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Stalled for Whom? Change in the Division of Particular Housework Tasks and Their Consequences for Middle- to Low-Income Couples

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Abstract

Whether the gender revolution has transformed couple behavior across all social classes is the subject of ongoing scholarly debate. The authors explore cohort change in the performance of individual routine and nonroutine housework tasks among middle- to low-income couples as well as their association with several aspects of relationship quality. Data are from the second wave (1992–1994) of the National Survey of Families and Households and the 2006 Marital and Relationship Survey. Contrary to arguments of a stalled gender revolution, the authors find that contemporary couples more often share all routine tasks (other than shopping) than couples in the past, with the greatest change in dishwashing and laundry. The equal sharing of housework is more positively related to sexual intimacy and relationship satisfaction among more recent cohorts and more negatively related to marital discord. The division of dishwashing, among all tasks, is most consequential to relationship quality, especially for women.

Keywords

housework, relationship quality, sexual intimacy, division of labor, relationship discord

In recent years there has been a growing debate about the extent of change in men's willingness to participate more equally in family labor, including involvement in domestic labor and childcare (Cherlin 2014; England 2010; Gerson 2010). For example, Goldscheider, Bernhardt, and Lappegård (2015) argued that the gender revolution, particularly men's greater involvement in the home, is strengthening families. They pointed to numerous facets of what they termed "the second half of the gender revolution," such as the growing egalitarianism in the attitudes of younger men and their greater involvement in childcare (Gerson 2010; Hofferth et al. 2012). Furthermore, women's involvement in the paid labor force has become increasingly central to the family, and maternal employment is now normative (e.g., Pew Research Center 2015).

Despite such evidence, some scholars express concern that the gender revolution has not yet diffused broadly across social classes (Cherlin 2014), which may contribute to the diverging destinies of families and children (McLanahan 2004). In the United States, where few federal or state policies supportive of work-family balance exist, the greatest changes in family behaviors toward egalitarianism are best documented among those with the highest social class positions, particularly among the well educated, who, perhaps not coincidentally, now evidence more consistent male involvement in family over the life course, higher marriage rates, and greater relationship stability (Martin 2006; Raley 2000).

At the same time, there is evidence that less educated men are also interested in more egalitarian relationships (Gerson 2010; Pedulla and Thébaud 2015). Changes in the nature of work for these couples may create greater opportunities for egalitarian home lives among those of low and moderate socioeconomic standing. With the decline of blue-collar jobs, more moderately educated men have entered some female-typed service sector positions (Aisch and Gebeloff 2015; Miller and Fremson 2018; Munnich and Wozniak 2017), and their female partners' incomes have become

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increasingly important for supporting the family (Taylor et al. 2010). Such changes may lead to men's increasing comfort with household chores and women's greater negotiating power for a more egalitarian division. Indeed, studies have found a shift toward greater egalitarianism in how housework is divided among moderate- to low-income couples with minor children, leading to more positive couple-level outcomes (Carlson, Hanson, and Fitzroy 2016; Carlson, Miller, et al. 2016).

Such work intimates that the gender revolution operates among less advantaged couples, as well as among the most educated ones. Nonetheless, although men's time in housework has increased and women's decreased in the aggregate over the past half of a century (Bianchi et al. 2012), aggregate scales may actually conceal areas of domestic labor in which egalitarianism has increased or decreased. For example, from the mid-1980s until the mid-1990s, women decreased their time in cooking and cleaning but increased their time in laundry and shopping (Sayer 2016). How might changes in these specific task arrangements affect relationship quality?

In this article, we explore how the division of domestic labor has shifted across cohorts for middle- to low-income couples, relying on data from two national surveys collected approximately two decades apart: the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), initially gathered in 1987 and 1988, and the Marital and Relationship Survey (MARS), which was collected in 2006. We explore individual measures of domestic labor contributions, assessing (1) how involvement in particular housework chores has changed over time and (2) the varying contributions of such chores to different aspects of relationship quality: sexual intimacy, relationship satisfaction, and relationship discord. Our study gives us purchase on the very real meaning that changes in couple behavior—particularly the performance of domestic work by men—have for the gender revolution and the stabilization of families.

Background

The household division of labor has frequently been cited as one way in which couples can demonstrate and reify gendered conventions (e.g., Risman 2004; Tichenor 2005). Conventional arrangements dictate that female partners do the most routine, onerous, "indoor" housework, while male partners do the less frequent, more interesting, and "outdoor" chores (e.g., Bianchi et al. 2012). Recently, the division of household labor has become somewhat more equal, with women decreasing and men increasing their relative shares of household chores (Bianchi et al. 2012). Nonetheless, some scholars argue that such changes have not been felt equally by couples across the social class spectrum (e.g., Cherlin 2014; Shows and Gerstel 2009; Sullivan and Coltrane 2008).

