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Gendered Time Allocation and Divorce: A Longitudinal Analysis of German and American Couples

Objective: *To examine the association between divorce and partners' allocation of paid and unpaid work, and change over a few key decades in both West Germany and the United States.*
Background: *Past research has indicated that partner similarity in time spent on both paid and unpaid work is associated with a higher risk of marital dissolution. We explore whether the association between paid work disparities and divorce or between unpaid work disparities and divorce changed across time or differed between two cultures.*
Method: *Using data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics for the United States and the German Socio-Economic Panel for West Germany from the mid-1980s until the end of the 2000s, we conducted event history analyses.*
Results: *Over time, the risk of divorce declined among couples with a more similar division of labor. In parallel, the relative stability of marriages adhering to a dissimilar pattern of unpaid work decreased in Western Germany.*
Conclusion: *These results contrast with the predictions of a static normative perspective, but they are consistent with the multiple equilibrium theory, which predicts that divorce risks will decline in tandem with the embrace of more gender similarity in couple arrangements. Thus, evidence suggests that as societies evolve toward greater gender similarity in the division of paid and unpaid work, marital stability will likely improve.*
Implications: *Preventive intervention approaches promoting new forms of organization in the division of work between partners may be useful in the quest for improved marital relations and well-being.*

Couple specialization is viewed by many economists as the most efficient arrangement for joint welfare maximization (Becker, 1981), which implies that deviations from such role complementarity may be associated with greater marital instability. However, recent scholarship has questioned these predictions. In particular, the multiple equilibrium theory predicts that gender similarity in paid work and family duties will become a marital stabilizer once the dual-earner and dual-care model becomes normatively dominant (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015).

Implementing a dyadic approach, we aim to enrich the literature on couple similarity and marital outcomes by analyzing the impact of spousal similarities in paid and unpaid work on couple stability. Our main research question is

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whether the diffusion of gender egalitarian values within two normatively different countries, the United States and West Germany, has altered the relationship between partners' allocation of tasks and couple stability.

Literature Review

Becker's (1981) thesis, which is in principle gender neutral, predicts that partners characterized by interpersonal similarities (e.g., both pursuing careers) fail to maximize household efficiency via couple specialization, thus generating inferior marriage gains. Indeed, early studies reported positive associations between gendered role specialization and marital stability (e.g., Ross, Sawhill, & MacIntosh, 1975). Similarly, cross-national analyses suggest that rising divorce rates may be driven by greater convergence in partners' dedication to paid work (e.g., Kalmijn, 2007). Other studies, however, suggest that this link is unclear at the individual level (Özcan & Breen, 2012). There is evidence that the impact of dual-earner arrangements is not negative per se but varies both between and within countries (Cooke et al., 2013). Research has also shown that the stabilizing effect of couple dissimilarity has been decreasing over time (Kalmijn & Poortman, 2006) and that, in some countries, partners with similar human capital resources or with an analogous commitment to paid work are less likely to divorce (Schoen, Rogers, & Amato, 2006).

Numerous studies suggest that partnership stability is driven by factors other than just the efficiency gains associated with spousal dissimilarity. A central argument in this regard is that the influence of partners' task allocation on marital stability depends on the cultural setting (Ruppanner, 2010) because symbolic meanings regarding gender roles shape the individual's view of the appropriateness of a certain division of roles. Accordingly, marital stability may very much depend on the extent to which partnerships conform to normative expectations.

The multiple equilibrium model predicts that in societies characterized by a strong diffusion of gender egalitarian values, individuals will be socialized to behave in accordance with equitable gender norms and will consider egalitarianism as the sole logical arrangement. The embrace of the similarity principle in couples implies normative adherence, and this should, in turn, promote a higher degree of marital consensus and mutual understanding (Wilcox & Nock, 2006), as well as marital empathy and intimacy (Sprecher, 1992), both of which predict marital stability (Larson & Holman, 1994). In contrast, couples who adopt the similarity principle in a gender inegalitarian context will deviate from the normative order, and this may produce a sense of detachment from the spouse (Caspi & Herbener, 1990), more conflicts of authority (Bittman, England, Sayer, Folbre, & Matheson, 2003), and perhaps also social and emotional distance (Wilcox & Nock, 2006).

In the present study, we investigate whether and under what circumstances the risk of divorce is affected by (dis)similarity between partners. We make three contributions to the literature on couple similarity and marital outcomes.

First, we focus on dyadic (dis)similarities in the allocation of time in both paid and unpaid activities. The latter have received less attention than other partner characteristics (such as personality traits, shared beliefs, expectations, or levels of education) but are of clear relevance for the quality of intimate relationships (Bellani, Esping-Andersen, & Pessin, 2017; Cooke, 2006).

Second, we pay special attention to the influence of gender cultures on the impact of partners' task (dis)similarity. This requires a comparative design, both across clearly different societies and across epochs in terms of gender expectations. Previous research has focused on between-country (Cooke, 2006) or within-country variations (Killewald, 2016) to capture how the normative context affects the relationship between the marital division of work and divorce. We have not encountered any study that explores how both paid and unpaid work allocation are associated with divorce risks both between and within countries simultaneously. Adopting a comparative and longitudinal perspective allows us to identify how different as well as changing gender norms are associated with marital dissolution.

Third, previous studies have largely focused on marital outcomes such as life satisfaction (Chi, Epstein, Fang, Lam, & Li, 2013), relationship satisfaction (e.g., Gaunt, 2006), marital quality (Ogolsky, Dennison, & Monk, 2014), or well-being (Keizer & Komter, 2015), whereas our focus on divorce captures a more severe marital outcome (as did Hohmann-Marriott, 2006).

A Standard Normative Approach

Many studies have emphasized the influence of cultural scripts in terms of how marital stability is affected by couples' division of paid and unpaid work (e.g., Brines, 1994). The key here is whether the couple arrangement conforms to or deviates from the prevailing gender model of marriage (Wilcox & Nock, 2006). Men and women are externally motivated to act according to dominant norms, and violating these may garner social stigma (Tichenor, 2005). Accordingly, the level of discrepancy between the normative order about gender roles and level of gender symmetry in practice (in terms of division of work) at the couple level could ignite tensions and conflicts in the partnership (Esping-Andersen, 2016). Comparative studies have shown that where gender egalitarianism is more widespread, couple dissimilarity in both paid and unpaid work appears to be particularly destabilizing (Bellani et al., 2017; Cooke, 2007; DeMaris & Longmore, 1996). Following this reasoning, we predict that *in societies where gender egalitarianism is more widespread, task similarity stabilizes marriages* (H1).

