2009 YAPS; Swedish register data).

		Relationship satisfaction		Break-up intention		Relationship dissolution
		Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Couples
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Parity/Disparity						
Man*Woman						
Parity	Share equally (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–
	Both report husband does the most	0.43*	0.69	3.34*	2.89*	1.31
	Both report wife does the most	0.71*	0.65*	0.90	1.47	1.08
Disparity	Husband does most; Wife does most	0.22	0.41	1.00	0.86	1.00
(Discredit)	Husband does most; Share equally	0.68	0.63	3.21*	1.14	0.46
	Share equally; Wife does most	0.48***	0.43***	1.42	1.72*	2.70**
Disparity	Share equally; Husband does the most	0.82	1.19	1.32	1.54	1.00
(Credit)	Wife does most; we share equally	0.99	1.97*	1.07	1.06	0.73
	Wife does the most; Husband does the most	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Gender role ideology						
Man	Egalitarian (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–
	Traditional	0.64**	0.81	1.29	1.32	1.40
Woman	Egalitarian (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–
	Traditional	1.06	0.92	1.10	1.45*	0.90
Stabilizing characteristics						
Length of partnership (2003)		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.99*
Man's income per 1000 sek		0.93	1.02	1.08	0.97	0.88
Woman's income per 1000 sek		1.02	0.98	0.97	0.92	1.08
Presence of children (compared to no child present)						
Child under 3 present		0.86	0.86	0.60	0.51*	1.17
Child 3 to 6 present		0.46***	0.50***	1.85*	1.48	2.08
Child 7 to 12 present		0.73	0.87	3.52***	1.60	2.31
Child 13 plus present		1.31	1.42	2.94	1.54	3.47
Destabilizing characteristics						
Cohabiting (compared to Married)		0.55***	0.55***	2.41***	1.68**	1.64*
Controls						
Man's year of birth						
−1968 (ref.)		–	–	–	–	–
1969–1972		1.31	1.41	1.15	1.14	1.02
1973–1976		1.16	1.12	1.58	1.01	1.12
1977+		1.39	1.96*	1.42	0.71	0.56
Woman's year of birth						
−1968 (ref.)		–	–	–	–	–
1969–1972		1.42	1.16	0.74	0.94	1.22
1973–1976		1.20	1.24	0.80	0.98	1.53
1977+		2.02*	1.36	0.90	0.84	1.28
Ethnicity (compared to Swedish)						
Polish		0.83	0.74	2.14*	1.82*	1.08
Turkish		0.56	0.56	1.49	1.62	0.39
Man's work status (compared to Full-time)						
Part-time		0.39	0.93	1.54	0.48	0.59
Parental leave		0.27**	0.65	0.92	0.73	0.43
Student		1.13	0.87	6.05**	1.10	0.83
Other		1.22	0.67	1.78	1.46	1.18

Table 4. (Continued)

	Relationship satisfaction		Break-up intention		Relationship dissolution
	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Couples
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Woman's work status (compared to Full-time)					
Part-time	1.03	0.94	1.00	1.13	1.14
Parental leave	0.16	1.14	1.13	0.83	0.75
Student	0.98	0.64	0.74	1.18	2.50
Other	0.64	0.81	2.15*	0.98	2.89**
Man has university degree					
Yes (ref.)					
No	0.71*	0.98	1.30	0.98	0.67
Missing	1.12	1.01	2.05	0.46	2.49
Woman has university degree					
Yes (ref.)					
No	0.85	0.57***	1.71*	1.50	1.35
Missing	2.64	2.78	1.38	0.48	2.69
Intercept	5.09***	5.41***	0.03***	0.16**	0.11*
N	1048	1054	1033	1056	768

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

of the models include the full set of individual-level controls. In exploratory analyses, we also estimated the models including only native born Swedes with Swedish parents which produced equivalent results. Thus, our models include the full sample as second-generation immigrant groups are not driving these effects. We also estimated our models with the married or cohabiting with a child sample ($N = 803$) for consistency in samples across datasets, which produced equivalent results. Table 3 includes the respondents' and their spouses' own housework reports for all three of our dependent variables. In testing the equity perspective, we find limited support. We find men's reports of being under- or over-benefitted in housework have no impact on men's relationship satisfaction (model 1), break-up plans (model 3) or relationship dissolution (model 5). When men report their female partner does more housework, women are more satisfied with their relationship (model 2) and are less likely to dissolve the union (model 5). This suggests women are more satisfied when their spouse over-benefits women's housework contributions (he says she does more) than egalitarian relationships. While men's housework reports have little impact on either partner's relationship quality, we find women's reports of being under-benefitted are negatively associated with both partners' relationship satisfaction (models 1 and 2). This indicates that inequality does not have gender neutral consequences with women's under-benefitting reports, not men's, structuring both partners' relationship satisfaction. Yet, the consequences of feeling under-benefitted for women are more severe than for men as these women are more likely to consider breaking up (model 4) and these unions are more likely to dissolve (model 5) than equal sharing relationships. This suggests that consequences of housework inequality are serious for partnerships where women are under-benefitted.

