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Gender Equality Perceptions, Division of Paid and Unpaid Work, and Partnership Dissolution in Sweden

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Abstract

With the increase in female employment and the decrease in gender labor specialization there has also been a marked change in gender role attitudes. An increasing proportion of women and men has come to prefer gender egalitarianism. Yet, a marked gender division of labor persists. Here we study the interplay between individual gender role attitudes and behavior in terms of sharing paid and unpaid work with one's partner, and implications for partnership stability. We focus on Sweden, a country with long experience of the dual-earner model and policies supporting female labor-force participation while also promoting men's active engagement in family tasks. We test two hypotheses: first, that gender egalitarianism in attitudes and behavior per se strengthens partnership stability (the gender egalitarian model) and, second, that consistency in individual attitudes and couple behavior, whether egalitarian or traditional, strengthens partnership stability (the attitude-behavior consistency model). We use data from the Swedish Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS) conducted in 1999, 2003 and 2009. We find no difference in dissolution risk between the consistent egalitarian and the

consistent traditional individuals, and both categories exhibit lower dissolution risks than individuals holding gender egalitarian views but dividing workload with their spouse/partner in a gender traditional way. These results speak in favor of the attitude-behavior consistency model of marriage.

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Introduction

The era of the Second Demographic Transition in the developed world has been characterized by the deferment of marriage and declining marriage rates, increasing prevalence of less committed relationships, especially cohabitation, postponement of parenthood and low fertility rates, and high and/or increasing rates of partnership dissolution, even among families with children (Lesthaeghe 2010; van de Kaa 1987). Moreover, the supremacy of the male breadwinner-female homemaker model has been successfully challenged by the dual-earner family model.

These changes, especially women's increasing economic independence, have had important implications on gender relations, both on the societal level and in the family (Bernhardt 2004; Goldscheider, Oláh and Puur 2010). The traditional gender division of labor characterizes a rapidly diminishing proportion of couple relationships, as both women and men engage in paid work throughout the life course and share the responsibilities for housework and childcare to an increasing extent. In parallel, there has also been a marked change in gender role attitudes. An increasing proportion of women and men has come to prefer gender egalitarianism (Cotter, Hermsen and Vanneman 2011; Svallfors 2006; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001).

In this paper we explore if, and how, these demographic, economic, and social changes, each with substantial impact on people's lives, are linked to each other. We raise the question whether the gender division of labor in couples and individual gender role attitudes have implications for partnership stability, and whether individual attitudes and couple behavior *interact* to influence the risk for divorce and separation.

In our study we focus on Sweden, where union stability has decreased substantially during the last decades. Not only have formal divorce rates increased, from 4.9 per 1,000

married women in 1962 to 14.6 in 2012 (Statistics Sweden 1964, 2014) but, in addition, non-marital cohabitation has become increasingly widespread (Kiernan 2003; Oláh and Bernhardt 2008) and these unions are even more fragile than marriages, also when children are involved (Statistics Sweden 2007, 2012).

Increasing divorce and separation rates are by no means only a Swedish, or Scandinavian, phenomenon, rather this pattern is close to universal (Goode 1993; Lyngstad and Jalovaara 2010). A number of potential forces driving this development have been suggested (see, e.g., the review by Härkönen, forthcoming), among them *social changes*, e.g. changing attitudes towards divorce and decreased social stigma following divorce, *legal changes*, such as no-fault divorce laws that have simplified divorce (González and Viitanen 2009; Sandström 2012; Stevenson and Wolfers 2007), and the increase in *female employment and income*. It has been argued that wives' employment could generate conflicting interests between spouses, that women's economic independence increases the possibility for them to leave an unsatisfying relationship, and that these effects outweigh the positive impact of increased household income on partnership stability (Cherlin 1992[1981]; Lyngstad and Jalovaara 2010; Sandström 2012).

Empirically, it is still an unresolved question whether a traditional or egalitarian gender division of paid and unpaid work induces partnership stability. An unequal division is likely to decrease relationship quality, and increase dissolution risks, if spouses have a preference for a non-traditional, egalitarian, division of work, but maybe not otherwise. Thus, it could be argued that individual gender role attitudes and actual division of paid and unpaid labor between spouses/partners interact in shaping union (in)stability, where consistency in attitudes and behavior increases partnership stability whereas inconsistency decreases it. Yet, only few previous studies were able to incorporate measures of both attitudes and behavior.

Here we benefit from using a longitudinal data-set, the Swedish Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS), comprising information not only on actual gender division of labor but also on attitudes towards gender issues, measured well before any divorce or separation takes place. By combining data on behavior and attitudes from this quite unique, three-wave data-set, we are able to examine the impact of consistency and inconsistency regarding these dimensions on the risk for union dissolution. We also explore gender differences, if any, in the association between gender division of labor, gender equality perceptions, and partnership stability.

Gender Division of Labor, Gender Role Attitudes, and Union Stability

Gender Division of Labor

During the last decades, most Western societies have witnessed a decline in the gender work specialization (Blossfeld and Drobnic 2001). Survey data and time use studies generally indicate that men's and women's time in paid and unpaid work is converging, as men do less paid and more unpaid work than previously, while the opposite pattern is noticed for women (Gershuny 2000). A gendered division of paid and unpaid work persists, however, as women still do the lion's share of domestic tasks (Bygren, Gähler and Neramo 2004; Sayer 2005). The diminishing gender work specialization has been accompanied (the causal order is difficult to disentangle) by substantial changes in gender role attitudes. Increasing shares of women *and* men approve of female employment and fewer nowadays agree that men and women are designated for different work tasks and should divide paid and unpaid work accordingly (Cotter et al. 2011; Svallfors 2006; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001).

