

International Sociology

<http://iss.sagepub.com/>

What determines change in the division of housework over the course of marriage?

Daniela Grunow, Florian Schulz and Hans-Peter Blossfeld
International Sociology published online 9 February 2012
DOI: 10.1177/0268580911423056

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://iss.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/02/03/0268580911423056>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



International Sociological Association

Additional services and information for *International Sociology* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://iss.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

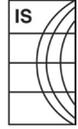
Subscriptions: <http://iss.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [OnlineFirst Version of Record](#) - Feb 9, 2012

[What is This?](#)



What determines change in the division of housework over the course of marriage?

International Sociology
0(0) 1–19

© The Author(s) 2012

Reprints and permission: sagepub.

co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0268580911423056

iss.sagepub.com



Daniela Grunow

University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Florian Schulz

Institute for Employment Research (IAB) of the Federal Employment Agency, Germany

Hans-Peter Blossfeld

Otto-Friedrich-University Bamberg, Germany

Abstract

This article analyses the changing division of housework between husbands and wives in western Germany. Using representative longitudinal data from the Bamberg Panel Study of Married Couples, the authors analyse how the division of household labour changes over the first 14 years of marriage. In particular, they assess when and under what conditions the husband's share of traditionally 'female' housework increases or decreases. They consider shifts in spouses' employment hours, relative earnings and family transitions as time-varying predictor variables in event-history models. It is found that almost half of all newlyweds begin by sharing household tasks equally. But over the course of marriage, the husband's contribution to housework declines significantly, mostly independent of spouses' income or working hours. The husband increasing his share of housework is uncommon, even when the wife works longer hours or realizes higher earnings. Traditional gender norms seem to trump earnings. This is particularly true when children are born.

Keywords

division of labour, event-history analysis, gender inequality, Germany, housework, marriage

Corresponding author:

Daniela Grunow, University of Amsterdam, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Oudezijds Achterburgwal 185, 1012 DK Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Email: D.Grunow@uva.nl

Introduction

Recent trends in assortative mating and the entry of married women into the labour force would lead one to expect significant shifts in the gendered division of housework in all modern societies. Becker's (1981) economic theory of the family as well as various economic bargaining models (e.g. reviewed in Gupta, 2007) expect these processes to lead towards a more gender-neutral division of labour at home. But far from husbands and wives equally taking on the roles of caregiver and provider, recent empirical studies reveal an asymmetrical development in the division of work among couples (e.g. Bittman et al., 2003; Evertsson and Neramo, 2004): while women have moved into the 'male' sphere of paid employment, men have not increased their share of unpaid work at home to a similar extent. As gender inequalities in the division of labour at home are closely tied to gender inequalities in other spheres of life, particularly on the labour market (Charles and Grusky, 2004), understanding how gender norms, earnings and working hours affect the division of housework is key to understanding other aspects of gender stratification. Gender norms, earnings and working hours also seem to impact fertility intentions (Mills et al., 2008), risk of divorce (Cooke, 2004) and parental time for childcare (Bonke and Esping-Andersen, 2011).

Although the phenomenon is essentially dynamic, most studies assessing the impact of earnings and working hours on husbands' and wives' contributions to housework draw on cross-sectional data. While longitudinal studies are growing in number (cf. Cunningham, 2007; Evertsson and Neramo, 2007; Gershuny et al., 2005), none thus far have systematically followed couples from the beginning of their marriage. As later divisions of household labour evolve from earlier decisions, this is a shortcoming.

The article addresses this research gap by seeking answers to the following questions: When does the relative involvement of spouses in housework change over the course of marriage? What factors determine the relative increase or decrease in the husbands' share of housework over time? We first examine how newlyweds divide housework and whether there is a pattern of household specialization over time. We then use event-history techniques to see whether changes in spouses' working hours, share of earnings and the birth of children impact upon their contribution to those household tasks traditionally regarded as 'female' (cooking, washing the dishes, cleaning and laundry).

We provide a longitudinal analysis based on data from the Bamberg Panel Study of Married Couples. These data offer notable advantages for studying shifts in the spousal division of housework over time, precisely because they follow a cohort of first-time newlywed couples ($N = 1528$) for a period of 14 years (1988–2002). The sample is nationally representative for this marriage cohort in western Germany.

What happens to couples in western Germany is of interest to an international readership for at least four reasons. First, the gendered division of housework and paid work has been encouraged by German labour market and family policies and by other social provisions. Western Germany is therefore an ideal context in which to test the impact of traditional male breadwinner and female homemaker norms against emerging norms of equity (cf. Cooke, 2004). Second, while our analysis draws on data from western Germany, the theoretical mechanisms under study are believed to be at work in all

Western societies (e.g. Baxter et al., 2008; Gupta et al., 2010). As this study provides a test of external validity, it is of relevance beyond the specific German context. Third, our study innovates methodologically by applying event-history techniques to model husbands' relative increases and decreases in their contributions to housework separately – the first time this has been done in the field of housework research. Fourth, the gendered division of housework and the gendered economic resource constellations observed later on in marriage emerge from constellations, decisions and experiences in earlier stages of marriage. If the earlier processes remain unobserved, we cannot distinguish causes from consequences in later phases of marriage. We thus need longitudinal data that include information about the 'initial point' in the spousal division of housework, namely from the beginning of marriage onwards. Unlike other longitudinal data that have been used to study housework (Cooke, 2007), our data offer this type of information for all couples.

Money and gender as competing predictors of change in household labour division

The assumption that husbands and wives divide housework unequally on the basis of their unequal earnings has long gone unchallenged (Gupta, 2006). The expectation that husbands 'naturally' do less housework has been backed up by stereotypical ideas about the normative roles, preferences, skills and abilities of men and women. Scholars of housework have therefore considered three main theoretical mechanisms as additive rather than competing: *efficiency*, based on the complementary role specialization of husbands as earners and wives as homemakers (Becker, 1981); *economic dependency and resource bargaining*, where the spouse with greater earning power can refrain from doing housework (reviewed in Gupta, 2007); and *traditional gender norms and gender deviance neutralization*, according to which 'femaleness' is confirmed by doing housework and 'maleness' by avoiding it (Berk, 1985).