Table 4 adds inconsistencies in couples' reports to test partners' credit/debit of the other's contributions. In gender atypical couples, or those where both partners report the

husband does more housework, men report lower relationship satisfaction (model 1) and both partners consider breaking up (models 3 and 4). These relationships are no more likely to dissolve than their equal sharing counterparts (model 5), but our results suggest the quality of these partnerships are lower. Among gender traditionals, or those where both partners report the wife does more housework, men and women's relationship satisfaction is lower (models 1 and 2) but this inequality has no impact on break-up plans (models 3 and 4) or relationship dissolution (model 5). Consistent with the equity perspective, our results indicate that being under-benefitted in the partnership jeopardizes relationship quality with important gender differences. We now turn to mismatches in couples' housework reports which we expect to have the strongest effects on relationship quality and stability. Among discrediting couples, we find both partners are less satisfied with their relationship when their husband reports they share, but the wife reports she does more housework (models 1 and 2), a finding supporting our discrediting hypothesis. This form of discrediting also increases the odds that women consider breaking up (model 4) and these unions are more likely to dissolve (model 5). Men in discrediting unions, or where he reports spending more but she reports sharing housework equally, also consider breaking-up more often than equitable sharers (model 3) but these unions are no more likely to dissolve (model 5). We find women are more likely to be satisfied with their relationship when their spouse credits their housework contribution, or when he reports she does more but she reports they share (model 2). Collectively, our results lend support to our crediting/discrediting hypotheses.

Conclusion

In this article we explored the impact of housework inequality on relationship satisfaction and stability. Utilizing couple-level data, we find women's larger share of the housework is associated with lower relationship quality for both partners and increases women's plans to break up. These relationships are also more likely to dissolve. When mismatch in partners' housework reports is considered, we find relationships where the husband reports equal sharing, yet the wife reports doing more, are the lowest quality and most unstable. By contrast, those where the men credit their wives by acknowledging their wives' housework have better relationship satisfaction than equal sharers. These findings indicate that housework inequality has important consequences for relationship satisfaction and stability.

According to the equity perspective, feeling under-benefitted in domestic arrangements has negative emotional consequences (Adams, 1965). Equity theory is gender neutral, assuming inequity should equally structure feelings of injustice. We find some support for the equity perspective but these relationships hinge on women's housework reports. For example, male and female partners are less satisfied with their relationship when women report performing the largest share of the housework. For women, these experiences are detrimental for relationship stability, contributing to women's plans to break up, and these unions are more likely to dissolve. This suggests that equity theory does not adequately explain the highly gendered housework experience. Our results suggest that couples' relationship dissatisfaction is dependent on women being under-benefitted in housework arrangements. The implications of this finding are serious as women are consistently shown to perform more housework even in these highly gender equal countries, like

Sweden (Bernhardt et al., 2008; Evertsson and Nermo, 2004; Fuwa, 2004; Geist, 2005). Our results indicate that these relationships are also more likely to dissolve, demonstrating the severity of this inequality. Whether these findings are replicable in other nations is an important direction for future research. But, our results are clear: women's larger housework share is associated with relationship dissolution.

In addition to each partners' reports, we also estimate the impact of inconsistencies in housework reports on relationship quality. Our couple-level data allow us to weigh how inconsistencies in couples' housework reports structure relationship satisfaction, break-up plans and relationship dissolution. We expected that those whose housework was discredited by their partners (e.g. I do more; we share equally or I do more) would report the lowest relationship satisfaction and the least stable unions, with stronger effects for women than men. Our results support this claim. We find both partners are less satisfied when the man reports sharing the housework yet the woman states she does more and women in these partnerships are more likely to consider breaking up. These unions are also more likely to dissolve, indicating the severity of discounting women's housework contributions. Unequal divisions of housework may contribute to or may be a symptom of relationship instability. While the cross-sectional nature of our data does not allow us to test causal claims, the consequences are clear – couples with unequal housework arrangements are more likely to dissolve the union. We also find women are more satisfied with their relationship when their partners report that the woman does more housework. This supports our crediting hypothesis with important gendered consequences. Housework scholars have long invoked an interactionist approach to understanding household dynamics (Goffman, 1959, 1979). The gender display perspective identifies an actor, here the person doing the housework, and an audience, here the partner receiving the performance, as a means to display gender in heterosexual unions (Berk, 1985; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Our results suggest that acknowledging partners' housework contributions, in particular women's contributions, has important consequences for relationship quality and stability.