Have these changes affected couple stability? Some scholars argue that declining gender work specialization decreases the risk for divorce. According to Oppenheimer (1994), female

employment should increase marital utility for both spouses as women's earnings contribute to household resources and reduce the economic vulnerability of the family. Moreover, egalitarian gender relations are believed to generate stable and high-quality marriages, based on intimacy, empathy, and mutual understanding (Amato et al. 2003).

Other scholars, however, view decreasing gender specialization as a threat to family stability. Such a view has perhaps been most clearly expressed in new home economics which claims that work specialization between spouses, i.e. the traditional male-provider model with female main responsibility for household tasks and child care, maximizes both spouses' gain from marriage and, thus, minimizes the risk for divorce, whereas dual-earner families run an increased risk for divorce as interdependency of spouses decreases (Becker 1991). Moreover, bargaining and exchange theories predict that spouses' control over resources enables them to bargain for what they want in the marriage and, ultimately, leave the marriage if they are not satisfied (see e.g., Bittman et al. 2003, Cooke 2006). An important difference between theories on specialization and bargaining and exchange theories is that the former predicts female employment to increase the risk for divorce generally, whereas the latter predicts that female employment would only increase the risk for divorce if women are unsatisfied with their marriages (see, e.g., Sayer et al. 2011).

Empirical evidence is mixed. Many studies indicate that female employment, work hours, and relative income, increase the risk for divorce, but others find no effect for these factors and a few studies show that women's employment and income increase partnership stability (see Kalmijn, De Graaf and Poortman 2004; Kalmijn, Loeve and Manting 2007; Lyngstad and Jalovaara 2010; Poortman 2005; Sayer et al. 2011 for reviews).

One reason why increased female employment would not strengthen family stability may be that women's and men's roles have changed in an asymmetric way, as the increase in female employment has not, generally, been accompanied by a corresponding increase in

men's efforts regarding domestic tasks (England 2010). The extension of the female gender role to include gainful employment is widely socially accepted nowadays, but men's engagement in domestic tasks is still considered more or less controversial (i.e. not fully compatible with the male gender role). Thus, Sayer et al. (2011) argue that women's bargaining for an equal (or less unequal) division of domestic tasks is often likely to fail, and they may therefore use their resources from employment for exit rather than voice. Sayer et al. show that employed women initiate divorce only if they are unsatisfied with their marriages, thereby supporting the bargaining/exchange perspectives. If women are happy with their marriages, their employment does not increase their proneness for divorce (see also Schoen et al. 2002).

Some studies find that men's contribution to household and family work increases marital quality and stability among women, but results are inconclusive. A Swedish study for example shows that parents display a significantly lower risk of couple dissolution if the father took parental leave with the first child, compared to couples where the father did not engage in active parenting (Oláh 2001; also see Goldscheider, Oláh and Puur 2010). In an American study, Amato et al. (2003) also show that husband's share of housework increases marital happiness which is closely linked to divorce risk (Kamp Dush and Taylor 2012; Sayer et al. 2011; Schoen et al. 2002) and decreases divorce proneness among women, but decreases marital happiness and increases divorce proneness among men. These results conflict, however, with other American studies that find no association between husbands' share of housework and wives' marital happiness (Greenstein 1996; Wilcox and Nock 2006).¹

The complexity of the issue is further underscored by Cooke's (2006) finding that the association between gender division of work and the risk for divorce varies with policy context. In Germany, characterized by policies reinforcing gender specialization, male

breadwinner couples are the least likely to divorce and the divorce risk rises with increasing domestic work efforts by the husband. In the U.S., with its liberal policy being “silent on the private sphere”, wives being out of the labor force increase the risk for divorce whereas husbands’ increasing domestic contributions decrease it. A recent comparative study also shows strong cross-country variations regarding the impact of wives’ employment on the risk of partnership dissolution. In countries with comprehensive work-life-balance policies, employed women are much less likely to divorce than non-employed women whereas the opposite pattern is found in countries with little policy support for the combination of paid work and family responsibilities (Cooke et al. 2013). Thus, we are not able to conclude that the gender division of work *per se* affects partnership (in)stability.

There seems to be agreement, however, about the importance of how spouses *perceive* the division of work. Women in dual-earner marriages are more likely than men to perceive the division of household chores as unfair, and the sense of unfairness significantly decreases marital happiness and increases psychological distress, marital disagreements, and the risk for divorce among women (Frisco and Williams 2003; Lennon and Rosenfield 1994; Voydanoff and Donnelly 1999), also when holding constant partners’ actual paid and unpaid work hours (DeMaris 2007).

Gender Role Attitudes

The perception of (un)fairness regarding the division of paid and unpaid labor is linked to gender role attitudes. Women with egalitarian gender attitudes are more likely to perceive a traditional division of housework as unfair to them (DeMaris and Longmore 1996), and perceived fairness is also more important for their marital happiness and stability than it is for traditional women (Greenstein 1996). Moreover, these perceptions seem to be contingent upon societal-level gender equity. In nations with low levels of gender equity (like Southern

European countries), the actual share of household labor has limited impact on women's perception of fairness of the division of household labor, whereas the effect is much stronger in societies with high levels of gender equity (like Sweden). In the latter group, perception of fairness is also more important for satisfaction with family life than in countries with low levels of gender equity. Women who perceive lack of fairness are much less satisfied with family life in high gender-equity societies than in low gender-equity nations. When women perceive high level of fairness, cross-national differences are only marginal (Greenstein 2009). These results have been explained within the framework of relative deprivation theory, according to which individuals' subjective assessments of a situation, rather than objective conditions, determine their perception of fairness; perceptions are contingent on comparison, i.e. the evaluation of actual vis-à-vis expected circumstances; and individuals have a preference for equity. If individuals perceive inequity, they will feel discontent and strive to attain equity (ibid.).