Until recently, all three explanations were used to predict the same thing – that women would do more housework than men. By now, however, traditional resource matches and gender norms no longer prevail among all couples, leading to rival expectations about how housework is divided. More women are now as qualified as their husbands and earn as much (sometimes even more); more couples favour an equitable division of work. Statistics for Germany show that the woman holds an equivalent or higher position in approximately 50 percent of all dual-earner couples born between 1951 and 1955 (Heß-Meining and Tölke, 2005: 264). Educational homogamy between spouses shows a similar trend. This historical circumstance, together with available data that allow us to separate the timing and sequencing of shifting economic resources in terms of relative earnings; changes in working hours and employment interruptions; family events such as the birth of children and stages of infancy; and changes in the spousal division of housework over the course of marriage, make it possible to test whether several assumptions about the time-dependent relationship between earnings and housework are partly competing rather than additive forces.

Efficiency

Economic specialization due to efficiency has been used to explain the persistence of men's lesser involvement in housework (Becker, 1981). The approach was initially based on the assumption that labour market and domestic skills are complementarily distributed between the sexes. Due to traditional norms and gender-specific socialization, it was presumed that men invest more in their labour market resources while women develop more domestic skills. This maintains a traditional division of labour among couples, as specialization, in Becker's framework, is the main mechanism to maximize the family's joint utility. Which partner should focus on the domestic sphere is then decided by evaluating relative productivity, and is thus gender-neutral (Blossfeld and Drobnič, 2001; Gupta, 2007). In other words, if a woman has lower earnings potential, she specializes in the domestic sphere while her husband specializes on the labour market. But the resource and specialization mechanisms imply that it could also be the other way around: a husband with a lower wage rate than his wife would specialize in housework while she would take over the provider role. As gains from specialization increase over the course of the union due to reinforcement and cumulative advantages, this process should be irreversible.

Efficiency and childbirth

Some economists have argued that biology makes the mother the more efficient homemaker and caregiver (Becker, 1981). Therefore, the efficiency criteria rather than social expectations and norms of motherhood leads to a more traditional division of housework when children are born. Though the biological efficiency assumption has never been tested empirically, Becker (1981: 23) drew on the bridge-assumption that a division of labour based on mothers as primary caregivers has been dominant 'in virtually all modern societies'. More recent anthropological research actually reveals the opposite – that mothers have been sole caregivers only in exceptional cases (Ahnert, 2005). Becker's argument of childbirth as an efficiency indicator in the gender division of housework is therefore unconvincing.

Economic dependency

According to this group of theories, the household division of labour is repeatedly renegotiated between spouses on the basis of their relative economic resources. The spouse with the higher earnings potential has the power to negotiate a lower share of housework while the economically dependent partner is expected to do more. Following this logic, it is assumed that the husband will do more housework when the resource balance shifts in favour of his wife and reduce his share when the resource balance shifts in his own favour.

Economic dependency and childbirth

Childbirth is a crucial phase in which we can assess the impact of economic resources on the division of labour within couples. Having small children increases the amount of total housework by an average of 10 hours per week (Künzler et al., 2001: 141, 143).

Childbirth is therefore associated with another round of bargaining within couples. Several outcomes are possible. First, the partners' share of housework may remain constant before and after the child's birth, implying that they share the additional workload proportionally. Based on purely economic reasoning, this should occur when their earnings are equal before the birth of the child and remain so afterwards. Although continuous female careers are still exceptional, 14 percent of German first-time mothers do not claim any parental leave (Aisenbrey et al., 2009). For them, childbirth does not necessarily mean a shift in the balance of resources towards the husband. Controlling for the birth of children, resource parity should have a significantly negative effect on change in the division of housework. Second, the husband may increase his share of the housework after the child is born. In the bargaining framework, this should occur when the husband has lower earnings than his wife. Third, the husband's share of the housework may decrease, predicted by the economic dependency mechanism only when the earnings ratio shifts in favour of the husband, controlling for childbirth. This includes scenarios where the husband increases his absolute number of hours spent on housework while his wife increases hers significantly more.

Gender norms

Decisions about how to divide paid and unpaid work do not take place in a societal vacuum. The male breadwinner/female homemaker model remains alive and well in western Germany (Sainsbury, 1999), though as in all European countries, women entered the labour force en masse and gender norms became more egalitarian over the course of the 20th century (Lück, 2006). Emerging gender equity norms imply that when both partners spend equal time in paid employment, they also have an equitable division of labour at home. The latter is based primarily on norms of fairness and should be largely independent of spouses' relative earnings.

Gender norms and childbirth

The shift towards the dual-earner model in western Germany has so far been incomplete, applying to childless couples but not to parents. In contrast to the US, 'the good mother' is still expected to interrupt her career to be a full-time homemaker as long as her child is a toddler (Grunow et al., 2006). Although fathers are in principle equally eligible for parental leave, the pressure is high on mothers to claim leave and for fathers not to. Thus when a child is born, the traditional gender norm mechanism predicts a shift towards a more traditional division of housework independent of spouses' relative economic resources. This expectation was confirmed in Kaufmann's (1998) study, which found that even couples favouring an egalitarian division of work tend to adopt the traditional model over time rather than struggle against institutional boundaries in everyday life.

Conceptual considerations

When testing the theoretical mechanisms outlined in the previous section, we need to carefully consider path dependency and the gendered nature of routine housework itself.

