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“Doing” Gender in Context: Household Bargaining and Risk of Divorce in Germany and the United States¹

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Gender relations remain embedded in their sociopolitical context. Compared here using event-history analysis is how household divisions of paid and unpaid labor affect marital stability in the former West Germany, where policy reinforced male breadwinner families, and the United States, where policy remains silent regarding the private sphere. In Germany, any moves away from separate gendered spheres in terms of either wives' relative earnings or husbands' relative participation in housework increase the risk of divorce. In the United States, however, the more stable couples are those that adapt by displaying greater gender equity. These results highlight that policy shapes how gender gets done in the intimate sphere, and that reinforcement of a gendered division of labor may be detrimental to marital stability.

A growing body of evidence indicates that the rules of economic exchange do not predict who does the housework once wives' relative earnings exceed their husbands'. Although the division of housework tends to become more equitable as wives' relative household earnings increase from none to about half, it then reverts to a more traditional division as wives become the primary breadwinner (Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994; Green-

¹ Earlier versions of these analyses were presented at the International Sociological Association RC28 semiannual meeting in Neuchatel, Switzerland, May 7–9, 2004, and the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in Atlanta, August 16–19, 2003. Many thanks are due to the *AJS* reviewers for making suggestions to enhance the clarity of this article, Peer Fiss for comments on an earlier draft, and to Fran Goldscheider for her helpful comments regarding multiple aspects of this research project. After January 1, 2007, I may be reached at the University of Kent, at the School of Social Policy, Sociology, and Social Science Research. Direct correspondence to Lynn Prince Cooke, School of Social Sciences, Room 823, University of Queensland, Queensland 4072, Australia. E-mail: lynn.cooke@uq.edu.au

stein 2000). This latter phenomenon has been attributed to couples’ “doing” gender in their marital relationship (Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994). By doing gender, people actively manage social interactions in light of normative expectations (Fenstermaker Berk 1985; West and Zimmerman 1987). The division of housework in particular reflects the “material embodiment of wifely and husbandly roles, and derivatively, of womanly and manly conduct” (West and Zimmerman 1987, p. 144). Consequently, housework produces both a material and symbolic product of marriage so that what would seem the fairest division under the rules of exchange does not necessarily occur within the home (Fenstermaker Berk 1985; see also Hochschild 1989).

The first contribution of this article is to turn attention to the “So what?” If the division of housework reflects couples’ negotiation of intimate life, what is the effect of these negotiations on marital stability? To date research has focused on the effects of the division of *paid* labor on marital stability; little is known about effects resulting from the division of *unpaid* labor. Two schools of thought theorize the impact of the household division of labor on marital stability, and these offer competing hypotheses. The first is that gender specialization benefits family solidarity because it increases couples’ mutual dependence (Becker 1981; Parsons 1942, 1953). Under this specialization and trading model (Oppenheimer 1997), women’s employment poses a threat to the benefits of specialization because it reduces women’s economic dependence upon men, in turn predicting a greater risk of divorce (Becker 1985). By extension, although never assessed, husbands’ greater domestic participation also threatens the mutual dependence created by specialization, and so should also *increase* the risk of divorce.

The second school of thought evolves from social exchange and bargaining models (Blau 1960; England and Farkas 1986; McElroy and Horney 1981). Couples negotiate the division of paid and unpaid labor to a unique equitable distribution within the family based on relative wages, preferences, and so on. These models hold that alternatives to the marriage are important determinants of relative bargaining power that influence possible divisions (McElroy and Horney 1981). In these models, women’s employment and economic independence more generally increase their ability to invoke a credible *threat* of divorce if a more favorable division of domestic labor cannot be negotiated. Under this dynamic, husbands’ greater domestic participation should *decrease* the risk of divorce (Breen and Cooke 2005).

To explore which of these competing hypotheses reflects reality, we first assess whether husbands’ share of unpaid, domestic tasks increases the risk of divorce as would be predicted by the specialization and trading model, or decreases the risk of divorce as predicted by social exchange

and bargaining models. We then explore the effect of any compensatory actions that suggest doing gender in the domestic sphere as women's relative earnings rise, which falls outside of either model's prediction. With the arguments to date, however, we are left with another set of competing hypotheses. If doing gender in this way represents a process by which dual-earning couples neutralize gender deviance (Bittman et al. 2003; Greenstein 2000), and doing so is beneficial to marital relations, it should *decrease* the risk of divorce. If, instead, wives taking on a greater share of domestic tasks as their relative earnings exceed their husbands' reflects a display of relative gender power running counter to what is perceived as fair under notions of distributive justice, it should *increase* the risk of divorce.

Doing gender, however, is an active process reflecting the institutional shaping of gender relations. Structural and ideological incompatibilities between the home and workplace limit women's ability to achieve equity in either sphere (Ferree 1990; Hartmann 1981). The degree to which institutional factors reinforce more or less traditional divisions of labor varies across industrialized societies (Lewis 1992). The second contribution of this article is to explore how household divisions of labor and any associated risks of divorce vary in the sociopolitical context. To do so, I use the U.S. Panel Study of Income Dynamics and the German SocioEconomic Panel to compare the risk of divorce among couples as they marry and negotiate the household division of labor in the United States, where there is less institutional support for the traditional male breadwinner model, with West Germany, where there has been strong institutional support for the traditional gendered division of labor. Panel data are used, as they are most suitable for assessing the dynamic process of couple negotiations of the division of labor (Kalleberg and Rosenfeld 1990) as well as the risk of life transitions such as divorce (Allison 1984).

THE HOUSEHOLD DIVISION OF LABOR IN CONTEXT

The desirability of the gendered division of labor—when husbands specialize in economic production while wives specialize in domestic (re)production—is judged differently depending upon whether one is theorizing about household versus individual outcomes. At the household level, the specialization and trading model (Oppenheimer 1997) holds that mutual dependence (Becker 1981) and family solidarity (Parsons 1953) are created when partners specialize, then trade the fruits of their specialties. When women are instead economically independent, marriage is less advantageous to them, and divorce rates are predicted to rise (Becker 1981, 1985).

Empirical evidence of the direct relationship between women’s employment and marital instability, however, is mixed (see Rogers 2004). While some studies report a positive relationship (Becker, Landes, and Michael 1977; Brines and Joyner 1999; Ruggles 1997; South 2001), others find that the positive relationship stems from changes in the pool of available partners (Aberg 2003; South and Lloyd 1995) or only when the marriage is an unhappy one (Schoen et al. 2002). Still other research finds no significant relationship (Bumpass, Martin, and Sweet 1991; Hoffman and Duncan 1995; Greenstein 1990, 1995). Consequently, it is not clear that women’s participation in the employment sphere is directly harmful to family stability and raises questions about the desirability of specialization (see also Oppenheimer 1988, 1997).

From an individual perspective, specialization is problematic because the mutual dependence is not a marker for equality within the marriage (Goldscheider and Waite 1991). As argued within the social exchange or bargaining literature, dominant power is held by the person who is less dependent on the relationship in terms of having attractive alternatives (Blau 1960; Emerson 1962; Thibaut and Kelley 1959), with economic resources a primary source of power (Blood and Wolfe 1960; Weber 1958). Economic resources are more transferable than an investment in a particular relationship and children, so a woman’s specialization in the domestic sphere reduces her outside alternatives to a given marriage (England and Farkas 1986). In addition, having children by a prior relationship is not advantageous to women seeking a new partner, especially if she requires that the new partner contribute his own resources to support these children.