In addition, Amato and Booth (1995), in their longitudinal study, show that wives who adopt more egalitarian gender role attitudes often perceive their marriages as less rewarding. They report less marital happiness, more disagreement, and a higher proneness for divorce than wives with stable, and more traditional, gender role attitudes. For men, however, the opposite pattern is found. Husbands who adopt more egalitarian gender role attitudes report higher marital quality than husbands reporting no change in gender role attitudes. This pattern is confirmed for actual divorce risks. Kaufman (2000) shows that women expressing gender egalitarian views are slightly (but not significantly) more likely to divorce/separate than women with more traditional orientation on gender labor specialization whereas egalitarian oriented men are less likely to divorce than traditionally oriented men (see, however, Frisco and Williams 2003 for opposing results on men). Kaufman speculates that men with gender equal views are likely to be more family oriented than men with traditional gender role

attitudes and, thus, have more to lose from family disruption. Moreover, they may be more highly valued as partners as they are likely to share domestic responsibilities.

Gender Division of Labor and Gender Role Attitudes Combined

So far, our discussion has focused *either* on the gender division of work *or* gender role attitudes and how they are associated with marital quality and divorce. Only few previous studies have simultaneously incorporated measures of attitudes and behavior. In one exception, Amato et al. (2003) find that equal decision making between spouses increases marital quality whereas traditional gender attitudes decrease it. Moreover, husband's housework increases marital quality for women (but not for men). In general, increases in husband's housework and equal decision making, and decrease in traditional gender attitudes between 1980 and 2000, have all contributed to increase the quality of U.S. marriages, although this positive impact was offset by other changes. Thus, Amato et al.'s results suggest that gender equality, in theory and in practice, benefit marriages and marital stability (also see Kamp Dush and Taylor 2012). We label this perspective the *gender egalitarian model of marriage*.

Wilcox and Nock's (2006) findings largely conflict with Amato et al.'s. In their study, husband's housework and gender role egalitarianism has no impact on wives' marital happiness. Wilcox and Nock instead emphasize the importance of women's *perception* of the division of household labor. Women who hold egalitarian gender attitudes are more likely than women holding traditional gender attitudes to perceive the division of household labor as unfair. Accordingly, Wilcox and Nock find that wives who hold egalitarian gender attitudes and consider the division of household labor to be unfair to them, are significantly less likely to report marital happiness. Thus, rather than gender equality per se, the perception of equity and the importance of congruence between attitudes and behavior for marital

happiness among women could be stressed (also see Greenstein 1996; Stevens, Kiger and Riley 2001). We label this perspective the *attitude-behavior consistency model of marriage*.

Summary of Previous Research

It is no easy task to synthesize results and conclusions from previous studies on the interplay between gender role attitudes, gender division of work, and divorce. Results are inconclusive and sometimes difficult to interpret, for several reasons. First, few studies include measures of paid and unpaid work and attitudes simultaneously. Thus we have limited knowledge about whether each of these conditions is linked to partnership stability holding constant for the other.

Second, studies that include measures on all these conditions only report their main effects and we have insufficient knowledge of how these dimensions interact. Hence, we do not know how (in)consistency in attitudes and behavior affects union disruption risks.

Third, some studies include direct measures of perception of fairness regarding the gender division of household work. Yet, it is not clear what actually drives this perception, an even division of household tasks or a perception that an uneven division is fair? Not surprisingly, then, perception of fairness seems to be only weakly correlated with women's and men's actual division of household work (Frisco and Williams 2003). Respondents may also incorrectly claim fairness in the household work division to avoid the embarrassment of not being able to achieve a work division in accordance with their preference. Also, marital problems may cause spouses to perceive their work division as unfair rather than the other way around (Grote and Clark 2001). Hence, the order of causality is unclear.

Fourth, most previous studies are based on cross-sectional data. Thus, we are not able to distinguish how attitudes, behavior, and partnership dissolution are temporally linked to each other. Respondents, when asked about attitudes and behavior at the same occasion, may

adjust their responses to avoid inconsistency and, thus, obscure the real association between gender role attitudes, gender division of work and partnership dissolution (cf. Kalmijn, De Graaf and Poortman 2004).

In this paper, we are able to deal with these problems as we have access to longitudinal data, including information on individual gender role attitudes, couple division of paid and unpaid work, and partnership dissolution over a long time-span. We seek to improve our understanding of the interplay between these dimensions. Above all, we will scrutinize the relative importance of the gender egalitarian and the attitude-behavior consistency models of marriage, respectively.

According to the gender egalitarian model of marriage, we would hypothesize that partnership dissolution risks are relatively low for women and men in couples where both are gainfully employed to about the same extent, share housework equally, and hold gender egalitarian attitudes. According to the attitude-behavior consistency model of marriage, on the other hand, we would hypothesize that dissolution risks are relatively low for women and men whose individual gender ideology is congruent with the couple's division of paid and unpaid work, independent of *how* workload is divided, i.e. whether spouses share paid and unpaid work equally or if the division is gender traditional. As opposed to the gender egalitarian model of marriage, then, the attitude-behavior consistency model of marriage predicts that gender egalitarian attitudes and behavior may *increase* the risk for divorce/separation, if they are accompanied by gender traditional behavior and attitudes respectively.

The Swedish Context

Sweden has had high female employment rates for several decades. In 1970, when the OECD-average of labor force participation among women aged 15-64 years was 47.6 per cent, it reached 59.3 per cent in Sweden and increased to 76.8 per cent by 2003, while the OECD-average reached 59.4 per cent, with little further increase since then (OECD.Stat 2014). Women's high activity levels at the labor market were linked to a consequent emphasis on gender equality in Sweden, both in the public sphere and in family life, since the late 1960s (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008). Individual taxation (since 1971), no-fault divorce and the abolition of spousal alimony (since 1974) provided incentives for women to engage in paid work independently of marital and/or parental status. The parental-leave program (introduced in 1974 and extended several times), as well as public childcare provision, have facilitated reconciliation of work and family responsibilities for both women and men since the mid-/late 1970s.

