

**Do more egalitarian men experience less union dissolution?
Reconsidering men's roles in gender theories of family change**

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Extended Abstract

Recently, proponents of gender revolution theory have argued that as men become more egalitarian in their gender role attitudes, and as they share housework and childcare more equally, they enjoy happier, more stable partnerships (Goldscheider et al. 2015). This hypothesized pattern is broadly consistent with macro-level social trends in most developed societies over the last few decades. These trends show that divorce rates have stabilized or declined (OECD 2018; Cohen 2019); “traditional” gender role attitudes have become less commonplace, as a variety of more egalitarian attitudes have taken hold (Bolzendahl & Myers 2004; Cotter et al. 2011; Knight and Brinton 2017); and men’s contribution to domestic labor has been increasing (Altintas and Sullivan 2018).

At the micro-level, why might men’s egalitarianism be related to partnership stability? When men participate less in domestic labor, female partners experience a “second shift”, i.e., women shoulder the double burden of caretaking as well as working for pay (Hochschild and Machung 1989). In this case, the female partner may experience greater work-family conflict, and feel “underbenefited” in her relationship (Leopold 2019). In contrast, in couples in which the male partner participates more in domestic labor, the female partner may experience greater feelings of satisfaction with the relationship and greater marital happiness (Barstad 2014; Greenstein 1996; Schober 2012). Gender revolution theory suggests that these positive feelings among women may, in turn, lead to lower rates of union dissolution (Goldscheider et al. 2015).¹ Similarly, in couples in which the male partner holds more egalitarian gender role attitudes, the female partner may appreciate his supportive approach towards her paid work and towards her desires for equality (Amato and Booth 1995).

The current research reads gender revolution theory through the lens of men as well as women, rather than of women only. More specifically, we address the consequences of men’s domestic labor for their own experiences within the relationship. In an extension of the “flip side” argument put forth in Okun & Raz-Yurovich (2019), we suggest here that the greater contribution to domestic labor among men may affect their own feelings of relationship satisfaction, perceptions of relationship cohesion, and eventual union dissolution. At the couple level, the effects on men’s experiences may counterbalance the effects on union stability stemming from women’s increased satisfaction from the relationship. The importance

¹It may also be that men who are more involved in domestic labor, particularly childcare, are more reluctant to leave the home due to gender asymmetry in child custody (Goldscheider et al. 2015). Thus the theoretical arguments apply to both housework and childcare, but perhaps are a bit stronger for childcare.

of explicitly taking both women's and men's experiences into consideration, as part of a couple-level perspective, is supported, for example, by the higher odds of "breakup" plans among Norwegian men who participate more in routine housework, which contrasts with the lower odds of "breakup" plans among women whose partners share housework more equally (Barstad 2014). This example highlights how theoretical implications of men's changing roles in terms of union dissolution at the couple-level may differ from those at the level of each partner individually.

Along the lines of the "flip-side" perspective, why might it be the case that more egalitarian men will not experience greater partnership stability? In couples where men take on a greater share of the housework or childcare, the male partners may experience fewer 'gains' to marriage or partnerships, especially if they suffer in terms of wages or job promotion (e.g. Cooke 2014; Killewald and Gough 2013). This perspective is consistent with a microeconomic model of marriage, which implies that unions become less stable in the absence of exploitation of partners' comparative advantages (Becker 1981). Similarly, if men's increasingly egalitarian gender role attitudes are not accompanied by parallel changes in sharing of domestic duties (Aassve et al. 2015), more men and women may experience feelings of being "overbenefited" or "underbenefited", respectively, which may affect relationship satisfaction negatively (Leopold 2019). That is, each partner may feel a mismatch between his/her own gender role attitudes and actual contributions to housework and childcare, and this mismatch may increase the odds of union dissolution.

Given the differing perspectives on the impact of men's changing roles in the domestic sphere on union dissolution, our research question is: Is it indeed the case that in couples where men have more egalitarian gender role attitudes and take on more of the domestic labor, partnerships are more stable? We will also examine related questions concerning relationship satisfaction and perceived relationship cohesion – correlates of union dissolution: How are relationship satisfaction and perceived relationship cohesion, for women and for men, affected when men contribute more or have more egalitarian gender roles?

In this paper, we examine variation in relationship satisfaction and perceived relationship cohesion (at the individual level) and union dissolution (at the couple-level) as functions of gender role attitudes and housework hours. We follow cohabiting and married couples over time using panel data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study (Understanding Society) – covering a period from 2009 until 2016. Advantages of the dataset at hand are numerous and include (1) information on gender role attitudes and housework contributions, reported separately by each partner over time; (2) information on time-varying relationship satisfaction and perceived relationship cohesion, collected separately from each partner, in marital and cohabiting unions; and (3) detailed family histories which allow for an understanding of the timing of union dissolution and full family histories. As full partnership and fertility histories are not collected at all waves in the Understanding Society data, we integrate responses to questions on marital status with information on changes in relationship status since the last interview along with other information available from the household grid to identify the occurrence and timing of union dissolution and other demographic events.