Although scholars agree that working-class couples have more gender-traditional attitudes than do their college-educated counterparts (e.g., Usdansky 2011) there are two separate bodies of scholarship that offer competing evidence as to how couples actually share the load. One collection of research finds that, consistent with their more conventional attitudes, working-class couples also have quite conventional divisions of labor, even as female partners earn more money or have more education than their male partners (Gupta 2007; Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Miller and Sassler 2012). Middle- and upper-class men do larger shares of the housework than do working-class men, and middle-class women are more able to outsource much of the domestic load (Bianchi et al. 2012; De Ruijter, Treas, and Cohen 2005; Miller and Carlson 2016; Sullivan and Coltrane 2008).

In contrast, a second body of scholarship makes the case for what Usdansky (2011) termed the "gender equality paradox": the idea that despite their more gender-traditional attitudes, the working class shares the household division of labor more equally in practice than do the higher classes. Scholars whose work supports the gender equality paradox argue that conventional gender norms lead working-class couples to understate men's household contributions, and the greater reliance on working-class women's incomes provides them with more bargaining power on the domestic front (Silva 2013; Williams 2010). Although middle-class couples may state the desire to share domestic labor more equally, the relative inflexibility of men's professional work obligations make egalitarian household arrangements nearly impossible and force women to make hard choices about remaining in the workforce (Shows and Gerstel 2009; Stone 2009).

Regardless of whether couples' behaviors and attitudes are perfectly congruent, the division of household labor has real consequences for individual families. Young adults increasingly express a desire for partners who share both the financial and domestic responsibilities equally (Gerson 2010). Research from prior generations found that although achieving such egalitarian pairings is difficult and not without consequence, couples who set out and are able to maintain such arrangements experience a great deal of satisfaction and closeness (Risman 1998; Schwartz 1995). In contrast, when couples find their divisions of labor inequitable, relationship quality and stability suffers (Amato et al. 2003; Frisco and Williams 2003; Wilkie et al. 1998). Such consequences are likely to move beyond general dissatisfaction to more specific complaints.

Couples' Relationship Quality and the Household Division of Labor

Research demonstrates that the division of household labor is associated with couples' relationship quality (Greenstein 1996; Helms-Erikson 2001; Kamp-Dush, Taylor, and Kroeger 2008; Kluwer, Heesink, and Van De Vliert 1996; Lavee and Katz 2002; Wilkie et al. 1998). It is important to measure both positive and negative aspects of relationship quality in studies of contemporary families. Measures of higher marital quality, for example, tend to include greater

levels of satisfaction with the marriage and one's partner as well as lower levels of negative behaviors such as hostility; marital quality is then associated with the inverse of these negative characteristics (Robles et al. 2014). Furthermore, even traits typically associated with good relationship quality may be beneficial or deleterious for a marriage depending upon the context; McNulty and Fincham (2012), for example, found that couples that scored highly on measures of kindness, forgiveness, optimistic expectations, and positive thoughts actually had worse overall relationship well-being if their relationships were already troubled than those whose scores on seemingly positive traits were lower. Understanding the traits that are associated with higher relationship quality (such as "emotional intelligence") as well as those that are associated with lower relationship quality (e.g., feelings of inequity) and the context in which they occur can help increase relationship stability and satisfaction (Frisco and Williams 2003; Malouff, Schutte, and Thorsteinsson 2014).

One of the most important indicators of couples' relationship quality is sexual intimacy. A 2007 survey from the Pew Research Center found that respondents ranked a "happy sexual relationship" as the second most important factor, behind "faithfulness" in a successful marriage (Pew Research Center 2007). The third most important factor was sharing household chores. It should come as little surprise, then, that sex and housework are also related. Research has shown that how couples divide, and desire to divide, both routine and nonroutine housework is associated with sexual frequency as well as partners' sexual satisfaction (Carlson et al. 2016; Johnson, Galambos, and Anderson 2015; Kornrich, Brines, and Leupp 2013).

Although some studies link sexual functioning and physical intimacy to relationship satisfaction (Heiman et al. 2011), others focus on the importance of sexual frequency (Smith et al. 2011) or open communication about sex (Montesi et al. 2011) as contributing factors to a satisfactory relationship. Furthermore, some scholars have examined the association in the other direction, linking marital satisfaction to sexual satisfaction (cf. McNulty, Wenner, and Fisher 2016). Although there is some variation by sex such that the relationship between a satisfying sex life is more strongly associated with relationship satisfaction for men (Montesi et al. 2011), in all, the relationship between the two is almost universally positive.