First, economic and normative factors – viewed here as partly competing – both tend to produce path-dependent results over the course of marriage. The initial point in the spousal division of housework thus needs to be carefully considered. Marriage is a clearly defined event and a meaningful starting point. As a normative institution, marriage is a good marker as it comes with conflicting expectations of the husband's role – as both main breadwinner and involved partner. The division of labour at the time of marriage also serves as a proxy for otherwise unmeasured household productivity in the efficiency framework. Moreover, it defines the baseline for later negotiations over the division of housework, as is anticipated in resource-bargaining models.

Second, many studies construct housework as a proportional measure of the spouses' respective contributions to routine household chores. But as routine housework is traditionally regarded as 'female', the dependent variable itself is not gender-neutral. Time-use studies show that the time spent on routine housework varies with living arrangements, peaking when couples have small children (Künzler et al., 2001: 141, 143). Studies further show that the growing load of unpaid work is mostly borne by women at the expense of time they spend on paid labour.¹ As family demands change over time, the division of housework may shift in one of two opposite directions: the husband's relative contribution can increase or decrease. Each direction of change bears a distinct meaning for spousal gender roles. When over the course of marriage husbands increase their involvement in 'female' household tasks, this represents a shift away from traditional gender roles; when they decrease their involvement, a shift towards more traditional gender roles. Increases and decreases in the husband's share of housework cannot simply be considered opposite directions of the same process. We therefore study them as two separate processes, starting from the first year of marriage. Although the theories lack straightforward predictions of what makes husbands engage in housework, treating the efficiency and dependency mechanisms as – in principle – gender-neutral allows us to see whether economic and efficiency criteria indeed work similarly in both directions. This will also reveal the role played by norms of equity in supporting and counteracting both processes.

Data

To evaluate our hypotheses about the different determinants of men's changing involvement in housework, we applied event-history techniques to the data of the Bamberg Panel Study of Married Couples (BPSMC). The BPSMC is a 14-year panel study of relationship and family development in western Germany with five panel sweeps conducted in 1988, 1990, 1992, 1994 and 2002, providing nationally representative longitudinal data for the 1988 marriage cohort, as documented in detail by Schneewind et al. (1996). Spouses were interviewed separately, both answering similar questionnaires in each panel wave.

Our data-set contains only married couples where both partners answered the questionnaire (95 percent of all cases). In 1988 the sample included 1456 couples. Partly by design, partly as a result of panel attrition, our data declined to 870 (wave 2), 840 (wave 3) and 773 couples (wave 4).² The last survey in 2002 consisted of 523 couples, making up approximately 36 percent of the original sample. Selectivity tests confirmed that drop outs are not systematically related to couples' educational resource

constellations – centrally relevant to this study as education correlates with earnings and employment. During the observation period, the share of couples in each educational constellation (‘husband’s education > wife’s education’, ‘husband’s education = wife’s education’ and ‘husband’s education < wife’s education’) declined similarly, (Schulz, 2010: 243) indicating no severe selectivity vis-a-vis our theoretically relevant resource indicators. In our models we nevertheless corrected for sample selectivity by including an instrumental variable (Heckman and Robb, 1985) that measures the couple’s likelihood of dropping out of the panel conditional on the time-constant measure of the couple’s educational constellation. These estimates turned out to be not significant (Tables 3 and 4). We are therefore confident that panel mortality has not systematically biased the coefficients with respect to spouses’ relative education.

Method

Based on our theoretical approach, we analysed the dynamic division of household labour in terms of two distinct processes, influenced by events occurring in other parallel processes, e.g. changes in relative earnings or the transition to parenthood. Event-history techniques are especially suitable to model these processes longitudinally (Blossfeld and Rohwer, 2002; Yamaguchi, 1991). Event-history analysis enables us to assess why the spousal division of housework changes from one discrete state to another or, put differently, why labour division becomes more or less traditional over time. Changes are mapped in a logistic regression model with a representing the constant term and t the duration in the origin state (Allison, 1984). The models include time-constant (x_1) and time-varying ($x_2(t)$) covariates:

$$r(t) = \log\left(\frac{P(t)}{1-P(t)}\right) = a + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2(t)$$

Measures of housework and labour division

Based on the question ‘How do you divide housework? Which tasks do you predominantly or exclusively do on your own, which tasks are done by your partner, and which tasks do you fulfil together or on an alternating basis?’ (translated from German), the spousal division of household tasks was recorded on a five-point scale, ranging from ‘only me’ to ‘only my spouse’.

Our measure of spousal contributions to household labour contains only traditionally ‘female’ tasks: cooking, washing the dishes, cleaning the house and doing the laundry. In light of gender-norm theories, these tasks capture the gender stereotyping of household chores that we are interested in. At the same time, they work well to test resource bargaining theory as these ‘unpleasant’, ‘low-schedule-control tasks’ (Cunningham, 2007) are performed frequently. The chores were summed up in a non-weighted score (Task Participation Index, TPI) ranging from 4 to 20. This index has been tested and applied in previous research using the BPSMC data (Grunow et al., 2007).

Event-history analysis examines changes between discrete states in the dependent variable that correspond to notable (not minor) changes in the spousal division of housework. We divided the score into four theoretically distinct ordinal categories between

which housework arrangements can change: 'strongly traditional', 'traditional', 'egalitarian' and 'role reversal'. Division of labour arrangements are labelled 'strongly traditional' when the female partner does all tasks on her own. 'Traditional' arrangements refer to cases where the male partner contributes to the household chores but the female partner does most of them. In 'egalitarian' arrangements, both partners share the housework more or less equally, while 'role reversal' refers to those cases where the husband does most or all tasks on his own. As there are almost no cases of role reversal in our sample, we collapsed this category with the egalitarian couples for the longitudinal models.