A Dynamic Normative Approach

Most advanced countries have experienced progress toward gender egalitarianism at both the individual and societal levels (Pampel, 2011). The multiple equilibrium approach developed by Esping-Andersen and Billari (2015) attempts to formally model the relationship between gender role change and demographic outcomes. It predicts that the transition from a traditional to a gender-symmetric family model will follow an inverse u-shaped function as far as divorce rates are concerned; where the transition is incomplete, greater marital instability is expected due to normative uncertainty about socially sanctioned gender roles.

Changing gender norms alter the relationship between partners' time allocation and marital stability. The association between egalitarian couple arrangements and divorce depends on the degree to which gender egalitarianism has become normatively diffused.

More concretely, as long as traditional gender norms remain dominant, partner specialization should nurture stability, whereas partners who embrace similarity in their allocation of paid and unpaid work may experience social sanctions that could trigger marital instability (Tichenor, 2005). As the revolution of women's roles begins to unfold but has not yet gained normative dominance, widespread normative uncertainty concerning socially sanctioned gender roles can be expected. As noted, this is where declining marital stability should be observed, perhaps especially among couples who continue to adhere to conventional gender roles. In contrast, as gender egalitarian norms become ever more dominant, a declining divorce risk should be observed among couples who adopt similarity in their paid and unpaid arrangements.

We therefore expect that *as gender egalitarianism gains normative dominance, the association between similarity and divorce will turn negative* (H2). Following the same reasoning, *similarity in both paid and unpaid work taken together should be associated with a lower risk of divorce once the diffusion process toward egalitarianism has advanced* (H3).

Gender Role Patterns in West Germany and the United States

We examine data for couples in the United States and West Germany from the mid-1980s to the end of the 2000s. Although both are highly developed societies, they exhibit historically different gender role models (Cooke, 2006), yet they exhibit a common trend toward gender egalitarianism (Schober & Stahl, 2014; Schwartz, 2010).

In the decades after World War II, the breadwinner–homemaker model was dominant in both countries. Women's employment has risen substantially since the 1970s, but this has not been matched by a parallel surge in men's contributions to housework (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000). Thus, in the resulting normative context, women's acceptance of an arrangement that entails a second shift (Hochschild, 1989) has been interpreted as a couple stabilizer (Grunow, Schulz, & Blossfeld, 2012; Ruppanner, 2010) because it is associated with fewer marital conflicts (Erickson, 2005).

Although traditional gender role expectations have been challenged in both countries (Pampel, 2011), it is nonetheless clear that a more gender symmetric model has emerged in the United States than in Germany (Knudsen & Wærness, 2007). This is due to a mix of two trends: (a) a reduction in the number of hours dedicated to domestic work done by female partners with a

modest increase in men's housework and (b) an increase in the hours women spend in the paid workforce (Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie, & Robinson, 2012).

In West Germany, it has been the norm that women curtail paid employment for several years after childbirth; during that time, they typically opt for part-time work or housewifery (Breen & Cooke, 2005). Moreover, German family policies have largely been designed on the assumption that mothers are mainly responsible for care work (Pfau-Effinger, 2012). The tax system levies a high marginal tax rate on the second earner, and the family benefit system is designed to promote care of children within the home. Indeed, existing levels of child-care provision are far from meeting demand from working mothers (Schober, 2013). Nonetheless, there is evidence that nontraditional expectations about gender roles have gained momentum (Pampel, 2011). In the past 2 decades, a substantial increase in female employment has gone hand in hand with more widespread support for female empowerment and more gender-egalitarian attitudes (Buhr & Huinink, 2015). The percentage of Germans who believe that a preschool child is likely to suffer if the mother is employed has declined from 68.8% in 1994 to 32.1% in 2012 (Schober & Stahl, 2014), and the share of frequent churchgoers among West German women was halved between the 1970s and 2010 (Emmenegger & Manow, 2014). Furthermore, recent policy developments indicate a greater acceptance of maternal employment, further evidenced by the recent expansion of formal childcare (e.g., Schober, 2013).

In contrast, women in the United States have traditionally followed divergent labor market trajectories. After childbirth, they typically either continue working on a full-time basis, or they abandon employment altogether (Blau & Kahn, 2013; Blossfeld & Drobnic, 2001). This dualistic pattern has been linked to three factors: the absence of family support policies (Charles, Buchmann, Halebsky, Powers, & Smith, 2001), the peculiarity of the U.S. tax system that encourages the labor supply of career-oriented mothers (Gruber, 2011), and the large (and relatively low-cost) service sector that permits American couples to purchase market substitutes for domestic tasks (Heisig, 2011). In the United States, gender egalitarian attitudes began to emerge in the 1970s—much earlier than in West Germany (Pampel, 2011)—and are now the majority view in the United Sates. Also, beginning in the mid-1980s (much earlier than in West Germany), U.S. women outpaced men in terms of college completion rates (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006). This, in turn, helped boost full-time employment also among mothers with small children (Grunow, Hofmeister, & Buchholz, 2006).

Overall, the description of the two cases illustrates a greater institutionalization of gender equality in the public sphere, and to a lesser extent also in the domestic sphere, in the United States compared with Western Germany (Cotter, Hermsen, & Vanneman, 2011). In line with these country differences, we expect that gender similarity stabilizes marriages more in the United States than in Western Germany (H1). In addition, we expect to find support for both H2 and H3—that is, similarity in (un)paid work and divorce has an increasingly negative association over time and is more applicable to the United States (than West Germany) given its greater diffusion of gender egalitarianism.

Method

Data and Analytical Sample

The German analyses are based on the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP), which began in 1984 with a sample (interviewed annually) of 12,290 individuals nested in 5,921 households. We exclude Eastern Germany because it only entered into the GSOEP after 1990. For the United States, we use the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), which started in 1968 with a sample of 18,000 individuals residing in 5,000 family units. Both are representative panel surveys that provide information on marital history, weekly data on the partners' paid and unpaid work hours, as well as standard sociodemographic characteristics.

To obtain a comparable time frame, we analyze the years 1986 through 2010 for the PSID and 1986 through 2009 for the GSOEP. The PSID has some limitations compared with the GSOEP. First, the head of household responded on behalf of all household members in the PSID, whereas the GSOEP conducted separate interviews with each household member. Second, the PSID did not report information on parental childcare, and consequently our comparisons focus only on domestic work. As we

explain subsequently, to address potential bias from the missing childcare measure, we control for the number of children in the household. Third, the GSOEP includes information about paid and unpaid work during the weekdays for all the years considered (weekend data are available only for some years), whereas the PSID data are only based on an ordinary workday.