Consequently, the gendered division of labor *ex ante* favors husbands by giving them direct access to economic resources and superior alternatives to the marriage (England 1993). This enables them to negotiate solutions more favorable to themselves in terms of leisure time and their assistance with the amount or type of domestic tasks (Blau, Ferber, and Winkler 2002). There is also evidence that husbands expropriate more of the family economic resources for their own behalf (Blau et al. 2002), even those transfers specifically intended for other family members (Lundberg, Pollak, and Wales 1997). Further, a wife’s economic dependency leaves her vulnerable to a husband’s exploitation or abuse and, in the case of his death or desertion, poverty.

It is not surprising, therefore, that as female wage rates rose after World War II, women joined the labor force in increasing numbers. About two-thirds of women ages 15 to 64 across industrialized countries are in the labor force, although this rate varies from a low of less than 50% in southern European countries to a high of over 75% in Scandinavian countries (OECD 2000), with married women’s participation rates even

more varied (Jaumotte 2003). Under social exchange and bargaining models, the rising female employment was expected to lead to a revolution in the gendered division of domestic labor. In the late 1980s, however, Hochschild (1989) deemed the revolution “stalled.” Controlling for employment or earnings, time in domestic tasks changes as women and men move into and out of different familial states, with women increasing their housework hours when in unions while men decrease theirs (Gupta 1999a; South and Spitze 1994).

To explain the anomaly, Fenstermaker Berk (1985) argues that the home is a “gender factory,” producing and reproducing intimate identities of masculinity and femininity. “Simultaneously, members ‘do’ gender, as they ‘do’ housework and child care, and what [has] been called the division of labor . . . is the mechanism by which both the material and symbolic products of the household are realized” (Fenstermaker Berk 1985, p. 201). The home is just one arena in which we do gender, but it is the primary site of our intimate identities and therefore an important one.

The concept of “doing” gender reflects that we are not simply born into a sex or gender identity or merely functioning in a gender role, but that gender is a “routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment” (West and Zimmerman 1987, p. 126). Social interactions provide the context for reinforcing the proscribed essentialness of gender. These interactions do not express natural differences between women and men, but produce the differences (Goffman 1977). By doing gender, we reflect the social structure as well as derive relative power consequences of gender category membership (West and Zimmerman 1987). In this way, as individual members of society, we actively replicate gender hierarchies in social interactions.

Historically, the division of labor within industrialized societies produces and reproduces gender hierarchies (Ferree 1990; Hartmann 1981). Early in industrialization, policies supporting family wages for men and marriage bars for women, along with protective legislation limiting women’s work activities, locations, and hours, all further reinforced men’s dominance in paid labor (Goldin 1990; Lewis 1992). Despite the elimination of such explicitly gendered labor force policies across many countries, gender differences in employment persist, including both horizontal and vertical segregation and a gender wage gap even after controlling for education and experience (Blau et al. 2002; Harkness and Waldfogel 1999). One argument is that women’s continued responsibility for the domestic sphere inhibits their ability to attain employment equality with men (Ferree 1990; Hartmann 1981; Hobson 1990). So as an interlocking system, the gendered nature of both paid and unpaid work blocks the ability to achieve gender equality in either domain (Ferree 1990, p. 874).

As evidence, contrary to the “logic of the pocketbook” (Hochschild

1989), as women’s earnings exceed those of men, an even more traditional division of domestic tasks emerges (Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994; Fenstermaker Berk 1985; Greenstein 2000; Hochschild 1989). Brines (1994) finds that as U.S. wives’ relative earnings increase, they decrease their hours of domestic tasks in a linear fashion predicted under exchange models, but their husbands decrease their own as well. She interprets this as men’s need for “gender display,” with manhood an achieved status put under threat when wives take on the traditionally male economic role in the household. Greenstein (2000) finds similar results when using absolute hours of housework, but when using proportional measures, finds that both husbands and wives adjust their behavior to more normative divisions. He claims that proportional measures are more appropriate, as they “are more likely to capture the distributive justice or equity aspects of the division of housework” (Greenstein 2000, p. 325).

Bittman et al. (2003) also find that Australian and U.S. couples do gender in terms of compensating behavior in the division of domestic tasks as wives’ earnings exceed their husbands’, but in Australia, it is the women who compensate by increasing their domestic hours. The authors offer the explanation that Australian women’s corrective response is larger than that found for U.S. women because institutional differences make women’s primary breadwinning more anomalous in Australia than in the United States. The “family wage” central to strong male breadwinner nation-states was part of Australian governmental wage setting (O’Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999).

Consequently, while “doing” gender occurs in interactions at the individual level, its patois derives from the institutional setting, with corrective action more pronounced where more traditional gender roles have been reinforced by policy. This proposition that policy alters the ways in which couples negotiate the household division of labor bears elaboration and further testing.

Doing Gender in Its Policy Context

Jane Lewis (1992) suggests classifying countries as ranging from “strong” to “weak” male breadwinner states by the extent to which policy reinforces men’s preferential access to employment and women’s responsibility for the unpaid care work in the private sphere. Germany is the ideal-typical strong male breadwinner state (Lewis 1992). At the end of World War II, West Germany founded a new political system based on “natural law” (*Naturrecht*), stemming from a “pre-political” patriarchal order ordained by God (Moeller 1993). Strengthening the patriarchal family as an institution dominated West German federal policy under Konrad Adenauer during the 1950s and 1960s, with social provisions favoring male bread-

winners with nonworking wives (Gerhard 1992; Ostner 1992; Zimmerman 1993). Income splitting for taxation purposes, particularly beneficial to high-income, single-earner families, was introduced in 1958. In 1961, mothers were deemed the only satisfactory educators of their children, so that schools were subsequently set up to finish after two hours on one day, six the next, and were closed over the lunch hour (Ostner 1993; von Oertzen 1999). A 1966 federal report highlighted gender disparities in educational attainment and concluded that women were failing to exploit fully their right of education—to the detriment of the education of the next generation (von Oertzen 1999). Until 1977, domestic responsibilities continued to be recognized as West German women's legal duty (Hantrais 1994).

West German women's educational attainment and employment lagged during this time. Fewer West German women than men graduated from the highest secondary school tracks and went on to university, and there are clear gender differences in the type of occupational training selected (Geschka 1990). At the time of economic unification with East Germany in 1990, only 44% of West German married women were employed, and only half of this percentage were employed full-time (Ostner 1993).

In contrast, U.S. policy since World War II has primarily reflected the liberal tradition and addressed women's ability to compete in the labor market.² Employment, training, and education discrimination on the basis of gender became illegal under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. During the 1970s, laws expanded enforcement of this legislation, promoting equal educational opportunities and job training. U.S. women's secondary completion rates have historically been higher than those of their male counterparts. Since 1982, more bachelor's degrees have been conferred on U.S. women than men, women earn more associate and master's degrees than men, and they are coming close to parity in first-professional and doctoral degrees (U.S. Department of Education 2000). These policies also encourage U.S. women's labor force participation, with two-thirds of U.S. married women with children ages 6 to 17 employed, as are almost 60% of married women with children under the age of 6 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2004). Unlike West German policy, U.S. policy remains silent regarding who is responsible for the private sphere (Leibfried and Ostner 1991). This is not to say that gender equality is a given with liberal market economies (see Hartmann 1981), just that a gendered division of domestic labor is not specifically reinforced by U.S. policy.