Dependent processes

Following our conceptual approach, we examined two processes: in the first case, the dependent variable $r(t)$ is the time-dependent rate of the husband increasing his share of housework relative to his wife. The respective events were defined as shifts from 'strongly traditional' to 'traditional' or 'egalitarian/role reversal', and from 'traditional' to 'egalitarian/role reversal'. In the second case, we constructed the dependent variable $r(t)$ to measure the time-dependent rate of shifts in the opposite direction – namely the husband's decreasing share in household chores – indicated by shifts from 'traditional' to 'strongly traditional' and from 'egalitarian/role reversal' to 'traditional' or 'strongly traditional'. Because, by definition, 'egalitarian/role reversal' arrangements do not allow for shifts towards less traditional arrangements, and 'strongly traditional' arrangements do not allow for shifts towards 'more traditional' arrangements, these cases are excluded from the respective event-history analyses to avoid ceiling and floor effects. The analyses therefore use only part of the information available in the data. To make sure that findings are unbiased by this proceeding, we replicated the models employing the full range of the TPI as a continuous measure in a panel-regression model. Both approaches lead to similar conclusions (Grunow et al., 2007).

While it would have been interesting to analyse absolute changes in the hours husbands and wives spend on housework, our data-set does not contain information on absolute hours. Time-use studies indicate that men over the course of family development tend to decrease both their absolute and relative hours spent on housework, for instance in order to devote more time to childcare (Baxter et al., 2008; Künzler et al., 2001).

The analyses were set up so that each couple could change their division of housework several times in either direction. After each transition, the couple entered the risk set afresh from their new origin state. Our observations are thus not limited to the first change in the couple's division of housework – they address changes that occur in different phases of marriage. In our 14-year observation window, we observed 373 events indicating the husband increasing his share of housework and 740 events indicating the husband decreasing it.

Independent variables

In our theoretical work we identified a number of factors that supposedly impact the gendered dynamics of household labour division. Of specific interest is marriage duration, measured at the beginning of each episode. Spouses' relative hours devoted to paid employment and contributions to household income were measured as time-varying

covariates. Allowing these variables to change over time is an advantage of our data, enabling us to disentangle the causal order of economic changes, family events and housework outcomes. Data on working hours were only collected in broad categories: full-time employed, part-time employed and not employed. On the basis of these categories, the variable 'spouses' relative paid employment status' indicates which partner spends more time in paid employment or whether both work roughly equal hours. Individual income was measured continuously but proved insignificant when included as a continuous variable. We therefore decided to work with three broad but theoretically meaningful dummy variables which correspond to the main argument of the economic theories. 'Husband>wife' means that the husband contributes more than 60 percent of the household income, 'husband=wife' that the husband's share is between 40 and 60 percent, and 'husband<wife' that the husband contributes less than 40 percent of the household income. A fourth dummy flags when income information is missing. We tested different definitions of these dummies to ensure that our findings were not artefacts of the relational measures that we created.

To tackle the gender-norm hypothesis, we used time-varying covariates to account for the couple's transition to parenthood. 'No child' indicates that couples are childless and therefore face a dual-earner norm. 'Youngest child 0–1 year' marks couples who just made the transition to parenthood or had a second or *n*th child within the last two years. Two more dummy variables are used to model the medium-term effects of parenthood on the household division of labour – when children enter kindergarten or school and mothers re-enter the paid labour force. The share of each spouse's contribution to housework in the origin state was included as a dummy variable in the analyses. For the event 'husband's share increases', the variable refers to origin state 'strongly traditional', reference category 'traditional'. For the event 'husband's share decreases', the coefficients refer to origin state 'traditional', reference 'egalitarian/role reversal'.

Findings

Our findings show that the gendered division of housework is more dynamic over time than it appears in cross-sectional research (Table 1). Most interestingly, almost half of newlywed couples (45.5 percent) begin by sharing everyday household tasks equally or with husbands doing a greater share. This indicates that gender equity norms are important early on in marriage, when husbands do not avoid tasks traditionally regarded as 'female'. Over time, however, most husbands reduce their share of housework; only a few increase it. After 14 years of marriage, the share of 'egalitarian' couples declines to about 14 percent. Most couples (about 85 percent) end up in a 'traditional' or 'strongly traditional' arrangement with the wife doing most or all of the cooking, dish-washing, cleaning and laundry. The percentage of couples in the 'traditional' category remains quite stable over time, between 25 and 30 percent. The share of couples reporting a 'role reversal' arrangement scarcely exceeds 1 percent.

In Table 2, we compare the relative frequency of changes in the two processes later studied in the longitudinal models. We mapped the incidence of change and stability in spousal housework arrangements over the 14-year observation period, as obtained for all origin and destination states from wave x to wave $x+1$.

Table 1. Distribution of gendered labour division arrangements in each panel wave (column percent)

	Marriage	Marriage duration			
		2 years	4 years	6 years	14 years
Strongly traditional	25.5	38.7	48.0	55.0	60.2
Traditional	29.0	29.9	28.2	25.4	24.9
Egalitarian	43.6	30.6	22.9	18.6	13.7
Role reversal	1.9	0.8	1.0	1.0	1.2
<i>Couples total</i>	1423	870	840	773	518

Source: BPSMC 1988–2002, own calculations.

Table 2. Changes in gendered labour division from wave x to wave x+1

Division of work in wave x	Division of work in wave x+1	Frequency	Proportion of more traditional, stable and less traditional arrangements
Strongly traditional	Strongly traditional	815	76.2% stable 23.8% less traditional Σ 100%
	Traditional	190	
	Egalitarian	61	
	Role reversal	3	
	Σ 1069		
Traditional	Strongly traditional	352	45.2% more traditional 39.5% stable 15.3% less traditional Σ 100%
	Traditional	308	
	Egalitarian	117	
	Role reversal	2	
	Σ 779		
Egalitarian	Strongly traditional	151	47.4% more traditional 50.6% stable 2.0% less traditional Σ 100%
	Traditional	224	
	Egalitarian	401	
	Role reversal	16	
	Σ 792		
Role reversal	Strongly traditional	5	84.4% more traditional 15.6% stable Σ 100%
	Traditional	8	
	Egalitarian	14	
	Role reversal	5	
	Σ 32		
	Σ Total	2672	

Source: BPSMC 1988–2002, own calculations.