Also, men's family role has been actively promoted by policy efforts. This is seen in the parental leave program in which fathers and mothers have been eligible for leave on equal conditions since the start of the program; the introduction of the 10 daddy days at the birth of a child in 1980; the father's quota in parental leave – one month since 1995, extended to two months in 2002; the introduction in 1983 of parents' continued joint custody for children after divorce/separation, strengthened in 1998 (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008).

Indeed, egalitarian gender roles of women and men have long-term societal support in Sweden, which is likely to affect gender role attitudes and probably even behavior to some extent. In fact, egalitarian gender role attitudes are comparatively widespread in Sweden (Svallfors 2006) and Swedish women have a higher labor market participation rate (Jaumotte 2003), are less economically dependent on their husbands (Evertsson and Nermo 2004; Sørensen 1994), and do a smaller share of household work (Fuwa and Cohen 2007) than

women in most other countries. Hence, the Swedish context is ideal for studying the impact of gender equality perceptions on the stability of partnerships.

Data, Variables, and Methods

In this paper, we analyze data extracted from the three waves of the Swedish Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS), designed by Professor Eva Bernhardt and conducted in 1999, 2003 and 2009. YAPS is a mail questionnaire survey with the Survey Unit of Statistics Sweden in charge of all fieldwork. It provides data on men and women born in Sweden in 1968, 1972, 1976 and 1980, including a small sample of young women and men with at least one parent born in either Poland or Turkey. The study is augmented with register data on vital events, currently up to the end of 2009.

YAPS was designed to enable studies, like ours, of the complex relationship between attitudes, behavior and demographic events (see, e.g., the YAPS-based study by Thomson and Bernhardt 2010). It provides information on plans, expectations and attitudes regarding family and working life, including gender role orientation, histories of childbearing and partnerships, as well as information about current situation and background characteristics.

Our working sample includes 1 478 persons, 872 women and 606 men, living in a co-residential partnership at the 2003 wave of the survey, for whom we have information in the 2009 wave. Around 67% of respondents were living in a cohabiting relationship and 33% in marriage. The event of interest is partnership dissolution in the period between wave 2 and 3 (i.e. 2003-2009)²; 15.9 percent of the overall sample experienced the event.

Piecewise constant proportional hazards model is our tool of analysis, frequently applied in demographic research, also in studies of union stability. We observe respondents from the time of the 2003 wave until the dissolution of the partnership or until censoring at the 2009

wave. We start the observation at the 2003 wave rather than at union formation as in this paper we address the impact, if any, of the congruence between individual gender attitudes and the couple's division of labor on union stability, and these dimensions (i.e. attitude and behavior) are only measured at the survey waves in 1999 and 2003. Duration since the 2003 wave is our time variable, divided into yearly intervals. The risk of union dissolution is assumed to be constant within one interval, but may vary between intervals. In line with previous studies of divorce/separation, we expect a positive selection of partnerships over time as the more fragile unions dissolve relatively quickly, hence the risk of break-up decreases at longer duration. We include a control variable in the models to take into account the time between union formation and the 2003 wave of the survey when we start the observation.

Our main explanatory variable is *consistency of gender equality attitudes and division of housework*, i.e. whether individual gender attitudes are congruent with couple division of domestic tasks. This allows us to study whether and how the interplay between attitudes and behavior affects union stability. We use information on respondents' attitudes on the ideal division of work in families with pre-school aged children, measured in 1999³, and information on the actual division of housework in the partnership in 2003. In the 1999 wave the following question was asked: "What do you think would be the best arrangement for a family with preschool children?" Four response alternatives were provided: 1) Only the man works and the woman takes main responsibility for home and children; 2) Both work, but the woman works part-time and takes the main responsibility for home and children; 3) Both work, but the man works part-time and takes the main responsibility for home and children; 4) Both parents work roughly the same hours and share the responsibility for home and children equally. If choosing either of the first two response-alternatives, the attitude was coded as 'traditional', otherwise as 'egalitarian'.

As for the division of housework in 2003, we rely on the question: “In which way do you share the housework between you and your partner”, with three response alternatives: 1) I do the most; 2) My partner does the most; 3) We share equally.⁴ Outsourcing housework has not been specified as an option, but the three response alternatives capture rather well who has the main responsibility for domestic tasks in the union. Depending on the respondent’s and the partner’s sex, responses were coded as ‘traditional’ if the woman does the most, otherwise ‘egalitarian’.

By combining information for these two variables, we obtain four categories for the explanatory variable: consistent egalitarian (when both attitude and the division of housework are egalitarian), consistent traditional (when both attitude and the share of housework are non-egalitarian), ambivalent egalitarian (when attitudes are egalitarian but the division of housework is traditional), and ambivalent traditional (when traditional attitudes are combined with egalitarian homework division). Thus, we benefit from the longitudinal data structure by using information on attitudes from the first wave (1999), before information on actual gender division of labor was gathered in the second wave (2003), and well before any divorce or separation took place in the period 2003-2009, thereby reducing the risk that respondent’s attitudes are biased by the demographic event, i.e. partnership dissolution (see Kalmijn, De Graaf and Poortman 2004), and that attitudes are biased due to an adjustment to actual behavior, i.e. the share of housework, which could be the case if attitudes and behavior were measured simultaneously.⁵

However, respondents could have adjusted their attitudes to behavior already in 1999. To estimate this potential risk we have performed analyses based only on respondents who were single in 1999 as their attitudes would not be biased by actual division of housework between spouses/partners. The drawback with this is that the number of cases drops to only 214 and results are therefore unreliable due to large standard errors. Nevertheless, these analyses yield

very similar results for the consistency of gender equality attitudes and division of housework, as the findings presented here, indicating that our results are robust to the potential risk of adjustment of attitudes to behavior.