² Feminist or reformer concerns for women as mothers also play a key role in U.S. policy, particularly at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Orloff (1996) provides a review of the scholarship documenting this era.

From these divergent policy paths, the institutional framework defining where gender should be “done” vis-à-vis the division of labor varies across the countries. Not surprisingly, on attitudinal surveys West Germans express greater support for the traditional gendered division of labor than do U.S. persons (Breen and Cooke 2005). Analyzed here is the extent to which these more traditional attitudes translate into more traditional household divisions of labor within West German as compared with U.S. couples, and whether different divisions of labor alter the risk of divorce for couples in either country.

THE DIVISION OF LABOR AND MARITAL STABILITY

The specialization and trading model relates women’s rising employment to rising risk of divorce but has not explicitly predicted effects of husbands’ greater domestic contribution. If specialization creates an essential mutual dependence, it can be deduced within this framework that men’s increasing domestic contribution undermines specialization and so would also be predicted to increase the risk of divorce.

In contrast, social exchange (Blau 1960), contract (England and Farkas 1986), and game theoretic bargaining models (Manser and Brown 1980; McElroy and Horney 1981) view the observed household division of labor as the result of couple negotiations that reflect each person’s relative power and resources. Divorce is not the given outcome but forms the lower bound of an acceptable outcome, a person’s *threat point*, or BATNA (best alternative to a negotiated agreement). If women find themselves unable to negotiate a favorable division of domestic tasks, economically independent women are able to then leave the marriage. As more women gain economic independence, more are able to threaten divorce (Breen and Cooke 2005).

This suggests that the higher divorce rates since World War II are not reflecting just effects of women’s rising employment; they reflect men’s resistance to changing their domestic behavior in response to women’s rising employment. Lennon and Rosenfeld (1994) find that women with more alternatives to the marriage perceive unequal divisions of domestic tasks as unfair, whereas women with fewer alternatives report greater acceptance of the situation. Schoen et al. (2002) find that U.S. women’s employment only increases the risk of divorce when the marriage is an unhappy one. More than two decades ago, Huber and Spitze (1980) found that while wives’ thoughts of divorce increase with their own employment, they decrease with husbands’ increasing housework contribution. To date, however, analyses of the effect of wives’ employment on divorce have not controlled for possible countervailing effects of husbands’ domestic contribution. If the social exchange and bargaining predictions are correct,

husbands' greater share of domestic tasks should decrease the risk of divorce.

It should be noted that Lundberg and Pollak (1993, 1994) question whether divorce is the true threat point in family bargaining. They argue that even if couples cannot reach agreement, there are still benefits such as shared living economies and enjoyment of the children that make divorce a less desirable alternative. They suggest that failing agreement, couples first revert to a noncooperative strategy reflecting the traditional roles under the gendered division of labor. The absence of cooperation in marriage, however, results in either a poorly maintained home or fewer children, since a woman will only produce what she can manage on her own (Lundberg and Pollak 1993). There is evidence of these dynamics across countries. Couples in which the husband contributes less to housework or childcare have a lower risk of second children in Germany (Cooke 2004), Hungary, Sweden (Oláh 2003), and, depending on wives' employment status, the United States (Torr and Short 2004). Consequently, only the effects of the division of housework on likelihood of divorce shall be analyzed here.

Neither the specialization and trading nor social exchange and bargaining models offer predictions for the effects of compensating behavior on the risk of divorce. For this we link the hypothesized reasons for doing gender in the household division of labor to possible family effects. Bittman et al. (2003) and Greenstein (2000) argue that the compensating behavior in the form of a woman's greater domestic share when she is also the primary breadwinner neutralizes gender deviance in a marriage. If minimizing this deviance is essential not only to intimate identities but to relationship stability, doing gender in this way should decrease the risk of divorce. If, instead, the rules of exchange and distributive justice dominate in successful couples, female breadwinners compensating by taking on a greater share of domestic tasks might be performing a stop-gap measure within an inherently unfair situation. If so, the risk of divorce should be higher in couples exhibiting the compensating division of domestic tasks than in couples where there is gender equity. By gender *equity* we refer to when wives' relative contribution to earnings is the same as husbands' relative contribution to housework, ranging from zero, where wives contribute nothing to earnings and husbands contribute nothing to housework, to 100, indicating women are the breadwinners while husbands assume all domestic tasks.

The effects of the household divisions of paid and unpaid labor on couples' risk of divorce are compared in the United States and the former West Germany to see whether they vary as policy support for the male breadwinner model has varied. For this to be a meaningful comparison, the propensity to divorce in each country must be similar, so we observe

differences in effects, not differences in overall likelihood of divorce. During the 1980s, the divorce rate in West Germany was just 30% as compared with the U.S. rate at nearly 50%, but the West German rate has been rising. More recent statistics suggest that the current incidence of divorce is quite similar in the two countries, at 49.1 divorces per 100 marriages in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2000) as compared with 46.0 divorces per 100 marriages in unified Germany (EUROSTAT 2000).³

As illustrated in figure 1, attitudes toward marriage and divorce are also highly similar in the two countries. The figure displays the mean reports by country for three questions from the 1994 International Social Survey Program that assess attitudes about marriage and divorce: (1) married people are generally happier than single people, (2) a bad marriage is better than being single, and (3) divorce is the best solution to a bad marriage. In both countries, the samples tend not to agree that married people are happier, strongly disagree that a bad marriage is preferable to being single, and moderately agree that divorce is the best solution to a bad marriage, with West Germans slightly more likely to agree than U.S. respondents.

DATA

Wives' relative earnings, work hours, husbands' share of domestic tasks, number of children, and the risk of divorce vary across the marital life course. The most suitable way to assess these dynamic relationships is with event-history analysis (Allison 1984; Yamaguchi 1991), which requires longitudinal data. The German SocioEconomic Panel (GSOEP) and the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) are selected for the analyses.

The GSOEP is a longitudinal study of private German households where all household members over the age of 16 are interviewed annually for data on the preceding year. The first wave occurred in 1984 with a representative sample of 12,290 people in 5,921 households in the former West Germany. In June 1990, sampling extended into the former East Germany, but East Germans shall not be included in this analysis as the male breadwinner model was not institutionally reinforced in that region.

³ Part of the current divorce rate in unified Germany might be attributable to the higher historical rate in the former East Germany. Yet following the economic uncertainty of unification, East Germans were less likely for a time either to marry or divorce than were West Germans (Münz and Ulrich 1995). The most recent statistics available suggest that the number of divorces as compared with number of marriages is now higher in the former West *Länder* than in the former East (http://www.statistik-portal.de/Statistik-Portal/en/en_jb01_jahrtab3.asp).