Changes in the gender division of household labour occurred frequently over the course of marriage (Table 2), demonstrating the advantage of using longitudinal data. The potential for change vs stability varies considerably between the labour-division arrangements. ‘Strongly traditional’ arrangements remained predominantly stable across panel

waves (76.2 percent). Shifts towards less traditional arrangements occurred in less than one-quarter of the observations (23.8 percent). 'Traditional' arrangements showed a clear tendency to become even more traditional. In those couples where the wife already did most of the housework, 45.2 percent redistributed these chores even more unequally. In 15.3 percent of 'traditional' arrangements, husbands increased their share of the housework from one wave to the next; 39.5 percent retained the 'traditional' pattern. 'Egalitarian' arrangements were surprisingly stable, with 50.6 percent of couples once observed to be sharing housework equally doing so again in the next wave. But in 47.4 percent of cases husbands decreased their share of housework in the next wave while shifts in the opposite direction were rare (only 2 percent). Couples seem to have a strong tendency to avoid 'role reversal' arrangements.

Summing up the descriptive findings presented thus far, shifts over time that could be attributed to spousal specialization in housework (the efficiency hypothesis) are almost exclusively in the 'traditional' direction of husbands reducing their share of housework and wives increasing theirs. Men specializing in housework – and thereby swimming against the current of traditional, complementary gender roles – does not appear to be an option.

To explore the specific social forces behind the strong tendency of husbands to reduce their share of housework – and their weak tendency to increase it – over the course of marriage, we now turn to our multivariate event-history models. Since we examine competing theoretical mechanisms, we are primarily interested in the significance and direction of effects, not in effect sizes. We therefore present parsimonious models that directly follow from the efficiency, dependence and gender norm approaches sketched above. We first examine the role of efficiency, relative earnings and working hours in altering the spousal division of housework over the course of marriage.³

In Table 3, Models 1a to 3a represent the process of husbands increasing their share of housework over the course of marriage; Models 1b to 3b represent the process of husbands reducing it. Model 1a shows that marriage duration has a highly significant negative effect ($b = -0.17$) on the husband's likelihood to do more housework relative to his wife. Looking at change in the opposite direction (Model 1b), we see that marriage duration also has a negative effect on the husband's likelihood to do less housework ($b = -0.13$). The effect of marriage duration is negative and highly significant in all models, regardless of the direction of change. Further analyses confirmed what appeared to be a linear time trend. This indicates an inertia effect, meaning that couples change their division of housework more frequently in the early stages of marriage. In the medium and longer run, any kind of household labour division becomes routine.

The effects for the 'labour-division arrangement in the origin state' are theoretically interesting in light of the efficiency argument. If efficiency drives the husband's increasing involvement, the predicted pattern of change would be towards more specialization, with 'strongly traditional' couples being mostly stable as they are already optimally efficient. In Models 1a to 3a, coefficients refer to origin state 'strongly traditional', reference category 'traditional'. The positive and highly significant effects indicate that husbands are more likely to increase their share of housework when the division is 'strongly traditional' than when it is less traditional. This stable and positive association

Table 3. Economic determinants of husband's increasing and decreasing share of housework

	Husband's share increases			Husband's share decreases		
	1a	2a	3a	1b	2b	3b
Marriage duration	-0.17**	-0.16**	-0.18**	-0.13**	-0.14**	-0.14**
<i>Ratio of paid working hours</i>						
Husband > wife (ref.)		–			–	
Husband = wife		0.13			-0.29**	
Husband < wife		0.40			-0.42*	
<i>Earnings ratio</i>						
Husband > wife (ref.)			–			–
Husband = wife			-0.06			-0.23*
Husband < wife			-0.07			-0.23
Missing earnings			-0.01			-0.20
<i>Efficiency</i>						
Labour division origin	0.33**	0.36**	0.32**	0.20*	0.14	0.18*
<i>Controls</i>						
Selectivity correction	0.80	0.57	0.84	-0.18	-0.07	-0.12
Time lag (wave to wave)	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	0.01	-0.01	0.00
Constant	-2.22**	-2.30**	-2.20**	-1.10**	-0.86**	-0.95**
Likelihood ratio test	63.30	65.52	63.52	82.03	93.27	88.76

Source: BPSMC 1988–2002, own calculations, discrete-time logistic regression.

Significance: * $\alpha \leq .05$; ** $\alpha \leq .01$.

is not in line with the specialization argument. For Models 1b to 3b, coefficients refer to origin state 'traditional', reference 'egalitarian/role reversal'. Again, we find a positive but less stable effect for the labour division origin measure. The findings indicate that husbands in 'traditional' labour division arrangements are more likely to reduce their share of housework than husbands in 'egalitarian/role reversal' arrangements. At this point, the evidence for or against household efficiency is mixed at best: couples tend to shift towards a more traditional division of labour over the course of marriage – which is true as an overall trend. However, these shifts often reverse earlier specializations, casting doubt on efficiency as their main driving force.