Finally, in order to test that results are not unique for attitudes on division of work in families with children, we performed a test using another attitude measure. The breadwinning/homemaker attitude measure is based on respondent's opinion about two statements: "Household work is the woman's main task" and "Breadwinning is the man's main task". Respondents who strongly disagreed with both of these statements were categorized as 'egalitarian', otherwise as 'traditional'. Results from these analyses are very similar to those presented here and indicate that the findings are also robust to type of measure of gender role attitudes. A disadvantage with the latter analysis is that information on attitudes was collected only in 2003, i.e. at the same time as information on division of housework was collected. Although not presented here, results from all robustness checks are available from authors upon request.

In the analyses, we control for couple's division of market work in 2003 (as reported by the respondent) by two categories: egalitarian (man and woman work equally much, or the woman works more) and traditional (the man works more).⁶ We also test whether the association between consistency of individual gender role attitudes and couple division of housework and subsequent partnership dissolution if any is dependent on how partners divide market work. For this purpose we conduct two additional analyses where the sample is split by couple's division of market work.

Other control variables in the analyses are: respondent's sex, cohort (age in 2003), childhood family type, experience of previous union by 2003, the type of partnership in 2003 and later (time-varying covariate), the length of the partnership in 2003, whether having a child from another partnership in the household in 2003, age of the youngest child (time-

varying), and variables on different aspects of couple homogeneity (not frequently available in survey data): ethnic background, religiosity, and educational attainment. We have also run models with age at partnership formation (with respect to the union that was ongoing in 2003) instead of cohort, not reported here as there were no changes regarding the main findings, but available upon request.

Results

In Table 1, descriptive statistics for variables in the analyses are presented. As could be expected, male and female respondents differ in their gender role attitudes. By adding the categories “consistent egalitarian” and “ambivalent egalitarian” we find that 73 percent of the female respondents express egalitarian views on the ideal division of work in families with pre-school aged children, compared to 66 percent for male respondents. Moreover, women are slightly less prone than men to describe the actual division of housework between spouses to be egalitarian (53 versus 60 percent). Differences are significant for both dimensions, i.e. attitude and the division of housework.

Regarding other variables in the analyses, gender differences are small, in line with expectations since several variables refer to the couple or the household (as reported by the respondent) rather than the individual. The gender differences that we find, in age and that women have experienced previous partnerships to a higher extent, have been in their current partnership for a longer time, and are more likely to have children in their household, simply mirror the fact that women are younger than men on average when they form couples and become parents.

More than half of the time under observation, couples in these data are cohabiting. This reflects Swedish family formation patterns where young couples most often start off living together as unmarried and only marry later in life, if ever.

[Table 1 here]

We next turn our attention to the issue whether, and to what extent, the risk for divorce and separation is associated with individual gender equality attitudes and the couple division of household labor. Table 2 shows the proportions who experienced partnership dissolution among married and cohabiting couples during the period 2003-2009. From these results it is clear that (in)consistency in gender role attitudes and housework division is indeed associated with the risk for divorce/separation. The two consistent categories, i.e. consistent egalitarian and consistent traditional, exhibit lower risks for divorce/separation than the two ambivalent categories. In particular, the ambivalent egalitarian, i.e. individuals who prefer a gender equal labor division but actually divide household tasks in a gender traditional manner in the partnership, stand out with a substantially higher risk for divorce/separation. They are almost 50 percent more likely to break up than the consistent egalitarian ($20.2/13.8=1.46$). These differences are more pronounced among men than among women, i.e. ambivalent egalitarian men are particularly likely to divorce or separate, but the pattern is similar for women and men.

[Table 2 here]

In Table 3, we present a multivariate analysis, based on a piecewise constant proportional hazards model of the divorce/separation risk during the period 2003-2009 by consistency/ambivalence of individual attitudes regarding the ideal division of work in families with pre-school aged children (in 1999) and the couple division of household work (in 2003). The results confirm the picture from the bivariate analysis (Table 2), that

respondents holding gender egalitarian attitudes in partnerships where spouses/partners divide household tasks equally, and respondents holding gender traditional attitudes in partnerships where spouses/partners divide household tasks traditionally, are the least likely to divorce or separate (Model 1). Individuals with ambivalent combinations of gender role attitudes and division of domestic tasks exhibit higher risks for divorce/separation, although we find significantly higher dissolution risks only for ambivalent egalitarian individuals, exhibiting an increased risk of 50 percent compared to the consistent egalitarian. Thus, individuals with a preference for gender equality, living in a partnership where domestic tasks are traditionally divided, exhibit an excessive risk for divorce/separation.

[Table 3 here]

To test whether the patterns stand for both women and men, we add the interaction term between gender and the consistency measure in Model 2. None of these interactions reach statistical significance which suggests that the association between divorce/separation and consistency in gender equality attitudes and division of housework is similar for women and men.⁷ We have also tested the main effects of gender role attitudes and division of housework as separate variables in the models, rather than combined. These analyses (not shown) reveal that none of these variables were significantly associated with partnership dissolution.

The difference in partnership dissolution risks across consistency categories cannot be explained by variation in couple's division of market work as this is controlled for in the model. This variable shows, as many previous studies, that unions where partners divide market work in a gender traditional way are more stable than unions where the man and the woman work equally much or, in particular (as indicated by a deepened analysis, not shown), where she works most.