We examine only couples in which both respondents live together and are between 18 and 55 years of age to ensure that they fell within the employable ages, thus excluding 24.3% of PSID couple years and 29.1% of the GSOEP couple years. We also exclude nonmarried couples (approximately 10.2% of the remaining PSID couple years and 11.3% of the remaining GSOEP couple years) for both theoretical and practical considerations. First, in both countries the distribution of paid and unpaid work is different for unmarried cohabiting couples compared with married couples (Bianchi et al., 2014). Second, the meaning of cohabitation differs markedly in the two countries. West Germany has a modest level of cohabitation outside of marriage (Domínguez-Folgueras, 2013), and fertility is strongly associated with marriage (Le Goff, 2002). In the United States, nonmarital cohabitation has become common, but it tends to be short-lived and is clearly not an equivalent to marriage (Heuveline & Timberlake, 2004). Third, on a practical note, we do not have retrospective data on cohabitation durations for those couples that have never married, thus precluding the construction of comparable marital and cohabitation histories.

We identified marital histories by combining retrospective and panel information. The start of each episode corresponds to the first year in which we observe the couple. Partnership episodes are right-censored at any of the following events: Either partner reaches 55 years of age, fewer than 20 years of partnership duration, or at the last available interview (due to separation or death), thus excluding about 38.2% of the couple-years in the remaining PSID data and 33.5% of the couple-years in the remaining GSOEP data. The dependent variable is a discrete binary event, indicating whether respondents report a separation or divorce.

These restrictions produced a final sample of 7,125 PSID couples and 5,394 GSOEP couples, and an analytical sample of 49,392 and 31,691 couple-years, respectively. We observed 1,253 episodes of marital dissolution in the PSID data and 423 in the GSOEP data.

Measures

Our key explanatory variables intended to capture couple dissimilarity in both paid and unpaid work. Some scholars have advocated measures that capture absolute (and squared) differences. The absolute difference is preferred over algebraic differences because scores between the two measures are potentially correlated, but they differ in absolute terms (Schade, Hülür, Infurna, Hoppmann, & Gerstorf, 2016). Following Keizer and Komter (2015), we include in our model not only partner measures but also a couple-level score of dissimilarity. As to the latter, we avoided a measure with algebraic difference scores because these would oversaturate the model. Rather, we opted for the absolute difference in the number of weekly hours in paid work and unpaid work (what is called *level of dissimilarity*; e.g., Luo et al., 2008). We measured the absolute difference of the time spent by the husband minus the time spent by the wife, thus generating an absolute intracouple difference. We applied the same logic and procedure to both paid and unpaid work.

Paid work was defined in both datasets as the mean number of hours each spouse reported spending weekly in his or her primary job, including overtime. Unpaid work was defined in both the datasets as the total number of hours each spouse spent on housework on a typical weekday. In the PSID, these included time spent on cooking, cleaning, and doing other work around the house. The GSOEP definition of housework changed slightly across waves. For example, in 1986, it referred to housework in general; in 1997, it referred to household and shopping; and in 2006, it was defined as washing, cooking, and cleaning.

We included the standard control variables used in divorce studies: whether it was a first marriage, the wife's age at the year of marriage, and the age difference between the partners (whether he was older by more than 5 years, older less than or equal to 5 years [classified as homogamy], or she was older). We also included a variable for the number of children in the household, and both partners' education levels were included as categorical variables. For the PSID, categories corresponded to less than 12 years (less than high school diploma),

12 years (high school diploma), between 13 and 15 years (some college or a 2-year college degree), and 16 years plus (4-year college degree or more). For the GSOEP, 3 categories were included, corresponding to International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 1 and 2, ISCED 3 and 4, and ISCED 5 and 6. For the PSID data, a categorical variable for the race of the wife (White, Black, or other) was included because marital instability is greater among Black couples (Hoffman & Duncan, 1995). For the GSOEP data, we included a dummy that identified whether the individual was not a German citizen. We also controlled for each member's paid and/or unpaid number of hours (depending on the explanatory variable considered).

As in other studies focusing on change over time of the determinants of divorce (e.g. De Graaf & Kalmijn, 2006), we defined three time periods to proxy shifts in gender roles. To ensure a similar distribution of couples between country-periods, for the PSID data the three periods were 1986–1992 1993–2000, and 2001–2010, and for the GSOEP data they were 1986–1994, 1995–2001, and 2002–2009. Because we controlled for marital duration, we circumvented a misinterpretation of the empirical findings due to compositional characteristics of the time periods (Wagner, Schmid, & Weiß, 2015). Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the main variables for each country.

Analytical Procedure

We applied discrete-time event history analysis with logistic estimation. We treat time to event as discrete for two main reasons: (a) The divorce dates were recorded to the nearest month or year, and (b) all the explanatory variables were measured annually.

The duration variable is specified as a logarithmic function because the risk of separation is greater during the first years of a relationship in both countries. Given that our models include repeated events, we clustered the errors around the couple unit (for a review, see Allison, 1982).

Results

We began by estimating the association between dissimilarity in paid and unpaid work and divorce. Then we examined whether the association differed across periods (and countries). Finally, we analyzed whether there were differences in divorce risks related to the degree of dissimilarity in paid work within different levels of dissimilarity in unpaid work for each period (and country).

We first present a baseline model (i.e., Step 1 in each model), which includes only control variables. Then we present a full model (i.e., Step 2 in each model), which includes the explanatory variables.

Dissimilarity in Paid and Unpaid Work

The results of our analyses to test whether dissimilarity in paid and unpaid work was associated with the stabilization or destabilization of marriages are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Notably, effect sizes for the association between the level of dissimilarity in paid work and the relative risk of divorce were small in both the United States ($OR = 1.04$, $p = .027$) and in West Germany ($OR = 1.08$, $p = .081$), as well as basically the same in both countries, indicating that dissimilarity in paid work was not meaningfully related to risk of divorce in either country.

Complete results for unpaid work are presented in Table 3. In the United States, the risk of divorce was positively associated with the level of dissimilarity in the division of unpaid work ($OR = 1.17$, $p = .011$). In contrast, the risk of divorce was negatively associated with dissimilarity in unpaid work among German couples ($OR = 0.86$, $p = .043$). Thus, partnerships characterized by a dissimilar division of unpaid work were comparably more stable in Germany than in the United States.