So what types of lessons can be learned from this research? We find unequal housework arrangements, especially those that disadvantage women, are associated with lower relationship quality and increased relationship fragility. This indicates inequality in housework has serious consequences above and beyond relationship dissatisfaction. These experiences are compounded by discrediting behaviours, as couples where women's housework contributions are minimized are the least stable. Collectively, our results indicate that women's disproportionate housework shares have serious consequences for relationship quality, with important couple effects. These dyadic relationships are masked by single-respondent studies and indicate that, as family scholars have long argued, unequal housework divisions have serious consequences for relationship stability (Baxter and Western, 1998; Berk, 1985; Bird, 1999; Coltrane, 2001; Ferree, 1990; Glass and Fujimoto, 1994; Gupta, 1999; Hochschild, 1989; Kluwer et al., 1996; Yogev and Brett, 1985).

While the results are quite provocative, this study is not without limitations. A major limitation is the application of data from a single, highly gender egalitarian nation. The question remains as to whether these findings are replicable in other nations. It may be that in the highly egalitarian context of Sweden, unequal divisions of housework are grounds for divorce and thus our findings are country-specific. Yet, it is reasonable to expect that these relationships may be more consequential in nations with limited public

transfers for women and families. In a highly individualistic nation like the United States, for example, the compounding pressures of childcare *and* housework may intensify feelings of injustice and risks for divorce. This may, in part, explain the high divorce rate for couples in the United States. Future research should apply couple-level data to investigate these relationships. A second limitation relates to the application of Swedish register data. Coupling the YAPS with these data is a major methodological breakthrough, yet the limitations of the Swedish register, notably that data are not collected for cohabiting couples without children, limit the generalizability of our findings. Notably, cohabiters have less stable relationships than couples that are married, even in Sweden (Andersson and Philipov, 2002), and inequality in housework may contribute to separation. Our models cannot assess these relationships. Yet, these data limitations imply that we have under-estimated the effect of housework inequality on relationship stability. This is compounded by our timeframe as the 2014 Swedish register data may not provide a long enough timeline for relationship dissolution across multiple groups. However, Swedish marriages that terminate last an average of 11 years, indicating our timeframe should capture some of this pattern (Statistics Sweden, 2015). Additional research should follow these respondents over the duration of the relationship to identify long-term patterns.

In light of these limitations, the contributions of this research are clear. Our results indicate that inequality in housework has serious consequences for relationship quality and stability. We find women's housework reports drive these relationships, with important consequences for men's relationship satisfaction and women's relationship commitment. Mismatch in couples' housework reports, especially when men discount women's contributions, increase the risk of divorce. Ultimately, our results indicate that housework inequality has detrimental consequences on relationship stability indicating increased importance of men's equal contributions.

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Appendix A. Descriptive statistics: Variable distributions of all variables (N = 1057 men and women).

Variable	Percentages
Length of union in 2009 (months: mean)	102.7
Man's income	
Missing	0.66
<100,000 sek	2.55
100,000–150,000 sek	2.08
150,000–200,000 sek	3.6
200,000–250,000 sek	10.79
250,000–300,000 sek	18.73
300,000–400,000 sek	32.73
400,000–500,000 sek	15.14
>500,000 sek	13.72
Woman's income	
Missing	0.85
<100,000 sek	9.27
100,000–150,000 sek	9.46
150,000–200,000 sek	11.64
200,000–250,000 sek	19.58

(Continued)

Appendix A. (Continued)

Variable	Percentages
250,000–300,000 sek	22.33
300,000–400,000 sek	18.26
400,000–500,000 sek	6.24
>500,000 sek	2.37
Children in household	
No child	29.14
0–2 years	27.91
3–6 years	25.92
7–12 years	13.15
13+years	3.88
Marital status	
Married	51.66
Cohabiting	48.34
Birthyear of man	
<1968	25.64
1969–1972	27.63
1973–1976	28.38
1977+	18.35
Birthyear of woman	
<1968	17.22
1969–1972	24.22
1973–1976	28.1
1977+	30.46
Ethnic background: respondent	
Swedish	88.17
Polish	8.61
Turkish	3.22
Man's work status	
Full time: 30 hrs+	89.21
Part time: 10–29 hrs	1.42
Parental leave	2.18
Student	1.7
Other	5.49
Woman's work status	
Full time: 30 hrs+	68.12
Part time: 10–29 hrs	7.47
Parental leave	11.73
Student	4.92
Other	7.76
Man has university degree	
No	46.07
Yes	52.41
Missing	1.51
Woman has university degree	
No	35.57
Yes	63.20
Missing	1.23