More important here, however, is the question whether the association between union dissolution and consistency in gender role attitudes and division of household work varies with division of market work. In order to test this, we have conducted separate analyses for individuals who divide market work with their spouse/partner in an egalitarian and traditional way, respectively. These analyses (not shown) suggest that the increased risk for divorce/separation among the ambivalent egalitarian is particularly high if market work is also divided in a traditional way. Among couples working equally much (or where she works more), the increased risk in Model 1 is 31 percent ($p=0.211$) and among traditional couples the increased risk is 67 percent ($p=0.080$). None of the other categories differs significantly from the reference category, i.e. the consistent egalitarian.

Regarding the other variables in the model, we find results in the expected direction. Respondents who experienced the break-up of parents during childhood are more likely to experience family dissolution themselves (i.e. intergenerational transmission of divorce/separation), marriages are more stable than cohabitations,⁸ respondents with experience of previous divorce/separation are more likely to break up again, and if at least one of the partners is of non-European origin the disruption risk is high compared to couples with Swedish or Nordic origin.

The time variable, duration since the 2003 survey, when controlling for length of partnership in 2003, shows, also in accordance with expectations, that the longer the couple sticks together the lower is the risk of disruption, given the congruence of gender equality attitudes (in 1999) and the division of work (in 2003). The most fragile relationships break up quickly so there is a positive selection over time, with couples having about half the risk to divorce/separate after three years compared to the first year of the observation. Dissolution risk does not seem to decline further though at longer durations. Also, it seems to matter little

for how long the couple has been living together by the 2003 wave, for their break-up risk in the period 2003-2009.

The youngest respondents, 23 years old in 2003, exhibit a much higher risk for divorce/separation than older respondents. Based on the present analysis it is not possible to conclude on whether this is due to an age or cohort effect.

The results from this analysis also confirm that couples who have recently become parents are much less likely to break up than parents with older children and childless couples. Being a step-family, i.e. partnerships where one or both partners bring children from a previous partnership, also seems to increase the divorce/separation risk, although the difference towards other families is not statistically significant.

To conclude, controlling for all these factors does not change the picture that was evident already in the bivariate analysis, that individuals whose gender role attitudes are in accordance with their actual division of housework exhibit the lowest risk for divorce/separation whereas individuals with egalitarian gender role attitudes, living in a partnership where housework is gender traditionally divided, exhibit the highest risk for divorce, and this pattern is valid for both women and men.

Concluding Discussion

During the last decades, ever increasing proportions of women and men have come to express a preference for equality in gender relations. Studies on gender role attitudes show that respondents generally disapprove of gender work specialization: female employment is widely accepted, men are increasingly expected to contribute to household and family work, and fewer tasks are regarded as either “male” or “female” (Cotter et al. 2011; Svallfors 2006; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001). Yet, in practice a gendered labor division is highly

prevalent. In Sweden, women work part-time to a higher extent than men, they do most of the domestic chores, and mothers stay home with small children to a higher extent and for longer periods than fathers (Bygren, Gähler and Nermo 2004). In this paper, we analyze if, and how, individual gender role attitudes and the couple's gender division of labor are associated with partnership stability. In particular, we raise the question whether individual attitudes and couple household work division interact to influence divorce and separation risks.

We find that neither gender role attitudes, as indicated by respondents' views on the ideal division of work in families with pre-school aged children, nor actual division of domestic tasks *per se* are associated with the risk for partnership dissolution. Instead, our results suggest that it is important to account for the *combination* of attitudes and behavior, as an uneven distribution of household chores seems only to increase the risk for divorce and separation if spouses/partners express a preference for gender equality. Indeed, respondents whose gender role attitudes are in accordance with the couple division of household work, either as consistent egalitarian or consistent traditional, run a lower risk for divorce/separation than respondents whose attitudes and behavior are not in accordance. The highest break-up risk is found among the ambivalent egalitarians, who hold egalitarian gender role attitudes but share domestic tasks traditionally with their spouse/partner. The increased risk is particularly high if spouses/partners also divide paid work hours in a traditional way.

As we rely on three-wave panel data, the results are not likely to be biased by an adjustment of attitudes to behavior, or of attitudes and behavior to a break-up, as information on attitudes was collected well before (in 1999) information on couple division of household tasks which, in turn, was collected (in 2003) before the study period under risk for divorce/separation (2003-2009). The risk for bias is not entirely eliminated, however, as

respondents may anticipate changes in behavior and/or union status before these actually take place.

How do our results relate to previous studies and theoretical perspectives? According to the *gender egalitarian model of marriage* (or the companionate model of marriage, see Wilcox and Nock 2006), an equal division of decision-making and of housework and market work between spouses *per se* should increase partnership stability. This model has received empirical support in, e.g., Amato et al. (2003) and Kamp Dush and Taylor (2012). Our results partly confirm this picture as consistent egalitarian respondents run a relatively low risk for divorce/separation. However, consistent traditional respondents run an equally low break-up risk. Hence, gender equality *per se* does not seem to preserve union stability. This is also supported by the finding that individuals in couples who share responsibility for unpaid and paid work equally do not have a lower break-up risk.

According to the *attitude-behavior consistency model of marriage*, on the other hand, an unequal gender division of household labor increases the risk for divorce/separation only if the spouses/partners have a preference for gender role egalitarianism. This model has received empirical support in, e.g., Greenstein (1996), Voydanoff and Donnelly (1999) and Wilcox and Nock (2006). Our results, with low dissolution risks among respondents exhibiting consistency in individual attitudes and couple behavior, whether gender egalitarian or traditional, also lend support to this model. Thus, it seems that consistency in attitudes and behavior is more important for partnership stability than a gender egalitarian division of household work *per se*.