In Models 2 and 3 of Table 3, we investigate the impact of spouses' relative working hours and earnings on the likelihood of dividing housework either more or less equally over the course of marriage. Both efficiency and economic dependency models predict that spouses with lower earnings potential will increase their time spent on housework. On the other hand, the gender norm argument predicts that shifts in either direction will be independent of spouses' relative earnings and that equal time devoted to paid work will decrease the likelihood of the husband reducing his contribution to housework. For the first dependent process – 'husband's share increases' – none of our economic resource indicators is significant. This contradicts all gender-symmetric rational action models, whether Becker's idea of economic efficiency or any kind of

resource bargaining model. For the second dependent process – ‘husband’s share decreases’ – the relative number of working hours and relative earnings seem to play a role. Compared to the reference category of husbands working longer hours than their wives, for husbands working similar or fewer hours we find significant negative effects on their likelihood to reduce their share of housework (Model 2b). A husband who works a similar (husband=wife) or lower number of hours (husband<wife) is less likely to decrease his share of household labour than a husband who works longer hours than his wife (husband>wife). Equal earnings levels between the spouses also seem to reduce the likelihood of husbands decreasing their share of housework over the course of marriage (Model 3b). For couples with an ‘atypical’ female-provider earnings ratio (husband<wife), the effect is not significant. One reason why the coefficient lacks statistical significance may be the relatively small number of observations for this group (281 or 7 percent of the total for our sample). The strength of the effect suggests that it doesn’t matter whether the husband and wife have equal economic bargaining power or whether the wife earns more; both coefficients are equally large. The gender-symmetric predictions of the efficiency and dependence theories are therefore not supported by our data.

Next, Table 4 shows the effects of family formation on the gender division of household tasks. Models 1a and 1b focus on how childbirth and the age of the youngest child affect the spousal division of housework. Here we find a pronounced and significant effect on both directional changes. During the first two years after childbirth, the father’s tendency to increase his contribution not only strongly declines ($b = -0.56$ in Model 1a) compared to childless husbands; his tendency to decrease his share is also much higher ($b = 0.53$ in Model 1b). This movement towards a more traditional division of housework seems to halt when the youngest child reaches the age of two, when the estimates for the age of the youngest child are no longer significantly different from the reference category.

Our models do not suggest that parents readjust their division of housework back to a more egalitarian style when children grow older and mothers re-enter the labour market. The coefficient for ‘youngest child 3+ years’ (a-models) is still negative so fathers are unlikely to increase their share of housework, even if they reduced their share in earlier phases of parenthood. Finally, the time-varying relative economic indicators are included in the models (Models 2 and 3) to see if the childbirth-related traditionalization of housework is economically driven. These variables do not seem to have any important additional impact on the division of household chores. Except for Model 3a, where the coefficient for the earnings ratio ‘husband=wife’ almost reaches the 5 percent significance level, none of the coefficients for earnings or paid working hours is close to being significant. Since the share of parents in the ‘non-traditional’ resource categories is rather low, we are cautious not to interpret the lack of significance in the economic indicators as an ultimate lack of relevance. In sum, our findings suggest that parents give up previously equitable divisions of housework in favour of more traditional family models – even though for some couples, specialization in the opposite direction (the father becoming the primary homemaker) may have been economically more or equally rational.

Table 4. Parenthood and relative economic resources as a determinant of husband's decreasing and increasing share of housework

	Husband's share increases			Husband's share decreases		
	1a	2a	3a	1b	2b	3b
Marriage duration	-0.11*	-0.11*	-0.11*	-0.14**	-0.14**	-0.14**
<i>Ratio of paid working hours</i>						
Husband > wife (ref.)		—			—	
Husband = wife		-0.16			-0.14	
Husband < wife		0.14			-0.27	
<i>Earnings ratio</i>						
Husband > wife (ref.)			—			—
Husband = wife			-0.28			-0.14
Husband < wife			-0.25			-0.16
Missing earnings			-0.12			-0.17
<i>Parenthood</i>						
No child (ref.)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Youngest child 0–1 year	-0.56**	-0.66**	-0.68**	0.53**	0.42**	0.47**
Youngest child 2 years	-0.15	-0.24	-0.26	0.27	0.16	0.22
Youngest child 3+ years	-0.37	-0.44	-0.49*	-0.08	-0.17	-0.16
Missing age	-10.44	-10.54	-10.56	-10.20	-10.28	-10.27
<i>Efficiency</i>						
Labour division origin	0.41**	0.40**	0.38**	0.16	0.14	0.15
<i>Controls</i>						
Selectivity correction	-0.25	-0.21	-0.30	0.78	0.83	0.79
Time lag (wave to wave)	-0.04	-0.04	0.03	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02
Constant	-2.01**	-1.91**	-1.86**	-1.28**	-1.14**	-1.18**
Likelihood ratio test	87.02	88.81	90.99	115.24	117.73	117.95

Source: BPSMC 1988–2002, own calculations, discrete-time logistic regression.

Significance: * $\alpha \leq .05$; ** $\alpha \leq .01$.

Conclusions

Our study shows that the gender division of housework is less static than it appears in many cross-sectional studies. In western Germany, in the first year of marriage, couples frequently have an egalitarian division of household labour with both spouses engaging about equally in tasks traditionally viewed as 'female' – cooking, washing the dishes, cleaning and doing the laundry. This clearly indicates that gender roles at home have been changing for recent marriage cohorts. These new egalitarian patterns, however, are difficult to maintain in a social and institutional context that anticipates and rewards a bourgeois family model with a stay-at-home parent (Bühlmann et al., 2010). We thus observe a distinct gendered dynamic of household labour division over time, resulting in more traditional arrangements over the course of marriage. The finding is in line with earlier research drawing on different data and techniques (Thiessen et al., 1994).

According to our data, the strong tendency for husbands to reduce their participation in housework cannot be explained by economic specialization or by a bargaining mechanism, as has been suggested by Becker and the economic dependency argument respectively. In line with other recent studies (e.g. Gupta, 2007), we find that relative economic resources seem to play only a minor – and clearly no gender-neutral – role when spouses readjust their division of housework over the course of marriage. Indeed, we found that when both partners contribute about equally to household income, husbands are least likely to decrease their share of housework. But when wives have higher earnings, their economic efficiency advantage does not translate into greater bargaining power. This is in line with earlier cross-sectional research and supports Brines's (1994) compensation hypothesis. Our event-history analyses show how the hypothesized dynamics unfold over time: resource parity impedes a more traditional gender division of 'female' household tasks over the course of marriage. However, we find no indication that husbands increase their share of housework when their wives attain or re-attain resource parity. Future research should assess whether changes in economic resources that favour women are a consequence rather than a cause of shifting housework demands.