Although research has demonstrated a direct association of the division of housework with sexual intimacy in couples, the links between the division of housework and overall relationship satisfaction and discord are more complicated. Many scholars have examined relative domestic contributions, but most find that perceived equity (fairness) rather than equality has a much greater impact on relationship quality and stability (Amato et al. 2003; Frisco and Williams 2003; John, Shelton, and Luschen 1995; Wilkie et al. 1998). Women, in particular, tend to have stronger beliefs that household labor should be shared equitably (Hohmann-Marriott 2006; John et al. 1995), and therefore, it is not surprising that they feel less satisfied with conventional arrangements than do men, especially if they have egalitarian beliefs (Greenstein 1996; Lavee and Katz 2002; but see Frisco and Williams 2003 for evidence that the effect of equity on relationship satisfaction does not vary by sex).

Few studies have examined how changes in the household division of labor are related to relationship satisfaction, and such studies are often within couples rather than between cohorts. Faulkner, Davey, and Davey (2005), for example, in a study of couples' marital satisfaction and conflict across five years using the NSFH 1987/1988 and 1992/1994, found that perceived equity, measured as an index of fairness that included household chores, spending money, and working for pay, did not affect either the husbands' or the wives' reports of marital satisfaction, but if wives reported higher levels of inequity, husbands reported greater marital conflict. Similarly, Dew and Wilcox (2011) examined the decline in marital satisfaction for new mothers using a subset of the NSFH. They found that the decline in marital satisfaction for new moms was linked both to increased domestic chores and to increased perceptions of housework inequity. Although they examined changes in marital quality over time, Rogers and Amato (2000) noted that couples married between 1981 and 1997 exhibited greater levels of marital discord than those married between 1960 and 1974, in some respect because of increases in work-family demands among recent cohorts. Although a greater share of housework by men was negatively associated with discord, it did not mediate the cohort differences. Alas, changes in the division of housework were not assessed.

Concomitant with research suggesting that the association of housework with relationship satisfaction and discord may have shifted over time, the association of couples' housework arrangements with sexual intimacy has also changed (Carlson et al. 2016). Results from the NSFH indicate that nonconventional divisions of housework—men performing traditionally feminine (or routine) tasks and women performing traditionally masculine (nonroutine) tasks—is associated with lower levels of sexual intimacy in couples, specifically sexual frequency and sexual satisfaction (Kornrich et al. 2013). Recent work using more contemporary data, however, shows no such association between men's share of routine housework and sexual intimacy (Johnson et al. 2015) or, when it comes to routine tasks, that sexual intimacy is only negatively affected when men are responsible for the majority of such tasks (Carlson et al. 2016). Indeed, although past research suggests that egalitarian couples have poorer sexual outcomes than conventional couples, Carlson et al. (2016) found that over a 20-year period, sexual frequency increased for those who shared routine housework equally but declined among couples in which either partner, male or female, was responsible for the majority of routine housework. These changes appear to be due in no small part to shifts across cohorts in feelings

of fairness in egalitarian (more fair) and conventional (less fair) arrangements and the impact such feelings have on couples' sex lives (Carlson et al. 2016; Johnson et al. 2015).

Assessing the Role of Individual Housework Tasks for Couples' Relationship Quality

Although the sharing of housework tasks appears to be increasingly associated with better relationship outcomes in couples, research in this area is limited by its conceptualization of housework and a lack of knowledge regarding the manner in which the division of individual tasks is associated with relationship quality. Slight variation across studies aside, routine (or "female-typed") housework has been conceptualized by gender and family scholars as a latent construct composed of one's time spent in the following tasks: cooking, cleaning, laundry, dishes, and shopping, while nonroutine (male-typed) housework is composed of car repair, home and yard maintenance, bill paying, and trash removal. Still, some tasks may be less gendered than others. Although shopping is often treated as routine housework, Carlson and Lynch (2013) indicated that shopping does not load on the same factor as other routine tasks. Bill paying, a nonroutine task, has been conceptualized as a neutral task by some researchers (e.g., Greenstein 1996) given that it is more often done by women than other nonroutine tasks. And all aspects of food work, with the exception of barbequing, have been shown to be equally as likely to be done by men as by women (Bove and Sobal 2006). Nonetheless, "routine" and "nonroutine" housework is generally operationalized as a summed scale of their respective tasks (for a review, see Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010). It is unclear, therefore, how the division of particular tasks has changed during the gender revolution or whether the division of individual routine and nonroutine housework tasks are associated with sexual intimacy, relationship satisfaction, and relationship discord in the same way and to the same degree.