Wilcox and Nock (2006) also find support for two other models of marriage. First, the *gender model of marriage*, which suggests that couples prefer to “produce gender”, i.e. behave in a gender typical way, to increase marital happiness. Our results that there is no main effect of the division of household work, i.e. an equal division of household labor does

not increase the risk for partnership dissolution, and that the ambivalent egalitarian, i.e. respondents holding gender egalitarian attitudes but sharing domestic tasks in a traditional way, exhibit a relatively high dissolution risk, speak against this model (see also the discussion by Sullivan (2011a, 2011b) for other aspects questioning this model). However, we also find that an egalitarian division of paid work seems to increase the risk for union dissolution. The latter result appears to support the gender model of marriage, theories on specialization, and bargaining and exchange theories, but it should be noted that the order of causality may be reversed, i.e. that women who anticipate a divorce/separation increase their labor market attachment rather than the other way around.

Second, findings by Amato et al. (2003) and Wilcox and Nock (2006) are in line with the *institutional model of marriage*, which suggests that religious activity lends social support to marriage and instills commitment to marriage as an institution. Our results deviate, however, as religiosity, operationalized as couples where both parties claim to be very religious, shows no association with partnership dissolution risk. This finding is likely to reflect the limited importance of religiosity in the highly secular Swedish society (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008). Another possible explanation may be that our measure captures religious *belief* only but not religious *activity*, e.g. church attendance or participation in religious organizations, which, according to the theoretical model, are assumed to generate social support for marriage.

Do our results differ by gender? It may come as no surprise that Swedish men are slightly more likely than women to express gender traditional attitudes on the ideal division of work in families with pre-school children (34 versus 27 percent) (see Table 1). Women and men placing themselves in the same consistency/ambivalence category, however, do not run different risks for divorce or separation. In other words, we find no significant interaction effect between gender and the consistency measure; the relation between attitudes and behavior affects women's and men's divorce and separation risks in a similar way. It may be

surprising that men and women in the ambivalent egalitarian category, i.e. holding gender equal attitudes but sharing household work in a traditional manner, run the same relative risk for partnership dissolution. We may have expected this combination to be perceived as more unfair by women and, thus, induce higher relative divorce risks among them. Instead, this result suggests that men with gender egalitarian attitudes wish to live in a gender equal partnership to about the same extent as women holding such attitudes. This reasoning is supported by the finding that the risk for union dissolution does not differ between women and men in the consistent egalitarian category.

Our paper has thus contributed to the field by a deepened analysis of the interplay between individual gender role attitudes and couple division of labor and their association with partnership stability. We have benefited from three-wave panel data where attitudes, behavior, and risk for divorce could be separated in time. This is an essential strength compared to most previous studies, which are based on cross-sectional data. A weakness, however, that we share with many other studies, is that we only have information on *one* spouse's/partner's attitudes. Each of our respondents constitutes only one of two parties in the decision to split-up or stay together and we do not know how spouses' gender role perceptions, given workload, interact to shape partnership stability. How, then, could this lack of data be expected to affect our results? We believe that the differences between consistency/ambivalence categories that we report here are, in fact, underestimated as they may be "contaminated" by spouses/partners belonging to other categories, exhibiting higher/lower divorce/separation risks. Thus, an examination of *both* spouses'/partners' gender role attitudes, their division of labor, and how these interact to influence divorce/separation risks would be an important next step in this field of research.

Notes

1. Moreover, whereas Amato et al. (2003) find a negative association with marital happiness for wives' full-time employment, and no association for wives' income, Wilcox and Nock (2006) find that wives' income is negatively associated, and full-time employment is not associated, with marital happiness.
2. Although YAPS is enriched with register data, hence also data on divorce, for the majority of couples who were cohabiting at the 2003 wave of the survey, information about separation, if any, is only available via the 2009 wave of the survey.
3. For the 1980 cohort, attitudes were measured in 2003 as this cohort was only added to the sample then. We have also conducted analyses where the 1980 cohort was excluded and found only one deviation from the results presented here (see note 7).
4. Unfortunately, there is no information in the data set prior to the 2009 wave on the actual number of hours spent on housework.
5. We have also conducted such analyses, where attitudes and behavior were measured at the same time (in 2003), and results differ only little from those presented here.
6. YAPS provides information on whether respondents (and spouse/partner if any) worked full-time, part-time, studied, were unemployed or not gainfully employed for other reasons, but not of the number of weekly working hours.
7. In a deepened analysis (not displayed here), where the youngest cohort, i.e. respondents born in 1980, was excluded, the interaction ambivalent egalitarian*woman turns significant (relative risk=0.41, $p=0.018$).
8. We found no difference between marriage and cohabitation when we tested the interaction between partnership type and the gender attitude/behavior consistency measure.

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Tables

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for variables in the analyses, by gender.

	All (n)	Percent	Women (n)	Percent	Men (n)	Percent
Respondent's consistency of attitudes (1999) on ideal division of work in families with pre-school aged children and couple's division of housework (2003)						
Consistent egalitarian (egalitarian/egalitarian)	628	42.5	374	42.9	254	41.9
Consistent traditional (traditional/traditional)	238	16.1	140	16.1	98	16.2
Ambivalent egalitarian (egalitarian/traditional)	411	27.8	266	30.5	145	23.9
Ambivalent traditional (traditional/egalitarian)	201	13.6	92	10.5	109	18.0
Couple's division of market work in 2003						
Traditional (he works most)	668	45.2	402	46.1	266	43.9
Egalitarian (both work equally much or she works most)	810	54.8	470	53.9	340	56.1
Respondent's gender						
Male	606	41.0				
Female	872	59.0				
Respondent's cohort (age in 2003)						
1968 (35)	397	26.9	213	24.4	184	30.4
1972 (31)	461	31.2	281	32.2	180	29.7
1976 (27)	405	27.4	245	28.1	160	26.4
1980 (23)	215	14.5	133	15.2	82	13.5
Respondent's family type in childhood						
Intact	1,113	75.3	659	75.6	454	74.9
Parents divorced	291	19.7	177	20.3	114	18.8
Other	74	5.0	36	4.1	38	6.3
Partnership type (time-varying)						
Cohabitation		55.6		55.5		55.8
Marriage		44.4		44.5		44.2
Respondent's experience of previous partnership						
No	975	66.0	545	62.5	430	71.0
Yes	503	34.0	327	37.5	176	29.0
Age of youngest child in the household (time-varying)						
No children		32.9		31.7		34.6
<1 year		15.3		15.2		15.5
1-2 years		13.7		14.4		12.7
3-5 years		16.9		17.3		16.3
>5 years		21.2		21.4		20.9
Child from another partnership in the household in 2003						
No/no information	1,347	91.1	789	90.5	558	92.1
Yes	131	8.9	83	9.5	48	7.9