Our sample includes person-years of women aged 59 and under who are in first marriages or first cohabitations, as well as in the first wave following union dissolution, if observed. Women are linked with their partner's information for each person-year in union, and the numbers of women-years included in the analyses range between 5,698 to 18,165 person-years, depending on the dependent variable and the type of analysis employed. In the analyses of union dissolution, the dependent variable is measured at the couple-level in terms of whether the marital or cohabiting union dissolved since the last wave. We use both logistic regression analyses with cluster-corrected standard errors, as well as mixed models with random intercepts (to model differences in the baseline probability that a union will dissolve). In the analyses of relationship satisfaction, the dependent variable is an index ranging in values from

0 (lowest level of satisfaction) to 20 (highest level). In the analyses of perceived relationship cohesion, the dependent variable is an index ranging in values from 0 (lowest level of satisfaction) to 19 (highest level). In the case of these two dependent variables, we estimate cluster-corrected linear regression, mixed models with random intercepts, and linear fixed effects models, separately for female and male partners.

Our main explanatory variables of interest in both sets of analyses are (lagged values of) gender role attitudes of each partner; and (lagged values of) housework contribution (in hours) of each partner. We are also able to incorporate into our analyses cross-partner effects of gender role attitudes, and housework contributions, as well as a rich set of control variables including status duration, women's children ever born, type of union (marital or cohabiting), presence of child aged 6 and under, as well as both partners' age, employment status, hours worked, gross personal income (ln), educational attainment, health status, and data wave. In models of union dissolution, we use lagged measures of these control variables, while in models of satisfaction and cohesion, the control variables are not lagged.

In the last several years, there has been an increase in the number of studies looking at the issue of division of unpaid labor and its effect on union stability (e.g. Bellani, Esping-Anderson and Pessin 2018; Iturrate and Dominguez-Folgueras 2018; Mencarini and Vignoli 2018; Ruppanner et al. 2018), following some pioneering studies in this area (Cooke 2006; Kaufman 2000; Sigle-Rushton 2010). The empirical results from the above studies do not always include in-depth variables with regards to gender role attitudes, relationship satisfaction, perceived relationship cohesion, or labor market behavior (important control variables), and some are based on older data. The studies are based on varying contexts, and their results are mixed. In the current study, we make several contributions to the literature. We take a novel theoretical perspective that challenges some of the assumptions/implications of gender revolution theory, as it relates to relationship satisfaction and union dissolution. We use rich and up-to-date data from the British context, unusual in that it contains detailed information on both partners in union, including gender role attitudes, measures of housework, and measures of satisfaction and perceived cohesion from union. As we can measure relationship satisfaction and perceived cohesion separately for female and male partners, we are able to test whether men's role in the home has opposite effects for each partner. Moreover, we are able to test whether the impact of men's changing gender role attitudes differs from that of their actual behavior, as is predicted by some theoretical approaches (Aassve et al. 2015; Leopold 2019).

Our findings indicate that (lagged) measures of men's egalitarian attitudes and behavior do not impact women's relationship satisfaction and perceived relationship cohesion positively (results are not statistically significantly different from zero). This is a key point as women have usually been the initiators of union dissolution. In contrast, (lagged) measures of men's attitudes and behaviors do impact positively on men's perceptions of their relationships, as we find that men who hold more egalitarian gender role attitudes tend to have higher relationship satisfaction and to perceive that their relationships are more cohesive; moreover men who report doing more housework hours tend to report greater relationship cohesion (but not higher relationship satisfaction).

How do these findings translate into odds of union dissolution? Men's egalitarian attitudes and behavior do not carry over into reduced odds of union dissolution as we find that (lagged) measures of men's more egalitarian gender role attitudes have no significant effect on union dissolution, and that men's greater (lagged) housework hours are associated with higher (rather than lower) rates of union dissolution. We believe that this positive association in men's housework hours on the risk of union dissolution is not the result of endogeneity (i.e. that women reduce housework hours in anticipation of union dissolution, so that men are forced to increase their own contributions) because men's lagged housework hours are positively associated with their own perceived relationship cohesion.

Thus our findings show only mixed support for gender revolution theory, in terms of men's relationship satisfaction and union dissolution – on the one hand, men's egalitarian gender role attitudes are positively associated with their relationship satisfaction, as predicted by the theory, but, on the other hand, men's egalitarianism does not carry over into reducing risks of union dissolution. The finding that men's greater housework contributions actually increases the risk of union dissolution is more consistent with the flip-side approach.

We conclude by noting that from the perspective of the female partner, men's changing attitudes and behavior do not alter family dynamics, while from the perspective of the male partner, they do. Perhaps this gender gap is due to bargaining and tension between partners. This dynamic of bargaining and tension may be an underlying reason why risks of union dissolution do not decline with men's greater egalitarianism. Future research that focuses on the processes by which household labor is divided between spouses might shed light on this dynamic.

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