Although numerous studies have documented shifts toward more egalitarian divisions of household labor from 1960 to 1990 and a subsequent stall in the 1990s, details regarding these shifts are sorely lacking. For instance, although men have increased, and women decreased, their time in housework over the past 40 to 50 years (Bianchi et al. 2012), this provides no information on the domains in which those changes have occurred. Indeed, it is unclear whether gains are relegated to just one task such as laundry or evenly dispersed across all routine chores. Moreover, average changes in aggregated scales may even mask regression in some domains. Using trend data from time diary studies, Sayer (2016) reports uneven change in the time men and women spend in housework tasks. For instance, from 1985 to 1998, women decreased their time in cooking and cleaning but slightly increased their time in laundry and shopping. Moreover, although the total amount of time women spent in routine housework from 1998 to 2012 is roughly the same (109 vs. 111 minutes/day), indicative of a stall, women increased their cleaning time while decreasing time in cooking and laundry. These findings indicate a need to examine tasks individually. Moreover, though informative, time diaries are individual-level data and do not indicate how the division of tasks has shifted among couples, which is more central to understanding the gender revolution than average changes in men's and women's housework time.

Understanding changes (or lack thereof) in the division of individual tasks is necessary to understanding the remaining barriers to gender equality. Examining changes across individual tasks among the working class and poor are especially important, as these groups have seen the greatest convergence in men's and women's incomes. Compared with the college educated, for whom men's and women's incomes have both increased significantly over the past four decades, women who have a high school diploma or some college have seen their real wages rise over time (5 percent and 17 percent, respectively), while men with the same levels of education have seen their real wages decline (16 percent and 10 percent, respectively) (Taylor et al. 2010). Furthermore, with the decline of blue-collar, manual labor, more working-class men find the alternative to be traditionally female-typed service sector jobs (Munnich and Wozniak 2017). Whether these couples have parlayed these changes in the workforce into men "picking up" more specific tasks at home (such as laundry or shopping) is an essential question because these couples may not be able to outsource housework like their counterparts with greater economic resources.

An extensive literature search identified only a handful of studies that consider how couples divide individual housework tasks. These studies focused almost entirely on food work—the labor involved in meal preparation from planning to cooking—and were concerned largely with rationalizations for the gendered division of food work (Beagan et al. 2008; DeVault 1994) or food work as a leisurely pursuit of men (Cairns, Johnston, and Baumann 2010; Szabo 2013). Still, Szabo (2014) found that at least some men frame meal planning and cooking in traditionally feminine terms: a form of care and concern for the family's satisfaction and health. These qualitative studies are often quite small and focused on specific populations (e.g., primarily upper middle class "foodies" or minority ethnic groups within Canada). The paucity of research on individual routine housework tasks aside, men's performance of some tasks may be more consequential to couples' relationship quality than others.

The Differing Consequences of Sharing Particular Household Tasks

The relationship between the division of household labor and relationship quality is subject to some debate. Some scholars postulate that a conventional division of household labor will be associated with greater relationship quality because of conventional ideas about gender roles. Housework is central

to "doing gender" and avoiding (or doing) housework may be a way for men and women to demonstrate conventional masculinity and femininity (Tichenor 2005). Research even suggests that the performance of gender-traditional tasks is necessary to enact the sexual scripts necessary for sexual arousal (Kornrich et al. 2013; Simon and Gagnon 1986). Men, for example, who feel emasculated by doing feminine-typed tasks have lowered sexual libidos (Cornwell and Laumann 2011). This might be particularly true if men of lower and moderate socioeconomic status violate these conventions because of their more conventional beliefs about gender in which masculinity is expressed through strength, invulnerability, and breadwinning (Williams 2010). As the nature of working-class male jobs has changed over time to become less physical and lower paying (Lee and Mather 2009), clinging more tightly to the vestiges of masculinity at home might be a way to reinforce male privilege and virility. This suggests that conventional arrangements may have become more positively associated with relationship quality across cohorts.

Although gendered sexual scripts may be one pathway linking the division of housework to sexual intimacy, relationship satisfaction, and relationship discord, they are not the only pathway. Other evidence suggests that egalitarian arrangements are more conducive to higher quality relationships because they foster cooperation and communication among partners, two essential and apparently increasingly important predicates to a good sex life and good relationship (Carlson and Soller 2017; Montesi et al. 2011). Of course, cooperation and communication are most relevant when couples work together. Some tasks, such as shopping and cooking, are easily done together and may lend themselves more to teamwork than more solitary endeavors such as taking out the trash or paying bills, which cannot be readily subdivided into smaller tasks. Therefore, the sharing of particular tasks may be more consequential to couples' well-being than others. This is likely to be the case regardless of social class, but working-class couples tend to work more nonroutine and offset shifts (Beers 2000; Presser 2000), and such nonstandard work schedules are likely to lead to relationship conflict (Perry-Jenkins et al. 2007). Therefore, it is especially important to study the opportunity to share in (or to cooperate in) the completion of particular chores, as doing so may help enhance couples' sense of teamwork in the absence of shared time together.