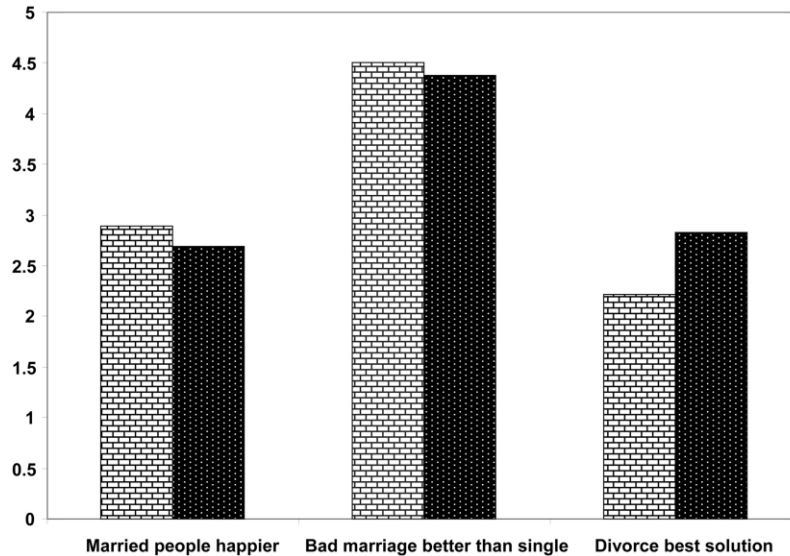


FIG. 1.—West German (left column) and U.S. (right column) attitudes toward divorce. Based on 1994 International Social Survey Program data, reflecting mean country scores on the questions ranging from 1, strongly agree, to 5, strongly disagree.

The constitution adopted by East Germany in 1949 enforced women's right and obligation to work, supported by extensive policy provisions enabling women to combine work and having children (Moeller 1993; Ostner 1993; Zimmerman 1993). After unification, economic constraints dramatically increased unemployment in East Germany and made East Germans less likely to make any family transition—into or out of marriage (Münz and Ulrich 1995; Witte and Wagner 1995). Too few East German couples in the sample married (69) and divorced (21) during the observation window to conduct separate East German analyses.

The PSID is a longitudinal study of U.S. individuals and the family units in which they reside, beginning in 1968 with a representative sample of 4,800 families in which the head only is normally interviewed. Although two thousand Latino households were added to the panel in 1990, they were subsequently dropped in 1995 and a new, much smaller immigrant sample added. Consequently, the only ethnic differentiation possible in the analysis here is when respondents are black. Historically, the rate of marital dissolution has been greater for black couples (Hoffman and Duncan 1995; Ruggles 1997).

From each data set, we select couples marrying for the first time between 1985 and 1995 for which there is at least one year of data following the marriage. These couples are followed through 1997 in the United

States and 2000 in Germany.⁴ The year 1985 is selected for the beginning of the observation window, as it is the second year of GSOEP data collection. The same year is selected for the PSID data in order to follow couples in both countries during the same historical time period. Couples already married as of 1985 are excluded from analysis, since their inclusion biases results with marriages of longer duration and would not provide an accurate portrayal of family dynamics affecting the risk of divorce for all couples from the beginning of their marriage. For example, in Greenstein’s (2000, p. 327) sample drawn from the National Survey of Families and Households, the average marriage duration was 17 years, whereas in 1990, the median U.S. first-marriage duration was approximately eight years (National Center for Health Statistics 1995).

In both panels, new members marrying into the sample can be assigned a weight of zero if they are not within the original sampling frame. For this reason, unweighted data are used for the analysis, although a comparison of weighted and unweighted sample descriptive statistics indicates that the two are highly similar. As a result, the analytical samples appear representative of German and U.S. couples marrying during the time period.

The West German sample includes 559 couples, yielding an analytic sample of 4,483 couple-years, reduced to 3,524 due to listwise deletion of missing data primarily because information on a couple was not available in all years. Subsequent analysis using indicator variables for when data are missing indicates robustness of key effects. While 1,122 Caucasian and 368 black U.S. persons in the panel married during the observation window, many did not continue reporting in subsequent years, so the analytical sample is composed of 506 couples (388 Caucasian and 118 black), or 4,204 couple-years. When indicator variables are included for the missing data, key U.S. effects remain robust, although the significance levels of some control variables change. Further, Lillard and Panis (1994) report that biases from sample attrition in the PSID when analyzing marital dissolution are generally mild. Also, demographics and the division of labor derived from the PSID sample used here have been compared with cross sections of other more recently fielded surveys (National Survey of Families and Households and the International Social Survey Program) and appear similarly representative.

In the data set, each year of a couple’s marriage is a distinct observation, beginning with the first year of marriage and concluding with either divorce or separation (which are not distinguished in this analysis given

⁴ The PSID changed in 1997 to be conducted biannually, and the core sample was reduced by almost 30%. This created substantial missing data in the 1999 and in-between waves, so I decided to end the U.S. observation window in 1997.

the variation in required waiting periods between separation and divorce), or the final observation year in the panel. Constructing couple-years in this way automatically incorporates the time-varying aspects of the independent variables, but also violates the assumption that error terms not be correlated. Consequently, robust standard errors clustering on a unique couple identification number are used.

Variables

Table 1 contains the descriptive statistics for the variables used in the analyses. These statistics are based on the couple-year files constructed for the event-history analyses, so the values of the time-varying variables represent averages over the observed years of marriage, not a snapshot of couples in any given year of marriage.

Dependent variable.—The dependent variable is a binary variable indicating whether a couple reports a divorce or separation in a given year. Once a divorce occurs, the couple is removed from analysis as they are no longer at risk of divorce. During the time period, 201 West German couples reported divorcing, and 223 U.S. couples (153 white and 90 black) reported divorcing. These aggregate figures suggest the divorce rate in Germany is higher than in the United States, when as noted earlier it is roughly similar in the two countries. The U.S. couples, however, are being followed for three years less than their German counterparts. As the event-history models control for the effect of time on the risk of divorce, it will be possible to see whether the shorter U.S. observation window is the reason the observed U.S. sample divorce rates appear lower.

Independent variables: Women's employment.—In both panels, participants are interviewed in a given year to ascertain information about their lives over the past 12 months. To ensure that causes of divorce are differentiated from effects, values of the time-varying independent variables are lagged by one year. For example, if a woman is in the process of establishing her own household, her share of household earnings would rise, leading to the erroneous conclusion that her greater earnings caused the transition rather than resulted from it. Similarly, total household income would decrease as dual-earner couples become single heads of household. In a troubled marriage, both partners may also reduce their time spent in household tasks as commitment to the marital home declines.⁵

⁵ Comparing models using lagged versus unlagged independent variables, these sorts of differences are borne out (results available from the author). The substantive effect of U.S. wives' relative earnings is larger when using unlagged variables, the effect of U.S. husbands' share of housework is smaller and becomes statistically insignificant, and the prophylactic effect of total household income is much larger in both countries.