These results seem to only partially validate H1. Our results do not suggest that similarity in the division of paid work between spouses is associated with heightened risk of divorce in more traditional contexts (such as West Germany). However, as expected, there was a positive relationship between dissimilarity in the division of unpaid work and marital stability in Western Germany but not in the United States.

Shifts Over Time

The risks of dissolution across the different periods were estimated with the inclusion of an interaction term between partners' dissimilarity in work allocation and time period (see Table 4). The results indicate a substantial change in divorce risks associated with dissimilarity in

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for United States (N=49,392) and West Germany (N=31,691) Samples*

	United States			West Germany		
Variables	*M*	*SD*	Range	*M*	*SD*	Range
Absolute dissimilarity in paid work	20.3	18.6	0–79	26.0	16.6	0–67
Absolute dissimilarity in unpaid work	12.4	11.7	0–60	13.0	10.9	0–55
Weekly hours in paid work—wife	29.6	19.4	0–80	18.2	17.1	0–64
Weekly hours in paid work—husband	43.9	12.5	0–80	41.2	10.9	0–84
Weekly hours in unpaid work—wife	18.5	12.3	0–72	19.4	11.5	0–67
Weekly hours in unpaid work—husband	7.2	6.5	0–35	9.3	8.6	0–51
Woman's age at start of marriage	26.3	6.6	13–55	25.0	6.2	16–54
Number of children in the household	1.5	1.2	0–10	1.4	1.1	0–10
	n		%	*n*		%
Age difference						
Age homogamy	30,376		61.50	19,522		61.60
Wife is older	10,906		22.08	4,240		13.38
Wife is younger	8,110		16.42	7,929		25.02
Wife's education						
Less than 12 years or 13 (DE) years	3,497		7.08	6,345		20.02
12 years	16,334		33.07			–
13 to 15 years	14,462		29.28	18,317		57.80
16 or more years	15,099		30.57	7,029		22.18
Husband's education						
Less than 12 (US) or 13 (DE) years	4,796		9.71	4,858		15.33
12 years	18,240		36.93	—		—
13 to 15 years	11,800		23.89	16,727		52.78
16 or more years	14,556		29.47	10,106		31.89
Race/ethnicity (US) Immigrant (DE)						
White	35,503		71.88			
African American	10,160		20.57			
Indian/Alaska	3,734		7.56			
German	—		—	26,446		83.45
Non-German	—		—	5,245		16.55
Marriage order						
First marriage	38,032		77.00	30,423		96.00
Higher order marriage	16,299		33.00	1,268		4.00
Period						
First period	16,640		33.69	9,869		31.14
Second period	17,040		34.50	10,550		33.29
Third period	15,712		31.81	11,272		35.57

paid work. In the United States, the positive association between dissimilarity in paid work and divorce has strengthened over time, whereas in West Germany couples with dissimilarity in paid work have remained relatively stable or even decreased a bit over time in their risk for divorce.

Regarding dissimilarity in unpaid work, our findings suggest that in the United States dissimilarity in unpaid work was positively associated with couple instability and that association has strengthened over time. Conversely, in West Germany dissimilarity in unpaid work has weakened over time in its role as a marital stabilizer.

To facilitate interpretation, we present in Figure 1 the results for dissimilarity in paid work (left panel) and unpaid work (right panel) for the three periods. Because the model is nonlinear, we estimated mean marginal effects

Table 2. *Hierarchical Binary Logistic Regression Predicting Divorce by Dissimilarity in Paid Work in the United States* (N=*49,392*) *and West Germany* (N=*31,691*)

	United States						West Germany					
Step and predictor variables	-2LL	Δ-2LL	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*OR*	-2LL	Δ-2LL	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*OR*
Step 1 (control variables)	−5664.61	−5664.61			<.001		−2197.20	−2197.20			<.001	
First marriage			–0.52	.09	<.001	0.60			–1.05	.18	<.001	0.35
Wife's age at marriage			–0.17	.03	<.001	0.84			–0.06	.05	.242	0.94
Wife's age at marriage squared			0.00	.00	<.001	1.00			0.00	.00	.520	1.00
Wife's race or ethnicity(White)												
African American			0.45	.07	<.001	1.56						
Native American or Alaska native			0.03	.11	.759	1.04						
Not German(German)									–0.77	.18	<.001	0.46
Age difference(homogamy)												
Wife older			0.21	.08	.006	1.24			0.38	.14	.008	1.46
Wife younger			0.18	.08	.022	1.19			0.18	.11	.121	1.20
Wife's education[a]												
High school diploma			0.19	.12	.118	1.21						
13–15 years/ISCED 3 or 4			0.29	.13	.021	1.34			–0.28	.13	.029	0.76
16+ years/ISCED 5 or 6			0.05	.14	.718	1.05			–0.20	.17	.247	0.82
Husband's education[a]												
High school diploma			–0.03	.10	.794	0.98						
13–15 years/ISCED 3 or 4			–0.17	.11	.110	0.84			–0.13	.14	.363	0.88
16+ years / ISCED 5 or 6			–0.70	.13	<.001	0.50			–0.52	.18	.003	0.60
Number of children in household			0.07	.02	.006	1.07			–0.04	.05	.424	0.96
Period(Period I)												
Period II			0.22	.07	.002	1.25			0.01	.13	.943	1.01
Period III			0.44	.07	<.001	1.55			0.27	.13	.033	1.30
Log of marriage duration			–0.31	.04	<.001	0.73			–0.16	.06	.006	0.85
Step 2 (full model)	–5653.51	11.10			<.001		−2185.11	12.09			<.001	
Mean weekly hours in paid work												
Wife			0.01	.00	.002	1.01			0.02	.00	<.001	1.02
Husband			–0.01	.00	.005	0.99			–0.01	.00	.210	0.99
Dissimilarity in paid work			0.04	.02	.027	1.04			0.07	.04	.081	1.08
Constant			–0.07						–1.99			

Note. Reference category in parentheses. ISCED = International Standard Classification of Education education; LL = log likelihood.

[a]Reference category: United States = less than high school diploma; West Germany = ISCED 1 or 2.