Finally, changes in the association of individual housework tasks with relationship quality across time may be due to perceived equity. Perceived equity is central to relationship quality and stability (Amato et al. 2003; Frisco and Williams 2003; Wilkie et al. 1998) and therefore also important to sexual intimacy (Carlson et al. 2016). Both men and women find equal arrangements to be the most equitable, an association that has increased over time (Carlson et al. 2016; Johnson et al. 2015). Yet feelings of equity depend on a myriad of factors, including how a task is expected to be divided and how it is actually divided (Miller and Carlson 2016). Again, if the gendering of routine or nonroutine tasks varies, then feelings of equity regarding the division of tasks in these areas are also likely to vary even if tasks are divided in a similar manner. Among the working class, equity might be particularly important. Given the decline in real wages for working-class men, the income of working-class women is increasingly more crucial for the financial well-being for the family (Taylor et al. 2010). This rise in relative financial contributions, may give working-class women an increasingly strong desire for equality and equity on the domestic front as well.

Methods

Data

To assess shifts in the division of individual housework tasks and their association with couples' relationship quality, data come from two sources: the MARS and wave 2 of the NSFH (NSFH2). Collected in early 2006 by Knowledge Networks, the MARS is an Internet-based probability sample of 1,095 individuals in 605 married and cohabiting couples. Both partners were interviewed separately and were provided with an Internet appliance and access, leading to a relatively high response rate of 80.3 percent (Lichter and Carmalt 2009), although only 487 couples had both partners complete the survey. For the purposes of this study, we limit our analysis to these couples.

The NSFH2 (1992–1994) consists of 10,005 respondents who were reinterviewed from 1992 to 1994, following the first wave of the NSFH in 1987 and 1988 (original sample n = 13,017), a nationally representative survey of U.S. households. We choose the NSFH2 for comparison with recent research on housework and couples' relationship outcomes and because this wave of data was collected at the time when the gender revolution is noted to have stalled. Because our interest is to assess cohort change, we limit our analysis of the NSFH2 to a subset comparable with the demographic characteristics of the MARS (i.e., low to moderate income, married and cohabiting couples with coresident minor children, and a female partner under age 45). Consistent with past research on the division of housework using the NSFH2, we also restrict the sample to couples who provided at least 8 (of 18) valid responses to the 9 housework item questions asked of both partners, which was 52.5 percent (n = 5,249) of the 10,005 wave 2 households. Of this group, 62.9 percent (n = 3,303) had a minor child living in the household, and 80.7 percent (n = 2,664) had a female partner under age 45.

Because low-income couples were oversampled in the MARS, we made adjustments to both samples to obtain identical income distributions. We truncated income in the MARS at the 95th percentile ($90,000) and at $44,500 ($63,635 in 2006 dollars) in the NSFH2. Mean income for both samples was approximately $38,300 (in 2006 dollars)

with interquartile ranges of approximately $26,000 to $50,000 (in 2006 dollars). These restrictions result in final sample sizes of $n = 932$ for the MARS and $n = 2,628$ for the NSFH2.

Measures

Dependent Variables. To assess how the division of housework tasks is associated with couples' relationship quality, we examine six outcomes: sexual frequency, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, relationship trouble, discussed separating, and physical arguments. For the sake of comparability the measures used in this study mirror as closely as possible those from other analyses of the NSFH2 and the MARS examining the relationship of the division of housework with these outcomes. Sexual frequency per month is based on each respondent's answer to the question "About how many times did you and your [spouse/partner] have sex last month?" Reports were truncated at the 95th percentile in both data sets to account for extreme outliers in the data.

In addition to sexual frequency, we include a measure of respondents' sexual satisfaction to better assess couples' sexual intimacy. Although sexual satisfaction is associated with sexual frequency (Brody and Costa 2009), we investigate each separately because they tap different aspects of sexual intimacy (Pascoal, de Santa Bárbara Narciso, and Monteiro Pereira 2014). In the NSFH2, respondents' satisfaction with their sexual relationships was assessed with the question "How happy are you with your sexual relationship?" Responses range from 0 = "very unhappy" to 7 = "very happy." In the MARS, sexual satisfaction is reported as respondents' level of agreement with the statement "I am satisfied with our sexual relationship"; responses range from 0 = "strongly disagree" to 3 = "strongly agree." To adjust for the differential scaling, each variable was standardized and represented as a z scores.

The third dependent variable in our analyses is relationship satisfaction. In the NSFH2, relationship satisfaction was assessed with the question "Taking things all together, how would you describe your marriage/relationship?" Responses ranged from 0 = "very unhappy" to 7 = "very happy." In the MARS, relationship satisfaction is originally assessed as a continuous variable (range = 0–10), with higher scores indicating more satisfaction with one's romantic relationship. Variable scaling is adjusted in a manner similar to sexual satisfaction.