TABLE 1
 MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR WEST GERMAN AND U.S. COUPLE
 INDEPENDENT AND CONTROL VARIABLES USED IN EVENT-HISTORY MODELS OF
 DIVORCE

	West Germany	United States
Wife's share of labor earnings (0–100)	18.24 (25.71)	32.18 (24.12)
Husband's share of housework (0–100)	28.47 (18.82)	33.05 (24.58)
Husband's share of housework, squared	1,165 (1,340)	1,697 (2,349)
Wife's weekly work hours	13.63 (18.15)	28.15 (15.74)
Wife's weekly hours of housework	28.80 (15.05)	17.40 (14.78)
Total household income (000)	74.96 (40.66)	48.85 (44.84)
Length of marriage	5.39 (3.43)	4.57 (2.91)
Husband's weekly work hours	39.74 (14.47)	41.59 (13.35)
Wife's age	30.25 (5.13)	30.23 (5.98)
Number of children	1.65 (.94)	1.00 (1.01)
Wife out of labor force (1 = yes) .....	.58	.09
Wife with university (1 = yes) .....	.10	.25
Husband with university (1 = yes) .....	.19	.27
Own home (1 = yes) .....	.35	.53
Wife earns > 50% × husband does ≤ 50% housework (1 = yes) .....	.07	.08
Equitable division (1 = yes) .....	.04	.14
Husband black (1 = yes)	NA	.24
<i>N</i> couples	522	1,490
<i>N</i> couple-years	4,483	9,633

NOTE.—These statistics are based on the event-history file for risk of divorce from year of marriage, representing valid couple-years in the observation window. Total household income is in the local currency.

Most analyses of women's employment on the likelihood of divorce assume that effects are linear by using a single continuous measure of women's hours of employment or wages. It is possible, however, that being a housewife is a fundamentally different state than being a part- or full-time working wife, particularly when comparing two countries with varying support for the traditional division of paid labor. The traditional family might also, in turn, carry different risks of divorce. To assess these effects, a binary variable is included for when the wife is out

of the labor force, against a referent of wives who are employed.⁶ If specialization is optimal for marital stability, these traditional couples should have a lower risk of divorce than dual-earner couples. Further, as the male breadwinner model has been reinforced more in Germany than in the United States, there should be more of these couples in Germany. As displayed in table 1, over half of West German wives are out of the labor force at some time during the observed years of marriage, as compared with less than 10% of U.S. wives.

To keep the metrics for the division of paid and unpaid labor commensurate, a wife's contribution to the family labor earnings is measured as a percentage (0–100) of the combined labor earnings of the wife and husband. This measure is perfectly correlated with the relative dependency measure developed by Sorensen and McLanahan (1987) used in other analyses predicting the division of housework (Brines 1994; Greenstein 2000). As shown in table 1, across all couples, the average household earnings contribution of U.S. wives is almost twice that of West German wives: 32% versus 18%, respectively.

Wives' hours of paid work are included to control for the time demands employment places on them that are theorized to alter the division of housework separately from the effects of their relative earnings (Blood and Wolfe 1960; South and Spitze 1994). Other things being equal, the more hours worked in the market, the fewer available for housework. Time constraints have proven important in predicting second births among German couples, an effect in addition to women's earnings' effects (Cooke 2004).⁷

Division of housework.—The German data have variables for each partner's reported weekly domestic hours, including housework, running errands, yard work and repairs, and child care, both during the week and the average hours on Saturday and on Sunday. The measure of housework used here is calculated as the time spent in all tasks with the exception of child care throughout the week. Child care is excluded as there is no similar measure within the PSID, but Cooke (2004) finds that German fathers' relative contribution to child care proves insignificant in altering the risk of divorce.

The PSID measure of housework is more limited in two ways. First, in contrast to the GSOEP, the PSID normally relies on a single primary

⁶ Doing so proves important to ascertaining true effects, for when not differentiating for when women are out of the labor force, the effect of women's relative earnings appears much smaller because it is camouflaging the higher risk of divorce among U.S. couples where the wife is out of the labor force.

⁷ The models were run with and without women's work hours with no substantive or significant changes in other effects or the fit of the model, but were left in for the theoretical reasons stated above.

adult—usually the male adult head if there is one—to provide information for all family members. Most evidence indicates that respondents overestimate their own housework time and underestimate the time contribution of others (Shelton and John 1996), with Press and Townsley (1998) finding that husbands’ reports are less accurate than wives’. The extent of the possible U.S. husband-only reporting bias was analyzed by comparing a cross section of the longitudinal sample with a sample from one of the few PSID dual-respondent surveys (1985; results available from the author). That analysis indicates that while U.S. husbands do tend to underestimate their wives’ housework hours, the relative division of housework is fairly represented in the data once controlling for husbands’ reports of wives’ estimated weekly housework hours, so there are no significant biases introduced in the model used here.

The second limitation of the PSID is that it contains a single question asking the respondent to estimate how many hours are spent in “housework, excluding child care” each week. These data were used in the analyses by both Brines (1994) and Gupta (1999*b*) to reveal that at the extreme of a husband’s dependence on his wife, there is evidence of gender display. A single measure does not provide the detail of the German data, nor is it as rich as the series of questions asked of U.S. respondents on the National Survey of Families and Households and analyzed by Greenstein (2000).⁸ None of these are as precise as the time diary data used by Bittman et al. (2003) in their analysis of Australian couples. But despite the wide range in the crudeness of the housework measure, results are remarkably consistent in terms of the extent of equity or compensatory behavior made evident with them. Consequently, concern for the quality of the housework measure appears more philosophical than applicable to the analysis.

Husbands’ relative domestic participation is measured by dividing their weekly hours in housework by the combined household hours of the wife and husband, yielding their percentage share of domestic tasks ranging from 0 to 100. Also included is the square of this term to test for nonlinearity. If the squared term is positive and significant, this indicates that husbands’ greater relative housework contribution at some point begins to increase the risk of divorce. A relative rather than absolute housework measure is used because of Greenstein’s (2000) evidence that compensating behavior is more evident when controlling for the relative rather than the absolute housework contribution of each. As also noted by Greenstein

⁸ Although the National Survey of Families and Households collects more detailed information on household tasks for each family member, it has only conducted three waves several years apart (1987–88, 1992–94, and 2001–2002), which makes it less suitable than the PSID for conducting event-history analyses of divorce.

(2000), perceptions of fairness and distributive justice are related to the relative, not total amount.

Women's reported housework hours are included to control for the husband-only reporting bias in the PSID, as well as to control for when men's share of housework is greater because women's own housework hours decline when they are employed (Bianchi et al. 2000; Goldscheider and Waite 1991; Shelton and John 1996). Including this measure does not create a problem of multicollinearity with women's hours of employment, however, because while employed women's housework hours adjust to reflect competing time demands, the sharpest drop in housework hours since the 1960s has been among women who are out of the labor force (Gershuny 2000).⁹

As evident in table 1, German wives spend more hours in housework on average than their U.S. counterparts (29 and 17 hours, respectively), although this could be due to the higher proportion of housewives in the German sample. Overall, the gendered division of housework appears roughly similar in the two countries, with husbands in each country performing about one-third of the housework as has been found in other cross-national studies (Gershuny 2000). Husbands' share of housework when wives are employed is less similar in the two countries, with U.S. husbands claiming to perform 44% as compared with German husbands performing 38%.¹⁰

The above measures enable us to assess the economic exchange relationship between the household division of labor and risk of divorce predicted by bargaining models, but not whether compensatory behavior in the division of domestic tasks reduces the risk of divorce when the wife's earnings exceed her husband's. To assess this, an interaction indicator variable is created for when wives' relative earnings exceed 50% and husbands' share of housework does not exceed 50%. In Germany, only 13% of wives earn more than their husbands, compared with 24% of U.S. wives. As can be seen in table 1, roughly half of these German female-breadwinning couples but just one-third of U.S. female-breadwinning couples compensate for wives' higher earnings by doing gender in this way (7% of the German and 8% of the U.S. samples). This is consistent with Bittman et al.'s (2003) Australian evidence that compensating behavior in the domestic sphere is more common in strong male breadwinner states.