Couple's educational homogeneity						
Both post-secondary	228	15.4	142	16.3	86	14.2
One post-secondary	317	21.5	169	19.4	148	24.4
None post-secondary/unknown	933	63.1	561	64.3	372	61.4
Couple's ethnic homogeneity						
Both with Swedish-/Nordic-born parents	1,201	81.3	707	81.1	494	81.5
Swedish-born and European-, Polish- or Turkish-born parent and Nordic-born or European-born partner	202	13.7	125	14.3	77	12.7
Other	75	5.0	40	4.6	35	5.8
Couple's religiosity						
Both very religious	54	3.7	36	4.1	18	3.0
Other	1424	96.3	836	95.9	588	97.0
Length of partnership in 2003						
One year or less	179	12.1	98	11.2	81	13.4
13 months to 3 years	336	22.7	185	21.2	151	24.9
More than 3 years	963	65.2	589	65.6	374	61.7
Duration since the 2003 wave (time variable)						
<1 year		19.7		19.7		19.8
2 years		19.1		19.1		18.9
3 years		18.7		18.8		18.6
4 years		18.7		18.8		18.6
>4 years		23.8		23.6		24.1
Divorce/separation in the period 2003-2009						
Yes	235	15.9	137	15.7	98	16.2
No	1,243	84.1	735	84.3	508	83.8
Total	1,478	100.0	872	100.0	606	100.0

Table 2. Proportion of respondents (%) who experienced partnership dissolution in 2003-2009, by consistency/ambivalence regarding gender equality attitudes (1999) and division of household work (2003).

	<i>All</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
Respondent's consistency of attitudes (1999) on ideal division of work in families with pre-school aged children and couple's division of housework (2003)			
Consistent egalitarian (egalitarian/egalitarian)	13.8	14.4	13.0
Consistent traditional (traditional/traditional)	14.3	14.3	14.3
Ambivalent egalitarian (egalitarian/traditional)	20.2	18.0	24.1
Ambivalent traditional (traditional/egalitarian)	15.4	16.3	14.7
Total	15.9	15.7	16.2
<i>N</i>	1,478	872	606

Table 3. Consistency/ambivalence regarding gender equality attitudes (1999) and division of household work (2003), and risk for partnership dissolution in 2003-2009. Piecewise constant proportional hazards model. Relative risks.

	Model	
Respondent's consistency of attitudes (1999) on ideal division of work in families with pre-school aged children and couple's division of housework (2003)	1	2
Consistent egalitarian (egalitarian/egalitarian)	1	1
Consistent traditional (traditional/traditional)	1.07	0.99
Ambivalent egalitarian (egalitarian/traditional)	1.50*	1.94**
Ambivalent traditional (traditional/egalitarian)	1.27	1.28
Couple's division of market work in 2003		
Traditional (he works most)	1	1
Egalitarian (both work equally much or she works most)	1.48**	1.47**
Respondent's gender		
Male	1	1
Female	0.91	1.03
Interaction term: Consistency of attitudes on ideal division of work/division of housework*gender		
Consistent egalitarian*woman	-	1
Consistent traditional*woman	-	1.15
Ambivalent egalitarian*woman	-	0.65
Ambivalent traditional*woman	-	1.00
Respondent's cohort (age in 2003)		
1968 (35)	1	1
1972 (31)	1.23	1.24
1976 (27)	1.74*	1.76*
1980 (23)	2.88***	2.89***
Respondent's family type in childhood		
Intact	1	1
Parents divorced	1.36*	1.36*
Other	0.87	0.89
Partnership type (time-varying)		
Cohabitation	1	1
Marriage	0.62**	0.61**
Respondent's experience of previous partnership		
No	1	1
Yes	1.52**	1.53**
Age of youngest child in the household (time-varying)		
No children	0.90	0.88
<1 year	0.06***	0.06***
1-2 years	0.35**	0.35**
3-5 years	1	1
>5 years	1.25	1.24
Child from another partnership in the household in 2003		
No/no information	1	1
Yes	1.44	1.44

Couple's educational homogeneity		
Both post-secondary	1	1
One post-secondary	0.90	0.92
None post-secondary/unknown	0.99	1.00
Couple's ethnic homogeneity		
Both with Swedish-/Nordic-born parents	1	1
Swedish-born and European-, Polish- or Turkish-born parent and Nordic-born or European-born partner	1.31	1.31
Other	1.97**	2.02**
Couple's religiosity		
Both very religious	1	1
Other	0.80	0.82
Length of partnership in 2003		
One year or less	1	1
13 months to 3 years	0.84	0.84
More than 3 years	0.85	0.85
Duration since the 2003 wave (time variable)		
<1 year	1	1
2 years	0.97	0.98
3 years	0.94	0.94
4 years	0.55*	0.55*
>4 years	0.58**	0.59**
Constant	0.003***	0.002***
Log likelihood	-808.348	-806.995
No. of independent parameters	28	31

*** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$.