Childbirth seems to be the leading event that triggers a more traditional division of labour over the course of marriage. Although it may have become acceptable and feasible for newlywed husbands and wives to share housework and paid work equitably, the same does not yet apply to mothers and fathers. Young families would therefore benefit from policies encouraging both spouses to divide unpaid work equally.

The widespread assumption that household chores are divided on the basis of economic bargaining over the course of marriage is not supported by our findings. We observed that non-traditional labour division arrangements were especially unstable over time. In western Germany, where institutions reinforce the gender binary over the course of marriage, most couples establish a more traditional gender division of housework over time. This is then unlikely to reverse, even if wives increase their relative earnings potential.

Promoting gender equity in general – and men's roles as caregivers in the family in particular – has now been part of EU political discourse for over 15 years. More and more countries, Germany included, have been adapting their family policies accordingly. Our article shows that rather than anticipating a family cycle of long-term employment interruption and labour market reintegration for one partner, family policies should aim to maintain gender equity in paid and unpaid work over the course of marriage.

Funding

Part of this research was carried out under the project 'The household division of domestic labor as a process', funded by the German Research Foundation. Daniela Grunow would like to gratefully acknowledge financial support from the European Research Council in the framework of an ERC Starting Independent Researchers Grant (APPARENT, No. 263651) in the final stages of completing this article.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions on the original manuscript.

Notes

1. Childless cohabiting men in western Germany spend on average 18 hours per week doing routine housework; cohabiting fathers with preschool children do two hours less. Fathers spend 21 hours per week in activities with their children. Childless cohabiting women spend 29 hours per week on housework. Cohabiting and raising a child of preschool age increases the time they spend on housework to an average of 41 hours in addition to 36 hours of childcare (Künzler et al., 2001: 85–8).
2. In wave 2, all parents – but only a random sample of childless couples – were contacted to participate. Waves 3 to 5 then drew on the full initial sample again. Among the few cases of panel attrition which could be traced, only 77 reported separation or divorce (Rost et al., 2003: 125).
3. The selectivity correction and time lag between successive panel waves are controlled for in all models to account for selective panel mortality and unequal time periods between panel observations. The coefficients are not significant. While it is impossible to claim that no panel selectivity exists in any data, at least these two theoretically important considerations do not seem to pose any systematic problem for our analyses.

References

- Ahnert L (2005) Parenting and alloparenting: The impact on attachment in humans. In: Carter S et al. (eds) *Attachment and Bonding: A New Synthesis*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 229–244.
- Aisenbrey S, Evertsson M and Grunow D (2009) Is there a career penalty for mothers' time out? A comparison between Germany, Sweden and the U.S. *Social Forces* 88(2): 573–606.
- Allison PD (1984) *Event History Analysis: Regression for Longitudinal Event Data*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Baxter J, Hewitt B and Haynes M (2008) Life course transitions and housework: Marriage, parenthood, and time on housework. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 70(2): 259–272.
- Becker GS (1981) *A Treatise on the Family*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Berk SF (1985) *The Gender Factory: The Apportionment of Work in American Households*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Bittman M, England, Sayer L, Folbre N and Matheson G (2003) When does gender trump money? Bargaining and time in household work. *American Journal of Sociology* 109(1): 186–214.
- Blossfeld H-P and Drobníč S (2001) *Careers of Couples in Contemporary Societies: From Male Breadwinner to Dual Earner Families*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blossfeld H-P and Rohwer G (2002) *Techniques of Event History Modeling: New Approaches to Causal Analysis*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bonke J and Esping-Andersen G (2011) Family investments in children: Productivities, preferences, and parental child care. *European Sociological Review* 27(1): 43–55.
- Brines J (1994) Economic dependency, gender, and the division of labor at home. *American Journal of Sociology* 100: 652–688.
- Bühlmann F, Elcherath G and Tettamanti M (2010) The division of labour among European couples: The effect of life course and welfare policy on value-practice configurations. *European Sociological Review* 26(1): 49–66.
- Charles M and Grusky DB (2004) *Occupational Ghettos: The Worldwide Segregation of Women and Men*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Cooke LP (2004) The gendered division of labor and family outcomes in Germany. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66(5): 1246–1259.
- Cooke LP (2007) Persistent policy effects on the division of domestic tasks in reunified Germany. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69(4): 930–950.