⁹ Including women's housework hours significantly improves the fit of the model, but does not substantively or significantly alter effects of other variables.

¹⁰ Disability or poor health can also alter the household division of labor, but only one or two of these younger first-married couples report that one of the partners is in ill health or is disabled in any given year.

Control variables.—Controls for a wife’s age, number of children, total family income, home ownership, and college or university attainment are included in the models. According to models of assortative mating, people who are older at marriage are less likely to divorce because of a decrease in possible future marital partners (Becker et al. 1977). But culturally defined bargaining disadvantages specific to women at older ages also exist. In many industrialized societies, youth and beauty prove valued characteristics of women and less important for the marriage prospects of men (England and Farkas 1986; Parsons 1942). Youth by definition disappears with age, so women lose their bargaining advantage over time regardless of any other factors. A variable is included here to control for women’s age. In both country samples, wives are, on average, 30 years old.

Persons with higher-valued characteristics such as university education or wealth gain more from marriage and are therefore less likely to divorce net of other factors (Becker et al. 1977). The log of total household income is included to control for wealth of the family. Men’s education level is positively associated with their domestic participation (South and Spitze 1994), whereas other studies find no association (Kamo 1991; McAllister 1990), or that the effect disappears once gender ideology is included (Kamo 1994). Women’s greater educational attainment is associated with less time in domestic tasks (Blair and Lichter 1991; South and Spitze 1994), and is normally interpreted as an education effect on ideology. There is some U.S. evidence that the historical effect of wife’s greater educational attainment lowering the risk of divorce is attenuating in younger cohorts (South 2001). A binary variable is created for women or men with college or university education, against a referent of less than college.

In neoclassical economic models of marriage, children and home ownership represent accrued “marital goods,” so they predict a lower risk of divorce (Becker 1981). One might also argue that more stable couples are more willing to purchase a home together or have additional children, suggesting these might reflect a selection bias. Number of children in the family in a given year is entered into the models as a continuous variable. Home ownership is measured with a binary variable indicating when a couple owns their home, against a referent of renting.

The risk of divorce can change as a function of time, irrespective of the independent variables, so a variable is included for years since marriage. This also enables assessment of whether the observed country differences in the incidence of divorce relative to sample size reported earlier are a function of time. A piecewise constant model including a series of year binary variables representing two to three, three to four, four to five, and five or more years from year of marriage was also tried, but any

significant time effects in the respective countries proved to be essentially linear during the observed years of marriage.

In the U.S. model, a binary variable is also included indicating when the husband is black, against a referent of when the husband is Caucasian. Racial marital homogamy is high: 95% of black women are married to black men and 99% of Caucasian women are married to Caucasian men.

FINDINGS: THE DIVISION OF LABOR AND RISK OF DIVORCE

The changes in the log odds that a West German or U.S. couple will divorce are presented in table 2. Discussion focuses on effects of the variables measuring the household division of labor. Two models are presented: one modeling the effects of the household division of labor using continuous measures, and the second adding the indicator term for when husbands perform half or less of domestic tasks when wives earn more than half of the couple's labor income.

Effects of the Household Division of Labor

Results for model 1 indicate specialization is optimal for marital stability in West Germany, but not in the United States. While male breadwinner couples in both countries are more likely to divorce, the effect only reaches statistical significance in the United States. Women's rising relative earnings also predict a rising risk of divorce, with the effect twice the magnitude in the United States as in Germany. Each percentage point increase in a wife's earnings as a percentage of her and her husband's total labor earnings increases the log odds of divorce by 1% in West Germany and 2% in the United States. Together these results suggest that the male breadwinner couples reinforced by policy are the most stable in West Germany, whereas dual-earner couples are the most stable in the United States provided a woman's earnings do not exceed her husband's. In the United States, being a male breadwinner couple increases the log odds of divorce by 0.83, comparable to the increase in risk when a wife is earning more than 41% of the family's labor income (41×0.02 wife's earnings effect). So reliance on a primary breadwinner of *either* gender among U.S. couples proves more precarious than when there are two more equal earners in the family.

These relative employment effects, however, do not take into account possible countervailing effects of the division of housework, for which there are also marked country differences. German husbands' increasing share of housework linearly increases the risk of divorce across the entire range (i.e., the quadratic term is insignificant). In contrast, U.S. husbands'

TABLE 2
COEFFICIENTS FROM DISCRETE-TIME LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF MARITAL DISSOLUTION FROM YEAR OF MARRIAGE

	WEST GERMANY				UNITED STATES			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	Log Odds	Robust SE	Log Odds	Robust SE	Log Odds	Robust SE	Log Odds	Robust SE
Wife's proportional earnings (0–100) .....	.01*	.00	.01*	.01	.02**	.01	.02***	.01
Wife out of labor force (0 = employed) ...	.62	.48	.60	.47	.83*	.39	.99*	.41
Wife's weekly work hours	-.00	.01	-.00	.01	-.01	.01	-.00	.01
Husband's % housework (0–100) .....	.01*	.00	.01*	.01	-.04***	.01	-.04***	.01
Husband's % housework, squared .....					.0003*	.00	.0002	.00
Wife's weekly hours housework .....	.01	.01	.01	.01	-.03*	.01	-.03*	.01
Number of children	-.57***	.12	-.57***	.12	.11	.13	.09	.13
Log of total household income	-.12	.09	-.12	.09	-.06	.11	-.05	.12
Wife with college or university	-.74 [†]	.43	-.70	.45	.13	.38	.20	.39
Husband with college or university (0 = less than college or university)	-.04	.30	-.00	.30	-1.38**	.51	-1.38**	.53
Home ownership (0 = rent)	-.25	.22	-.23	.23	-1.23***	.31	-1.23***	.31
Wife's age	-.01	.03	-.01	.03	-.03	.03	-.03	.03
Years since marriage .....	.03	.04	.03	.04	.16**	.05	.16**	.05
Black (U.S.) couple (0 = white) .....					.30	.24	.31	.24
Husband does < 50% housework × wife earns > 50%			-.01	.37			-2.25**	.75
Constant	-2.10	1.42	-2.10	1.42	-1.92	1.28	-2.20	1.40
Log likelihood	-499		-499		-378		-369	
Wald χ^2	44.44**		44.48***		107.00***		114.25***	
<i>N</i> couple-years	3,524		3,524		4,204		4,204	
<i>N</i> couples	559		559		506		506	

* $P < .05$, two-tailed tests.

** $P < .01$.

*** $P < .001$.

[†] $P < .10$.

increasing housework contribution significantly decreases the risk of divorce to more than offset the effect of wives' earnings. But the U.S. quadratic term is also significant, so once U.S. husbands' housework and wives' earnings contributions exceed about 30%, the risk of divorce again begins to increase. Yet the net effect of husbands' housework contributions equaling wives' relative earnings still predicts lower log odds of divorce until both exceed 83%, which is an extremely nontraditional division of paid and unpaid labor.