Table 3. *Hierarchical Binary Logistic Regression Predicting Divorce by Dissimilarity in Unpaid Work in the United States (*N=*49,392) and in West Germany (*N=*31,691)*

	United States						West Germany					
Step and predictor variables	-2LL	Δ-2LL	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*OR*	-2LL	Δ-2LL	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*OR*
Step 1 (control variables)	–5664.61	–5664.61			<.001		−2197.20	−2197.20			<.001	
First marriage			–0.52	.09	<.001	0.60			–1.05	.18	<.001	0.35
Wife's age at marriage			–0.17	.03	<.001	0.84			–0.06	.05	.242	0.94
Wife's age at marriage squared			0.00	.00	<.001	1.00			0.00	.00	.519	1.00
Wife's race or ethnicity(White)												
African American			0.45	.07	<.001	1.56						
Native American or Alaska native			0.03	.11	.759	1.04						
Not German(German)									–0.77	.18	<.001	0.46
Age difference(homogamy)												
Wife older			0.21	.08	.006	1.24			0.38	.14	.008	1.46
Wife younger			0.18	.08	.022	1.19			0.18	.11	.121	1.20
Wife's education[a]												
High school diploma			0.19	.12	.120	1.21						
13–15 years/ISCED 3 or 4			0.30	.13	.021	1.34			–0.28	.13	.029	0.76
16+ years/ISCED 5 or 6			0.05	.14	.718	1.05			–0.20	.17	.247	0.82
Husband's education[a]												
High school diploma			–0.03	.10	.794	0.98						
13–15 years/ISCED 3 or 4			–0.18	.11	.110	0.84			–0.13	.14	.363	0.88
16+ years / ISCED 5 or 6			–0.70	.13	<.001	0.50			−0.52	.18	.003	0.60
Number of children in household			0.07	.02	.006	1.07			–0.04	.05	.424	0.96
Log of marriage duration			–0.31	.04	<.001	0.74			–0.16	.01	.006	0.85
Period(Period I)												
Period II			0.22	.07	.002	1.25			0.01	.13	.943	1.01
Period III			0.44	.07	<.001	1.55			0.27	.13	.033	1.30
Step 2 (full model)	–5642.40	22.21			<.001		–2185.11	12.09			<.001	
Mean weekly hours in unpaid work												
Wife			–0.30	.01	<.001	0.98			–0.01	.01	.126	0.99
Husband			–0.01	.01	.157	0.99			–0.01	.00	.248	1.01
Dissimilarity in unpaid work			0.16	.06	.011	1.17			–0.15	.04	.043	0.86
Constant			0.24						–1.04			

Note. Reference category in parentheses. ISCED = International Standard Classification of Education; LL = log likelihood.

[a]Reference category: United States = less than high school diploma; West Germany = ISCED 1 or 2.

Table 4. *Hierarchical Binary Logistic Regression Predicting Divorce by Dissimilarity in (Un)Paid Work in the United States (*N*=49,392) and West Germany (*N*=31,691) by Period*

	Paid work												Unpaid work											
	United States						West Germany						United States						West Germany					
Step and predictor variables	-2LL	Δ-2LL	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*OR*	-2LL	Δ-2LL	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*OR*	-2LL	Δ-2LL	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*OR*	-2LL	Δ-2LL	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*OR*
Step 1 (control variables)	–5664.61	–5664.61			<.001		–2197.195	–2197.19			<.001		–5664.61	–5664.61			<.001		–2197.20	–2197.20			<.001	
First marriage			–0.52	.09	<.001	0.60			–1.05	.18	<.001	0.35			–0.52	.09	<.001	0.60			–1.05	.18	<.001	0.35
Wife's age at marriage			–0.17	.03	<.001	0.84			–0.06	.05	.242	0.94			–0.17	.03	<.001	0.84			–0.06	.05	.242	0.94
Wife's age at marriage squared			0.00	.00	<.001	1.00			0.00	.00	.519	1.00			0.00	.00	<.001	1.00			0.00	.00	.519	1.00
Wife's race or ethnicity[(White)]																								
African American			0.45	.07	<.001	1.56									0.45	.07	<.001	1.56						
Native American or Alaska native			0.03	.11	.759	1.04									0.03	.11	.759	1.04						
Not German[(German)]									–0.77	.18	<.001	0.46									–0.77	.18	<.001	0.46
Age difference[(homogamy)]																								
Wife older			0.21	.08	.006	1.24			0.38	.14	.008	1.46			0.21	.08	.006	1.24			0.38	.14	.008	1.46
Wife younger			0.18	.08	.022	1.19			0.18	.11	.121	1.20			0.18	.08	.022	1.19			0.18	.11	.121	1.20
Wife's education[a]																								
High school diploma			0.19	.12	.120	1.21									0.19	.12	.120	1.21						
13–15 years / ISCED 3 or 4			0.29	.13	.021	1.34			–0.28	.13	.029	0.76			0.30	.13	.021	1.34			–0.28	.13	.029	0.76
16+ years / ISCED 5 or 6			0.05	.14	.718	1.05			–0.20	.17	.247	0.82			0.05	.14	.718	1.05			–0.20	.17	.247	0.82