- Cunningham M (2007) Influences of women's employment on the gendered division of household labor over the life course: Evidence from a 31-year panel study. *Journal of Family Issues* 28(3): 422–444.
- Evertsson M and Neremo M (2004) Dependence within families and the division of labor: Comparing Sweden and the United States. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66(5): 1272–1286.
- Evertsson M and Neremo M (2007) Changing resources and the division of housework: A longitudinal study of Swedish couples. *European Sociological Review* 23(4): 455–470.
- Gershuny J, Bittman M and Brice J (2005) Exit, voice, and suffering: Do couples adapt to changing employment patterns? *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 67(3): 656–665.
- Grunow D, Hofmeister H and Buchholz S (2006) Late 20th century persistence and decline of the female homemaker in Germany and the United States. *International Sociology* 21(1): 101–132.
- Grunow D, Schulz F and Blossfeld H-P (2007) Was erklärt die Traditionalisierungsprozesse häuslicher Arbeitsteilung im Eheverlauf: soziale Normen oder ökonomische Ressourcen? *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 36: 162–181.
- Gupta S (2006) Her money, her time: women's earnings and their housework hours. *Social Science Research* 35(4): 975–999.
- Gupta S (2007) Autonomy, dependence, or display? The relationship between married women's earnings and housework. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69(2): 399–417.
- Gupta S, Evertsson M, Grunow D, Neremo M and Sayer LC (2010) Economic inequality and housework. In: Drobnič S and Treas J (eds) *Dividing the Domestic*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 105–122.
- Heckman JJ and Robb R Jr (1985) Evaluating the impact of interventions. In: Heckman JJ and Singer B (eds) *Longitudinal Analysis of Labor Market Data*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 156–245.
- Heß-Meining U and Tölke A (2005) Familien- und Lebensformen von Frauen und Männern. In: Dressel C et al. (eds) *Gender-Datenreport*. München: Deutsches Jugendinstitut und Statistisches Bundesamt.
- Kaufmann J-C (1998) *Dirty Linen: Couples as Seen Through Their Laundry*. London: Middlesex University Press.
- Künzler J, Walter W, Reichart E and Pfister G (2001) *Gender Division of Labour in Unified Germany*. Tilburg: Tilburg University Press.
- Lück D (2006) The impact of gender role attitudes on women's life courses. In: Blossfeld H-P and Hofmeister H (eds) *Globalization, Uncertainty, and Women's Careers: An International Comparison*. Cheltenham: Elgar, 409–435.
- Mills M, Mencarini L, Tanturri ML and Begall K (2008) Gender equity and fertility intentions in Italy and the Netherlands. *Demographic Research* 18(1): 1–26.
- Rost H, Rupp M, Schulz F and Vascovics LA (2003) *Bamberger-Ehepaar-Panel*. Bamberg: ifb-Materialien 6/2003.
- Sainsbury D (ed.) (1999) *Gender and Welfare State Regimes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schneewind KA, Vaskovics LA, Gotzler P, Hofmann B, Rost H, Schlehle B et al. (1996) *Optionen der Lebensgestaltung junger Ehen und Kinderwunsch*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Schulz F (2010) *Verbundene Lebensläufe. Partnerwahl und Arbeitsteilung zwischen neuen Ressourcenverhältnissen und traditionellen Geschlechterrollen*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.
- Thiessen V, Rohlinger H and Blasius J (1994) The 'significance' of minor changes in panel data: A correspondence analysis of the division of household tasks. In: Greenacre M and Blasius J (eds) *Correspondence Analysis in the Social Sciences*. London: Academic Press, 252–266.
- Yamaguchi K (1991) *Event History Analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Biographical notes

Daniela Grunow is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Amsterdam and Associate Fellow at the CIQLE-Center, Yale University. As principal investigator of the ERC-project APPARENT she studies norms and gender divisions of work at the transition to parenthood.

Florian Schulz is a senior researcher at the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) of the Federal Employment Agency in Nürnberg, Germany. He is currently working in the fields of labour markets and occupations, family and life course sociology.

Hans-Peter Blossfeld holds the Chair of Sociology I at Bamberg University. He is also the director of the State Institute for Family Research at Bamberg University. He has published 30 books and over 200 articles on topics including social inequality, family and statistical methods for longitudinal data analysis.

Résumé

Cet article analyse l'évolution du partage des tâches ménagères entre maris et femmes dans l'ouest de l'Allemagne. À partir de données longitudinales représentatives de l'enquête de panel de Bamberg sur les Couples Mariés, les auteurs analysent la manière dont la répartition des corvées ménagères change au cours des 14 premières années de mariage. Ils évaluent notamment quand et dans quelles circonstances la participation du mari aux tâches ménagères traditionnellement « féminines » augmente ou diminue. Ils considèrent les changements dans les heures de travail rémunéré des conjoints, les revenus respectifs et les transitions familiales comme des prédicteurs qui varient dans le temps dans des modèles d'analyse historique des événements. Il s'avère que près de la moitié des jeunes mariés se partagent au départ les tâches ménagères à parts égales. Mais au fil des années de mariage, la contribution du mari aux tâches ménagères diminue sensiblement, en règle générale indépendamment des revenus ou des heures de travail des conjoints. Il est rare que la participation du mari aux tâches ménagères augmente, même dans les cas où la femme travaille plus ou a des revenus supérieurs. Les normes traditionnelles de genre semblent l'emporter sur les revenus. Ceci est particulièrement le cas lorsque le couple a des enfants.

Mots clés: Allemagne, analyse historique des événements, inégalités entre les sexes, mariage, répartition des tâches, tâches ménagères

Resumen

Este artículo analiza los cambios en la división del trabajo doméstico entre esposos y esposas en Alemania occidental. Usando una muestra longitudinal representativa del Estudio de Panel de Parejas Casadas de Bamberg, los autores analizan cómo la división del trabajo cambia a lo largo de los primeros 14 años de matrimonio. En particular, examinan cuándo y bajo qué circunstancias se incrementa o se reduce la contribución del marido al trabajo doméstico tradicionalmente femenino. Los autores utilizan modelos de análisis histórico de eventos en los que tienen en cuenta los cambios en las horas de trabajo de los esposos, los ingresos relativos y las transiciones familiares como variables predictoras que cambian con el tiempo. Se ha hallado que casi la mitad de los nuevos matrimonios comienzan compartiendo las tareas del hogar por igual. Pero a lo largo del curso del matrimonio, la contribución del marido al trabajo doméstico se reduce de forma significativa, en la mayoría de las ocasiones con independencia de los ingresos de los esposos o las horas de trabajo.

Que el marido incremente su porción de trabajo doméstico es poco común, incluso cuando la esposa trabaja más horas u obtiene mayores ingresos. Las normas tradicionales de género parecen imponerse a los ingresos. Esto es particularmente cierto tras el nacimiento de los hijos.

Palabras clave: Alemania, análisis histórico de eventos, desigualdad de género, división del trabajo, matrimonio, trabajo doméstico