These effects are depicted in figure 2, which plots changes in the log odds of divorce for percentage point changes in wives' relative earnings matched by identical changes in husbands' share of housework (i.e., when wives contribute 10% of earnings, husbands' share of housework is also 10%; when wives contribute half to earnings, husbands are doing 50% of the housework, etc.), controlling for other significant effects related to the division of labor. In other words, it plots changes in the predicted risk of divorce when couples negotiate a division of paid and unpaid labor reflecting distributive justice. At the origin, indicating male breadwinner couples, the single black diamond is the U.S. coefficient, which is slightly above the gray circle indicating the German coefficient for risk of divorce. Only here, comparing male breadwinner couples, is the relative risk of divorce lower in West Germany than in the United States. All other more egalitarian divisions of paid and unpaid labor increase the risk of divorce in West Germany whereas they reduce the risk of divorce in the United States.

The second model in table 2 displays effects of compensatory domestic behavior attributed to couples doing gender to neutralize gender deviance when wives become the primary breadwinner (Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994). For the German couples, when wives perform a greater share of housework as their relative earnings exceed 50%, the negative effects associated with her greater relative earnings remain unaltered. For U.S. couples, this compensatory behavior at the extreme nontraditional division of paid labor predicts a much lower risk of divorce. This suggests that there are positive effects for gender equity in the U.S. household division of labor until parity is reached, but neutralizing gender deviance has a prophylactic effect among those few women who are primary breadwinners. Yet even under this compensating scenario, the remaining significance of the effect for husbands' housework share indicates that these nontraditional couples are most stable when husbands perform some share of the housework.¹¹

¹¹ From coefficients in table 2, model 2: U.S. female breadwinner, husband contributes half to domestic tasks = $[(100 \times 0.02 \text{ wife's earnings}) + (-0.04 \times 50 \text{ husband's share of domestic}) + (-0.03 \times 13.50 \text{ employed wife's mean housework hours}) + -2.25 \text{ wives'}$

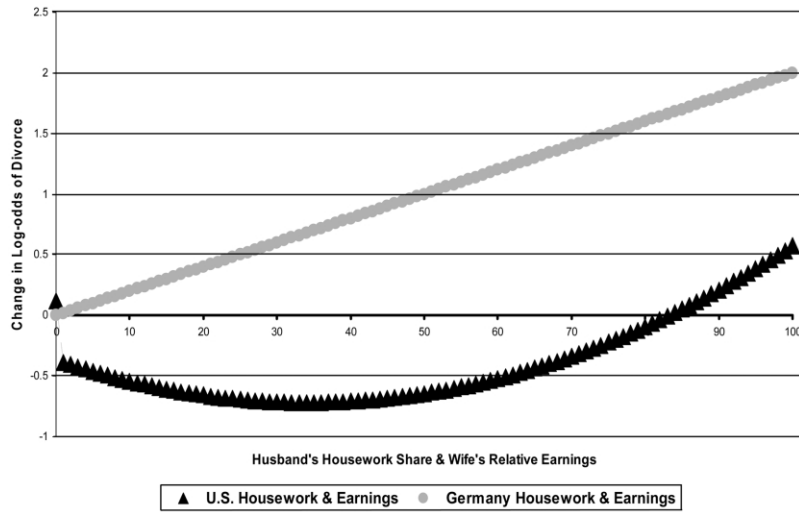


FIG. 2.—Effect of earnings and housework exchange on U.S. and West German couples’ log odds of divorce. Calculated from coefficients in table 2. The plots reflect the change in the log odds of divorce for percentage point changes in U.S. and German husbands’ share of housework matching wives’ relative earnings, controlling for significant effects of husbands’ housework share squared, male breadwinner couples, and wives’ mean hours of housework when employed or out of the labor force.

In summary, German traditional male breadwinner families are predicted to be the most stable in that country. Any other divisions of paid and unpaid labor, even compensatory ones wherein a female breadwinner would retain responsibility for domestic tasks, increases the risk of divorce. In contrast, the rules of distributive justice appear to dominate among these first-married U.S. couples until relative earnings approach a non-traditional extreme. When wives’ relative earnings exceed their husbands’, couples can reduce the risk of divorce if wives continue to perform a share of the housework. Further, when controlling for other significant effects related to the division of labor, U.S. female breadwinner families where the woman does half the housework have a lower risk of divorce than German male breadwinner couples.¹²

compensatory domestic share effect in that the husband does no more than half] = -2.66. Female breadwinner husband does nothing = [(100 × 0.02 wife’s earnings) + (-0.03 × 13.50 employed wife’s mean housework hours) + -2.25 interaction effect that the husband does no more than half of domestic tasks] = -0.66.

¹² From coefficients in table 2, model 2: being a German male breadwinner couple predicts no net change in the risk of divorce. Computing for being a U.S. female breadwinner couple where the husband contributes half to domestic tasks yields a substantial decrease in the log odds of divorce [(100 × 0.02 wife’s earnings) + (-0.04 × 50 husband’s share of domestic) + (-0.03 × 13.50 employed wife’s mean

Other Household Bargaining Effects

The primary interest here is to compare effects of divisions of paid and unpaid labor on the risk of divorce in two countries with varying levels of institutional support for a male breadwinner model. These institutional differences, however, can manifest indirectly as well, reflecting other gender differences in relative bargaining power. As noted earlier, if wives have not accrued work experience because they have been reliant on a male breadwinner, having children increases their dependence and inability to leave the marriage. In West Germany, where the majority of households are male breadwinner households, the presence of children significantly reduces the risk of divorce. The effect is linear, so each additional German child further reduces the risk of divorce. In contrast, in the United States, where the vast majority of couples have two earners so that the vast majority of wives have some accrued work experience, the number of children does not alter the risk of divorce, a result also found by others (South 2001; Waite and Lillard 1991).

Another difference in effects that might stem from the difference in the degree to which policy encourages couples' economic interdependence versus wives' dependence is that of home ownership. In the United States, the interest paid on home mortgages or loans secured with one's home is tax deductible. This provides U.S. married women with an incentive to join the labor force, enabling the family to afford a larger home in a better neighborhood, which enhances a husband's status as well. There are some deductions related to home ownership in Germany, but they are capped to a very modest level. As evident in table 2, home ownership reduces the log odds of divorce in both countries. The effect, however, is more than five times as great in the United States as in Germany (-1.23 vs. -0.23 , respectively) and is only statistically significant in the United States for these young couples. While other differences, such as the desirability of the rental sectors in the two countries, might account for part of this difference, it is also possible that the economic interdependence within couples created by the U.S. home mortgage tax provisions is a significant factor. Future research might explore the effect of policies promoting greater couple economic interdependence, as an antidote to the negative effects found here of policy reinforcement of the traditional male breadwinner model and women's economic dependence.

housework hours) + -2.25 interaction effect that the husband does no more than half of domestic tasks] = -2.66). In female breadwinner couples where the husband does no domestic tasks, the predicted net change in the risk of divorce is still less than zero ($[(100 \times 0.02 \text{ wife's earnings}) + (-0.03 \times 13.50 \text{ employed wife's mean housework hours}) + -2.25 \text{ interaction term}] = -0.66$).