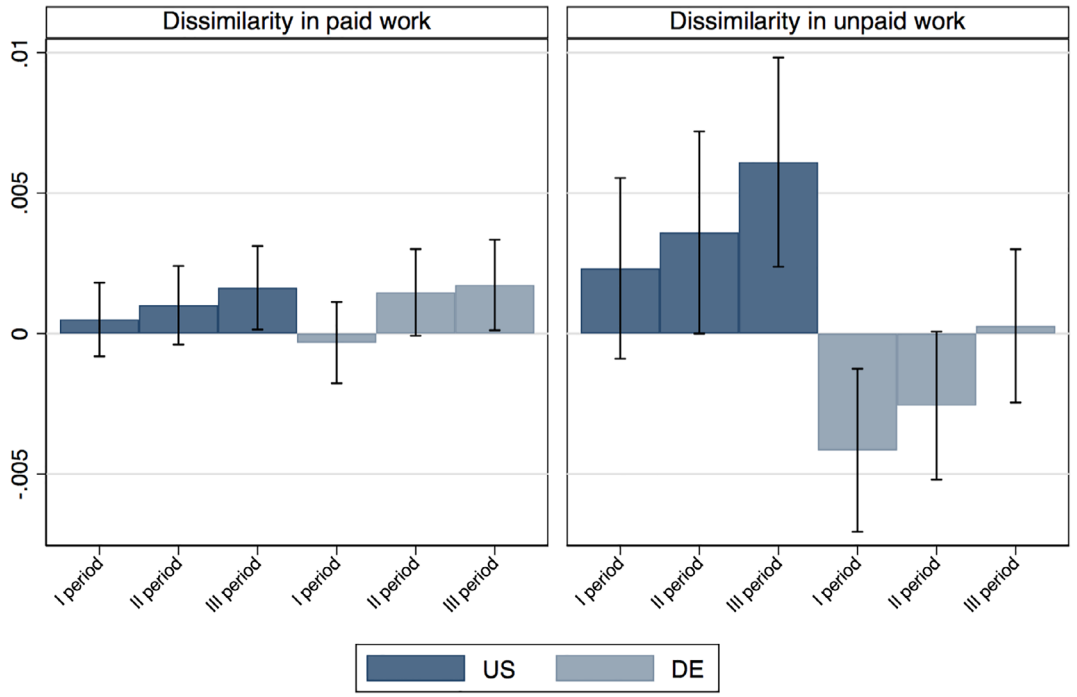
Table 4. *Continued*

	Paid work								Unpaid work							
	United States				West Germany				United States				West Germany			
Husband's education[a]									–0.03	.10	.794	0.98				
High school diploma	–0.03	.10	.794	0.98					–0.17	.11	.110	0.84				
13–15 years/ISCED 3 or 4	–0.17	.11	.110	0.84	–0.13	.14	.363	0.88					–0.13	.14	.363	0.88
16+ years/ ISCED 5 or 6	–0.70	.13	<.001	0.50	–0.52	.18	.003	0.60	–0.70	.13	<.001	–0.70	–0.52	.18	.003	0.60
Number of children in household	0.07	.02	.006	1.07	–0.04	.05	.424	0.96	0.07	.02	.006	1.07	–0.04	.05	.424	0.96
Period$^{(\text{Period I})}$																
Period II	0.22	.07	.002	1.25	0.01	.13	.943	1.01	0.22	.07	.002	1.25	0.01	.13	.943	1.01
Period III	0.44	.07	<.001	1.55	0.27	.13	.033	1.30	0.44	.07	<.001	1.55	0.27	.13	.033	1.30
Log of marriage duration	–0.31	.04	<.001	0.73	–0.16	.01	.006	0.85	–0.31	.04	<.001	0.74	–0.16	.01	.006	0.85
Step 2 (full model)	–5655.44	9.17		<.001	–2180.10	17.09		<.001	–5640.30	24.31		<.001	–2181.10	16.10		<.001
Mean weekly hours in (un)paid work																
Wife	0.01	.00	.002	1.01	0.02	.004	<.001	1.02	–0.02	.01	<.001	0.97	–0.01	.01	.144	0.99
Husband	–0.01	.00	.005	0.99	–0.00	.004	.196	0.99	–0.01	.01	.137	0.99	0.00	.00	.399	1.01
Dissimilarity in (un)paid work	0.02	.02	.455	1.02	–0.03	.060	.662	0.97	0.10	.07	.156	1.10	–0.33	.12	.004	0.72
× Period II	0.02	.04	.609	1.02	0.15	.071	.040	1.16	0.04	.06	.487	1.04	0.13	.14	.374	1.13
× Period III	0.04	.04	.303	1.04	0.15	.070	.030	1.16	0.13	.06	.040	1.13	0.35	.14	.009	1.42
Constant	.975				–1.75				0.32				–0.88			

Note. Reference category in parentheses. ISCED = International Standard Classification of Education education; LL = log likelihood.

[a]Reference category: United States = Less than high school diploma; West Germany = ISCED 1 or 2.

Figure 1. Mean marginal effects of dissimilarity in paid work (left panel) and unpaid work (right panel) in the United States and West Germany. The predicted marginal effects were obtained using estimates from logistic regression with all the control variables included. Confidence intervals are reported at 95%.



of a one-unit increase in dissimilarity; which corresponds to a 10-hour differential (this is because we have multiplied the explanatory variables by ten).

In the United States, dissimilarity in paid work was positively associated with divorce in the first period, but the marginal effect was not statistically different from zero. As expected, however, more recently partners who have greater dissimilarity in the amount of paid work hours tend to have higher risks of divorce than do those who have more similarity in their paid work hours. In the most recent period, a 10-hour increase in dissimilarity was associated with about a 0.20 percentage point increase in the probability of divorce.

In West Germany, an analogous but distinctive shift occurred across periods. Dissimilarity in paid work was initially indistinguishable from zero, indicating that the risk of divorce was unrelated to dissimilarity in paid work between spouses. However, during the most recent two periods, dissimilarity in paid work was positively associated with the risk of divorce, and the magnitude of this association was the same as in the United States.

Turning to unpaid work, here the two countries exhibit similar patterns—dissimilarity consistently became less of a protective factor for marriages—but at different levels. In the United States, dissimilarity in unpaid work has been increasingly associated with a destabilization of marriages. Compared with the United States, dissimilarity in unpaid work has been more closely associated with marital stability in West Germany, but that association has shifted. The most recent data for West Germany show that the risk of divorce rose with the increase of dissimilarity in unpaid work. To provide magnitudes and real-world context for these effects, in the United States, a 10-hour increase in dissimilarity was initially associated with about a 0.25 percentage point increase, and subsequently with more than a 0.60 percentage point increase, in the probability of divorce. For West Germany, in the first period, a 10-hour increase

in dissimilarity in unpaid work was associated with about a 0.45 percentage point decrease in the probability of divorce, whereas in the most recent period the level of dissimilarity was no longer associated with a difference in marital stability.

Simultaneous Dissimilarity in Paid and Unpaid Work

We now explore how the risk of divorce was related to dissimilarity in paid and unpaid work simultaneously, which permits us to estimate the impact of dissimilarity in paid work at different levels of dissimilarity in unpaid work. To estimate this association, we add an interaction term for the level of dissimilarity of unpaid work combined with the level of dissimilarity in paid work (and periods).

Table 5 presents the results for each of the two countries. To facilitate interpretation, contour plots are shown in Figure 2. These are heat maps where the color of the plot indicates the magnitude of the predicted risk of divorce. The top row of Figure 2 contains contour plots for the United States in the first, second, and third period, respectively. Comparing the contour plots over the three periods reveals that couples characterized by similarity in both paid and unpaid work had more stability across all the periods. The opposite seems true (a) for couples characterized by a low level of dissimilarity in paid work (the horizontal axis) and substantial dissimilarity in unpaid work (the vertical axis) during the first period and (b) for couples with the highest level of dissimilarity on both the dimensions during the last two periods. These results provide confirmation of the decreasing marital stability associated with a conventional division of work between partners.

The bottom row of Figure 2 depicts the risk of divorce associated with the combination of dissimilarity in paid and unpaid work for West Germany, and the pattern is different from that in the United States. In the first two periods, couples characterized by a small dissimilarity in paid work but a large one in unpaid work were the most stable group. However, this is not the case for couples in the last period. Notably, the most unstable couples were once those with a low level of dissimilarity in unpaid work (regardless of dissimilarity in paid work), whereas in the most recent period, the most unstable couples were those with a high level of dissimilarity in paid work combined with a small level of dissimilarity in unpaid work.