Last, we include three measures to assess relationship discord. Relationship trouble is assessed in the MARS with the question "During the last year I thought that my marriage/relationship might be in trouble." In the NSFH2 respondents were asked "During the past year, have you ever thought that your marriage/relationship might be in trouble?" Responses in the MARS ranged from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 4 = "strongly agree." Responses in the NSFH2 were categorized as yes or no. Both responses were recoded into a dummy variable (1 = yes). Those who responded strongly agree or agree in the MARS are coded as 1 on this variable. Discussed separating is assessed in both surveys with the question "During the past year, have you and your husband/wife/partner discussed the idea of separating?" Possible responses were 1 = yes and 0 = no. Finally, physical arguments is assessed in the MARS with the question "Sometimes arguments between partners become physical. In the past year how often have arguments between you and your husband/wife/partner become physical?" Possible responses included 1 = "never," 2 = "a few times a year," 3 = "a few times a month," and 4 = "a few times a week or more." In the NSFH2 respondents were asked "Sometimes arguments between partners become physical. During the past year has this happened in arguments between you and your husband/wife/partner?" Responses included 1 = yes and 2 = no. Responses for both surveys are recoded into a dummy variable for which 1 = yes, had physical arguments.

Independent Variables. We examine the association of seven individual household tasks with couples' relationship quality. Routine housework tasks include preparing and cooking meals, washing dishes, cleaning around the house, shopping for groceries, and doing laundry. Nonroutine tasks include home maintenance or outdoor tasks and bill paying. We are limited to two nonroutine tasks because they are the only ones asked about in both the MARS and the NSFH2. In the MARS respondents were asked to identify how they divided individual housework tasks with their partners on the following five-point scale: 0 = "I do it all," 1 = "I do most of it," 2 = "we share it equally," 3 = "my partner does most of it," and 4 = "my partner does it all." We recoded each measure into 0 = "she does it all," 1 = "she does most of it," 2 = "we share it equally," 3 = "he does most of it," and 4 = "he does it all." From this we construct three dummy variables to represent the division of household tasks. "She does majority of task" indicates a conventional division of labor whereby respondents are given a value of 1 if the score on the housework item was 1 or 0: the equivalent of the male partner doing less than 40 percent of the task. "Task shared equally" represents an egalitarian division of labor and is the reference category. Respondents are given a value of 1 if the score on the individual housework measure was a 2, or roughly between 40 percent and 60 percent of the task. Finally, respondents were given a value of 1 on "he does majority of task" if scores on the particular items were 3 or 4, which is roughly the equivalent of the male partner completing more than 60 percent of the task, which can be described as a counter-conventional division of labor.

In the NSFH2, respondents and their partners reported the hours per week they spend on individual tasks. A measure for the division of each housework task is calculated as the male partners' hours spent in the tasks divided by the couples' total time devoted to the task, on average, per week. As noted previously, at times NSFH respondents reported more hours spent in housework than time in the day, values are therefore truncated the 95th percentile (Kornrich et al. 2013). As we do

with the MARS, the division of housework is separated into three dummy variables representing conventional, egalitarian (reference), and counter-conventional arrangements.

Controls. We control for the following continuous variables in our models: respondent's age (in years), couples' total hours of housework per week, both partners' hours spent in paid labor per week, couples' total yearly income (in dollars), female partners' proportionate share of couples' income, number of children less than age 2 in household, number of children ages 2 to 5 in household, and number of children ages 6 to 12 in household. Models also include dummy variables for female (1 = yes), cohabitation (1 = yes), and both attend religious services weekly (1 = yes). We control for respondent's education with a series of dummy variables for less than high school, high school, some college, and bachelor's degree or higher, with high school as the reference category. Measures of both partners' self-rated health are included in models as ordinal scales, ranging from 0 to 4, with higher scores indicating better health. We control for religion with categories for Protestant (reference), Catholic, other, and no religion. Any category in religion that constituted less than 10 percent of the sample was collapsed into "other." These included Jewish, Muslim, and other. Last, we control for the couples' time spent alone together, which is a measured as a scale ranging from 1 to 6: 1 = "almost never," 2 = "once or twice a month," 3 = "almost every week," 4 = "once a week," 5 = "more than once a week," and 6 = "almost every day."

Analytic Strategy. Because listwise deletion would result in a substantial loss of cases in the NSFH2 (~50 percent) and MARS (~16 percent), we imputed missing values in both data sets using the set of "mi" procedures in Stata 13. Ten iterations of the data were produced and combined for both data sets. Negative binomial regression was used to assess the association of individual housework tasks with sexual frequency because sexual frequency is positively skewed and overdispersed. Analyses of sexual and relationship satisfaction were conducted using ordinary least squares regression. Analyses of relationship discord were conducted using binomial logistic regression. All analyses used clustered standard errors to account for nonindependence of reports, because respondents are nested within couples.