DISCUSSION: DOING GENDER IN CONTEXT AND ITS EFFECTS ON MARITAL STABILITY

Like a Russian doll, how we “do” gender is embedded in its historical sociopolitical context. Consequently, gender relations vary across institutional contexts, with the hierarchy evident in and replicated by the gendered division of labor in society (Hartmann 1981; Lewis 1992). Only recently, however, have policy influences and resultant divisions been compared across societies (Baxter 1997; Bittman et al. 2003; Davis and Greenstein 2004; Fuwa 2004), and none of these analyses compared effects of varying household divisions of paid and unpaid labor on marital stability. The specialization and trading model claims the traditional gendered division of labor reinforced in some sociopolitical contexts is optimal for marital stability. Social exchange and bargaining models contend that women’s rising economic equality with men alters the credibility of threat points such as divorce through which more equitable distributions of household labor can be negotiated. Under these models, equitable divisions of household paid and unpaid labor reflect distributive justice that should enhance marital stability.

Here, the household division of labor and its effects on marital stability of couples first married between 1985 and 1995 are compared in the United States and the former West Germany. U.S. liberal policy encourages female labor force participation while remaining silent on the private sphere, whereas West Germany implemented policies after World War II reinforcing women’s legal responsibility for the home and economic dependence on a male breadwinner. With this historical reinforcement of the gendered division of labor, more West German couples report the wife is out of the labor force as compared with U.S. couples, where dual-earner couples are the norm. When a West German wife is employed, she performs more domestic tasks, displaying more compensating domestic behavior for her nontraditional economic role than do U.S. wives. This is similar to evidence for couples in Australia, another strong male breadwinner country relative to the United States (Bittman et al. 2003), and the variation in individual effects across countries found by Fuwa (2004). Together these findings highlight that it is not sufficient to look at individual resources in making predictions regarding the household division of labor; we must situate effects within the institutional setting, particularly the extent to which policy reinforces the gendered division of labor. This determines the extent to which a gendered division of labor is done within the intimate sphere of the home.

As a counterargument, one might assert that other cultural differences explain both the traditional policies and effects found for West Germany as compared with the United States. Yet the former East Germany shares

a common cultural past with West Germany while the people were socialized for two generations under divergent policies affecting the division of labor. After World War II, East Germany adopted a Stalinist constitution that enforced women's obligation to work (Moeller 1993). To support maternal employment, East Germany passed the 1950 Mother and Child Care and Women's Rights Acts, establishing a network of public child care centers, kindergartens, and facilities for free school meals, and maternity leave and days off to tend sick children (Ostner 1993; Zimmerman 1993). The state also mandated developing women's skill credentials through education and vocational training, and a larger proportion of East German women attended professional colleges and university than in West Germany (Budde 1999). Recent evidence indicates that even after economic reunification, the division of housework is significantly more egalitarian in the former East than in West Germany (Cooke 2004), and is similar to the division reported here for U.S. couples. These differences within Germany suggest it is not just culture reflected in the divergent household divisions of labor in West Germany as compared with the United States, but also state policy.

The institutional context shapes more than the household division of labor; it also varies the effects of different divisions of paid and unpaid labor on marital stability. Gender specialization proves optimal for marital stability in the country with institutional support for this model: West German male breadwinner couples are the most stable in that country, and any movement away from this in terms of wives' relative earnings or husbands' relative housework increases the risk of divorce. In contrast, equitable distributions of the household division of labor predicted under social exchange models appear optimal in the United States where policy remains silent on the private sphere and market effects meander their *laissez-faire* course. At the extremes, however, both U.S. male and female breadwinner couples are at greater risk of divorce. Yet female breadwinner couples neutralizing gender deviance by having wives perform an equal share of domestic tasks are more stable than traditional male breadwinner couples in either country.

These results suggest important extensions of our understanding of gender relations. First, the competing theories of effects of the household division of labor both hold true; *which* holds true depends upon the degree to which theorized dynamics are supported by institutional factors such as policies. This suggests that the slow evolution in the division of domestic tasks observed over the past half century may not result from persistent gender differences, but from continuing institutional reinforcement of the gendered division of labor (see also Breen and Cooke 2005). Change is not *revolutionary* as initially predicted by Hochschild (1989); policies affect the progress of the *evolution* toward greater gender equity.

Second, where the evolution is not thwarted by policies reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies, men’s greater participation in domestic tasks results in more stable marriages regardless of women’s employment. This finding raises questions regarding the wisdom of calls from conservative quarters to reinforce the traditional male breadwinner family to turn the tide of increasing family instability. Further, a gendered division of labor leaves women and their children economically vulnerable under macroeconomic conditions that are more volatile than those of the 1960s. For example, unemployment in West Germany was just 0.5% in 1965, rising during the 1980s and 1990s to 7% or 8% (OECD 1978, 2000). Most vulnerable during periods of high unemployment are persons with low skills and little experience, such as traditional housewives. Single female heads of household are more likely to be poor and reliant on state transfers (Daly and Rake 2003). Consequently, reinforcement of the male breadwinner model appears of little benefit to women, children, or the state.

One might lament that U.S. female breadwinners must carry a one-and-one-half burden of paid and unpaid labor to ensure marital stability. Women employed full-time, however, reduce their domestic hours, so such women’s greater domestic share is based upon fewer total housework hours to be divided between the wife and husband. In addition, we cannot tell with these data the extent to which performing the remaining household tasks represents an expression of love and caring rather than a burden (Ferree 1990). Future research needs to decipher, however, what U.S. husbands that contribute little to either paid or unpaid labor *do* contribute to marriage to make them more successful than traditional ones.

More generally, the results shed no light on the process by which the household division of labor might lead to marital instability. Does the household division of labor alter marital quality, or do different divisions only alter the risk of divorce within unhappy marriages as found by Schoen and his colleagues (2002)? There is also a tacit assumption within both models that women initiate divorce, either because they no longer economically require men (specialization and trading model), or because men fail to take on more equitable divisions of domestic tasks (social exchange model). Given that different household divisions of labor appear optimal in different countries, our understanding of gender relations would deepen with exploration into which partner under what circumstances terminates the relationship under different policy configurations.

We remain somewhat cautious in our conclusions, however, because even among the more recent group of first-married couples analyzed here, female primary breadwinning couples are still outliers. Wives earned more than 75% of the income in only 13% of U.S. and 7% of West German couples in the sample. Still, the results highlight the idea that distributive justice prevails where gender hierarchies are not reinforced. Policy is

instrumental in setting gender hierarchies, with the evidence here indicating that policy encouraging gender equity encourages family economic flexibility and marital stability. In other words, gender equity represents more than a feminist ideal; it proves essential for sustaining healthy post-industrial societies. Neither the United States nor Germany, however, has policy provisions actively supporting maternal employment and encouraging men's participation in the domestic sphere, particularly in child care, such as those found in Scandinavian countries (Gauthier 2005; Gornick and Meyers 2003). Future comparative research needs to look at the household divisions of labor and effects of these on family outcomes across a wider array of state, market, and gender relations.

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