Overall, these findings reveal a trend toward a common pattern in favor of gender symmetry as a marital stabilizer in both countries. That is, during the most recent period, marriages in which husbands and wives worked roughly the same number of paid and unpaid hours tended to have the lowest predicted divorce risk in both the United States and West Germany.

Discussion

In this study, we have revisited the much-researched link between couples' work arrangements and marital outcomes. Our aim was to better capture divorce dynamics on two principal dimensions. First, similar to other studies (e.g., Cotter et al., 2011), we have emphasized the importance of dominant social norms in guiding family life. Second, we have sought to improve our understanding of how and under what conditions the adoption of dissimilarity in partners' allocation of paid and unpaid work may be associated with partnership dynamics (e.g., Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003; DeMaris, 2010).

Like Cooke (2006) and Bellani et al. (2017), we focused on West Germany and the United States (using the same datasets) because they represent clear contrasts in terms of normative adaptation to the new role of women. Like Killewald's (2016) analysis on PSID data, we exploited variation in divorce propensities across periods to further enrich our understanding of couple dynamics. Although previous research has focused on each partners' contribution to the market or to the domestic sphere (e.g., Killewald, 2016), we have attempted to identify whether the diffusion of gender egalitarian values has altered the relationship between dissimilarity in partners' work hours and divorce within countries.

Our findings are consistent with our predictions, which were rooted in multiple equilibrium theory: Partner similarity became increasingly important for conjugal stability in both countries; dissimilarity in both paid work and unpaid work became increasingly associated with marital instability over time. For West Germany, the association between the degree of dissimilarity in unpaid work and marital dissolution was negative in the late 1980s and early 1990s but disappeared in the 2000s. Thus, the adoption of a

Table 5. *Couple Arrangements, Periods and Divorce Risk in the United States (N=49392) and West Germany (N=31691)*

	United States						West Germany					
Predictor	-2LL	Δ-2LL	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*OR*	-2LL	Δ-2LL	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*OR*
Step 1 (control variables)	–5664.61	–5664.61			<.001		–2197.20	–2197.20			<.001	
First marriage			–0.52	.09	<.001	0.60			–1.05	.18	<.001	0.35
Wife's age at marriage			–0.17	.03	<.001	0.84			–0.06	.05	.242	0.94
Wife's age at marriage squared			0.00	.00	<.001	1.00			0.00	.00	.519	1.00
Wife's race or ethnicity(White)												
African American			0.45	.07	<.001	1.56						
Native American or Alaska native			0.03	.11	.759	1.04						
Not German(German)									–0.77	.18	<.001	0.46
Age difference(homogamy)												
Wife older			0.21	.08	.006	1.24			0.38	.14	.008	1.46
Wife younger			0.18	.08	.022	1.19			0.18	.11	.121	1.20
Wife's education[a]												
High school diploma			0.19	.12	.120	1.21						
13–15 years/ISCED 3 or 4			0.29	.13	.021	1.34			–0.28	.13	.029	0.76
16+ years/ISCED 5 or 6			0.05	.14	.718	1.05			–0.20	.17	.247	0.82
Husband's education[a]												
High school diploma			–0.03	.10	.794	0.98						
13–15 years/ISCED 3 or 4			–0.17	.11	.110	0.84			–0.13	.14	.363	0.88
16+ years/ISCED 5 or 6			–0.70	.13	<.001	0.50			–0.52	.18	.003	0.60
Number of children in household			0.07	.02	.006	1.07			–0.04	.05	.424	0.96
Period(Period I)												
Period II			0.22	.07	.002	1.25			0.01	.13	.943	1.01
Period III			0.44	.07	<.001	1.55			0.27	.13	.033	1.30
Log of marriage duration			–0.31	.04	<.001	0.73			–0.16	.01	.006	0.85
Step 2 (full model)	–5631.10	33.51					–2169.55	27.65				
Mean weekly hours in paid work												
Wife			0.00	.00	.008	1.01			0.02	.00	<.001	1.02
Husband			–0.01	.00	.003	0.99			–0.00	.00	.240	0.99
Mean weekly hours in unpaid work												
Wife			–0.02	.01	<.001	0.98			–0.00	.01	.956	1.00
Husband			–0.01	.01	.036	0.99			–0.00	.01	.970	1.00

Table 5. *Continued*

Predictor	United States						West Germany					
	-2LL	Δ-2LL	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*OR*	-2LL	Δ-2LL	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*OR*
Absolute dissimilarity in												
paid work			0.08	.01	.084	1.08			–0.02	.08	.780	0.98
unpaid work			0.16	.10	.087	1.17			–0.45	.18	.012	0.64
paid work × unpaid work			–0.03	.02	.022	0.97			0.05	.05	.362	1.05
paid work × Period II			–0.03	.06	.619	0.96			0.19	.11	.080	1.21
paid work × Period III			–0.03	.06	.652	0.06			0.20	.11	.069	1.21
unpaid work × Period II			–0.04	.11	.721	0.96			0.22	.29	.442	1.25
unpaid work × Period III			0.04	.11	.739	1.04			0.59	.25	.018	1.81
paid work × unpaid work × Period II			0.03	.03	.392	1.03			–0.06	.08	.436	0.94
paid work x× unpaid work × Period III			0.03	.03	.330	1.03			–0.11	.08	.143	0.89
Constant			0.26						–1.34			

Note. Reference category in parentheses. ISCED = International Standard Classification of Education; LL = log likelihood.
[a]Reference category: United States = less than high school diploma; West Germany = ISCED 1 or 2.

dissimilar division of unpaid work that was once associated with a lower propensity for divorce was no longer a protective factor in West Germany or the United States by the 2000s.