Because sexual frequency is by nature a couple-level outcome, but reported individually in the NSFH2 and MARS, we conducted supplemental analyses in which partners' reports were averaged. The results of this analysis did not vary in any statistical or substantive way from those we present. For comparison with past studies, we present results on the basis of analysis of individual reports of sexual frequency.

Results

Descriptive statistics for demographic and control variables are shown in Table 1. The tables show a high degree of similarity between the early 1990s NSFH2 cohort and mid-2000s MARS cohort. Nevertheless, there are some differences (e.g., education, health, religion) that are consistent with known changes in population demographics in families over the past 30 years (Cherlin 2014).

Table 2 displays descriptive statistics for measures of relationship quality and the division of individual housework tasks for both samples. Individuals in the mid-2000s report having less sex than those in the early 1990s, consistent with noted population declines in sexual frequency (e.g., Mercer et al. 2013) although the difference is not statistically significant. Because of the differential scaling, it is difficult to assess whether sexual and relationship satisfaction differ, on average, across the two data sets. Results indicate that reports of relationship troubles are lower in the mid-2000s than in the early 1990s, while reports of physical arguments and having discussed separation are statistically no different across the two samples.

The division of housework has become more egalitarian over time, and this is echoed in Table 2, although the distributions of individual tasks are not uniform, nor are the shifts in these distributions across samples. In the early 1990s routine housework tasks are by and large the responsibility of female partners. There are some differences across tasks, nonetheless, as laundry (87 percent) and cleaning (83 percent) are the most likely to be done primarily by the female partner, while shopping is the least likely (64 percent). Consistent with the notion that nonroutine housework is the responsibility of men, few women are responsible for home maintenance (11 percent), but the majority of respondents report that the female partner is responsible for paying bills (51 percent), suggesting that although it is nonroutine, it is certainly not a strictly gendered task.

The distribution of cooking, cleaning, dishes and laundry is more equal in the mid-2000s cohort than in the early 1990s cohort. Not only was the division of routine tasks more equal in the mid-2000s, but more individuals also reported the male partner doing the majority of routine tasks compared with the early 1990s. Nonetheless, women in the mid-2000s are still responsible for routine housework tasks, on average. Although the routine tasks with the most gender conventional arrangements shifted toward egalitarianism over time, the one that was the least conventional, shopping, did not. The division of bill paying, a nonroutine task, also changed, but fewer couples shared this task in the mid-2000s than in the early 1990s. There appear to be no changes in the division of home maintenance.

Table 3 displays results of analyses examining the association of individual housework tasks with sexual frequency and sexual satisfaction. Past research using the NSFH2 has shown that conventional housework arrangements are associated with more sex in couples. The results in Table 3 indicate that for routine housework, this is driven by just two tasks: dishes and cleaning. In contrast, none of the routine housework tasks among the mid-2000s MARS cohort are

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics.

	1992–1994 NSFH2				2006 MARS			
	Men (n = 1,314)		Women (n = 1,314)		Men (n = 466)		Women (n = 466)	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Individual-level controls								
Hours spent in paid labor per week	36.582	20.191	18.780	19.419	36.678	21.538	15.157	18.398
Protestant	.489		.489		.370		.398	
Catholic	.231		.232		.180		.206	
Other religion	.166		.166		.215		.234	
No religion	.114		.113		.235		.162	
Age	36.419	6.996	33.708	5.716	37.880	7.598	34.624	6.226
Self-reported health	2.945	.805	2.917	.845	2.513	.981	2.466	.952
How often spend time together alone	4.225	1.570	4.169	1.718	2.989	1.764	2.905	1.771
Less than high school	.225		.232		.093		.092	
High school	.307		.407		.358		.324	
Some college	.306		.276		.362		.399	
Bachelor's degree or more	.119		.085		.187		.185	
Couple-level measures	*M*		*SD*		*M*		*SD*	
Couple-level controls								
Hours of housework per week	57.538		27.332		43.973		30.400	
Currently cohabiting	.106				.113			
Couples' total income (in 2006 dollars)	38,309.56		17,501.86		38,387.18		18,207.66	
Her share of income	.283				.291			
Number of children less than age 2 in household	.215		.428		.105		.314	
Number of children ages 2–5 in household	.538		.696		.572		.729	
Number of children ages 6–12 in household	.890		.921		.857		.944	
Both attend religious service weekly	.346				.305			

Note: MARS = Marital and Relationship Survey; NSFH2 = wave 2 of the National Survey of Families and Households.

associated with sexual frequency, suggesting a shift in the consequences of the division of housework for sexual intimacy across periods. Worth noting is that dishes and cleaning were two of the top three tasks that shifted most toward egalitarianism from the early 1990s to the mid-2000s. In neither cohort were nonroutine housework tasks associated on average with sexual frequency, but it should be noted that there is a limit on the number and scope of tasks within these data. We tested for the possibility of gender variation in the association of individual tasks with sexual frequency. No gender differences were identified in among the early 1990s cohort. In the mid-2000s cohort, however, results indicated that men reported significantly less sex when female partners did the majority of home maintenance ($p < .05$) compared with sharing home maintenance equally. No differences were found among women.