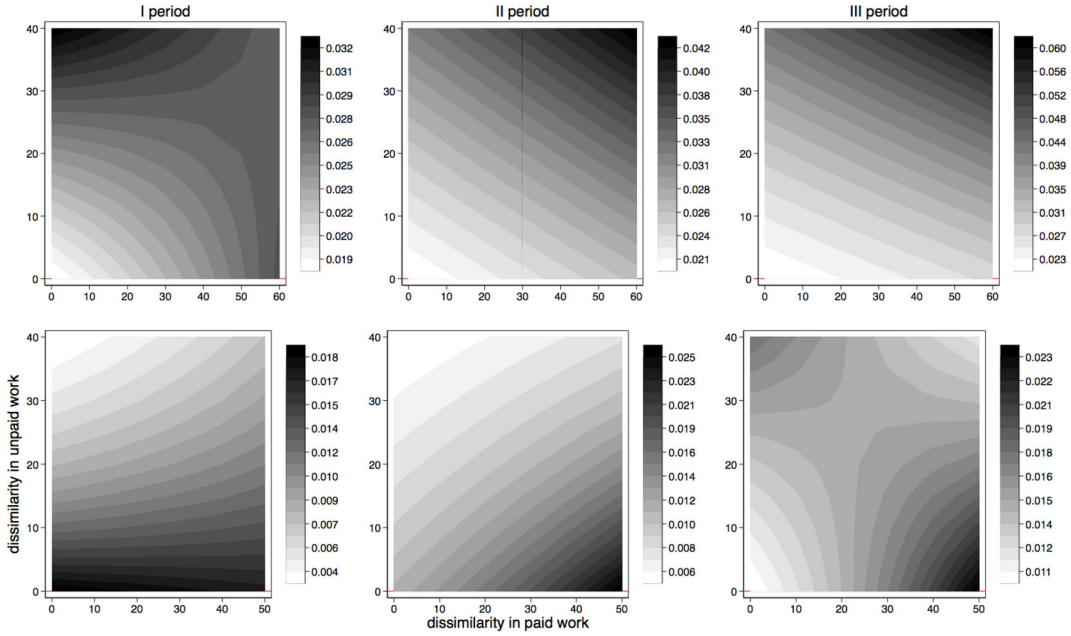
Another major finding is that the divorce risk among couples that adopt a higher degree of similarity in both paid and unpaid work declined, relatively speaking, by the 2000s in West Germany, and in the United States, it remained low throughout the decades our data spanned. Put differently, similarity in the domains of paid and unpaid work became associated with marital stability.

Implications for Practice

An asymmetrical division of work between spouses tends to be a source of dissatisfaction in marriage, especially for women (Pina & Bengtson, 1993). The upshot of our analyses is that it is increasingly associated with marital dissolution. Thus, as suggested by Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (2005), preventive intervention approaches promoting new forms of organization in the division of work between partners may be useful in the quest for improved marital relations and well-being. Marriage practitioners and family life educators may motivate couples to share work duties in a less gendered and more equitable manner by introducing alternative gender discourses. Notably, however, a substantial increase in male partners' participation in housework duties is difficult to achieve (Bianchi et al., 2012).

Various instruments could be used to help partners achieve similarity. At the macro-level of government policy, public support for working mothers can make a substantial difference in men's readiness to share domestic burdens more equally, in particular if policies promote full-time female career commitments (Esping-Andersen, 2016). At the micro-level of couples' lives, scholars have consistently found that a maintenance strategy (an action initiated by one of the partners to preserve the relationship) and maintenance behavior (a spouse expresses commitment to the relationship) are major ingredients in the quest for an enduring equitable marriage (Canary, Stafford, & Semic, 2004; Rabby, 2007). A daily training could facilitate the development of a positive interaction pattern and a shared meaning system (Duck & Barnes, 1992). Following this perspective, couples experiencing conflict due to an unbalanced

Figure 2. Predicted divorce risk by dissimilarity in paid work (x axis) and dissimilarity in unpaid work (y axis) across three periods in the United States (top row) and in West Germany (bottom row). Predicted probabilities were obtained using estimates from a logistic regression model (see Table 5). These plots trace iso-level contour spaces that have a similar level of divorce probabilities. Darker gray areas represent higher divorce risks; lighter gray areas represent lower divorce risks.



division of duties could be invited to keep a diary in which each partner reports on a daily basis the time spent on every activity as well as his or her perception of the time dedicated by the partner (as in Bodenmann, Hilpert, Nussbeck, & Bradbury, 2014). Likewise, an app that assesses time-use dissimilarities over time could help partners understand how domestic duties and paid employment are distributed between spouses. To the extent that clear inequities emerge, this may motivate partners to adjust their work allocation more equitably. However, this instrument in itself may not be sufficient to guarantee the adoption of a more equitable arrangement. The role of a counselor may be key in this regard. Behavioral therapy is likely to ensure functional approaches are taken to resolve proximate sources of distress, such as an altered division of duties (Gurman & Fraenkel 2002). Some evidence suggests women, in this context, are likely to pressure men for change, and may resort to conflict when men try to avoid any discussion that generates a change in their contribution (Kluwer & Mikula, 2002). Thus, to avoid unhealthy patterns of interaction, a counsellor should facilitate communication and cooperation between the partners in their search for equilibrium.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although we have found that gender similarity in paid and unpaid work has an ever-more-stabilizing association with marriage, some caveats must be taken into consideration. First, our data did not include time dedicated to childcare. It is, however, unlikely that this would have influenced our findings greatly given that previous studies have shown that husbands' time spent on childcare does not alter the risk of divorce (Cooke, 2004)

Second, due to the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in both data sets, our findings are specific to the racial and ethnic majority in each population; others may not have experienced a change in normative gendered expectations regarding the division of paid and unpaid work between partners. An interesting

direction for future research would be to assess the extent to which racial and ethnic minority groups, as well as their native versus immigrant subgroups, converge or diverge from the majority population in terms of adopting a less gendered division of work. Similarly, compared with heterosexual marriages, gender norms differ in both cohabiting (Brines & Joyner, 1999; Kalmijn, Loeve, & Manting, 2007) and same-sex (Goldberg, 2013) relationships, neither of which were included in the present study, thereby limiting the generalizability of our findings to heterosexual married couples of the majority race and ethnicity.

Finally, we only captured a limited number of aspects that make partners similar or dissimilar: the amount of hours spent on paid and unpaid work. It would be interesting also to measure the time partners spend on emotional work as an indicator of interpersonal (dis)similarity (Napier, 1988). As suggested by DeMaris (2010), an imbalance in the time dedicated to giving emotional support to the partner is a key factor in the functioning of marriage. Women usually give more emotional attention than they receive and husbands usually take more emotional attention than they give within a marriage (Sprecher, 1992), and this imbalance could either compensate for or exacerbate inequalities in the paid and unpaid work domains.

Conclusion

Our results contrast with predictions of the static normative perspective, but they are consistent with multiple equilibrium theory, which predicts that divorce risks will decline in tandem with the embrace of more gender similarity in couple arrangements. Thus, evidence suggests that as societies evolve toward greater gender similarity in the division of paid and unpaid work, marital stability will likely improve.

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