In the early 1990s, none of the routine housework tasks were associated with respondents' sexual satisfaction, and this did not differ by gender. The only task associated with sexual satisfaction was the division of home maintenance. Individuals who report that the female partner does the majority of the home maintenance report less sexual satisfaction than those who share it equally. The association between housework and sexual satisfaction appears to have changed substantially over time, however, as evidenced by differences between the two cohorts. In the mid-2000s, male responsibility for any of the five routine housework tasks is associated with less sexual satisfaction than sharing those tasks, and the coefficients are all significantly different than for the early 1990s cohort (the lone exception being laundry). The results also indicate that female responsibility for cooking, dishes, and shopping—the three routine tasks that are least often the responsibility of women in the mid-2000s—is also associated with less sexual satisfaction than sharing these tasks equally. The effects for cooking and dishes are significant different from the early 1990s. Female responsibility for home maintenance, however, is not more deleterious to sexual satisfaction in contrast to the findings from the early 1990s cohort. The association of individual tasks with sexual satisfaction is

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Sexual Intimacy and Division of Individual Housework Tasks.

	1992–1994 NSFH2 (n = 2,628)			2006 MARS (n = 932)			t Test/χ^2 Test
Sexual intimacy	6.645			6.313			
Sexual frequency	(5.517)			(5.507)			NS
Sexual satisfaction (standardized)	–.001			–.001			NS
Relationship satisfaction (standardized)	.000			.000			NS
Relationship discord							
Relationship in trouble	.363			.300			$p < .001$
Discussed separating	.180			.194			NS
Physical arguments	.088			.090			NS
Routine housework	She does most	Shared equally	He does most	She does most	Shared equally	He does most	t Test/χ^2 Test
Preparing/cooking meals	79.52%	13.07%	7.41%	66.23%	21.32%	12.45%	65.01 ($p < .001$)
Dishes	77.50%	16.15%	6.35%	56.43%	29.30%	14.27%	148.69 ($p < .001$)
House cleaning	83.72%	12.14%	4.14%	67.36%	22.41%	10.23%	112.59 ($p < .001$)
Shopping	64.13%	27.57%	8.30%	60.22%	29.67%	10.11%	5.18 (NS)
Laundry	87.03%	8.97%	4.00%	68.91%	20.55%	10.54%	148.14 ($p < .001$)
Nonroutine housework							
Home maintenance	11.37%	18.37%	70.26%	11.56%	18.67%	70.77%	0.23 (NS)
Paying bills	51.00%	25.72%	23.28%	56.09%	18.15 %	25.76%	21.43 ($p < .001$)

Note: Means and standard deviations (in parentheses) reported for sexual frequency and sexual satisfaction (standardized). MARS = Marital and Relationship Survey; NSFH2 = wave 2 of the National Survey of Families and Households.

largely gender invariant in the mid-2000s, although one difference ($p < .05$) is observed; results showed that female responsibility for dishes was associated with lower satisfaction among women compared to sharing dishes equally, but there is no difference for men.

Much like sexual satisfaction, results from analyses of relationship satisfaction and discord indicate significant change across cohorts in the association of individual routine housework tasks with relationship quality. However, as supplemental interaction test indicated (not shown) the associations vary significantly by gender. Therefore, results are shown separately for women (Table 4) and men (Table 5). There are few associations between the division of any particular task and relationship satisfaction among the early 1990s cohort. For women, as shown in Table 4, responsibility for dishes and shopping, the two tasks most often shared, is associated with lower relationship quality compared with sharing equally ($p < .10$). In the mid-2000s, the division of routine tasks is more consequential to women's reports of relationship quality, as responsibility for all routine tasks other than laundry, the task least often shared, is associated with reports of lower relationship satisfaction compared with sharing these tasks equally.

As found for all other measures of relationship quality examined, the division of dishwashing appears to be increasingly important for women's reports of relationship discord. For all three measures, female responsibility for dishwashing results in a significantly greater amount of discord than sharing dishwashing in the mid-2000s. In the early 1990s, female responsibility for dishwashing is associated only with greater odds of physical arguments. Even so, the association between the division of dishwashing and physical arguments is four times stronger in the mid-2000s. The division of only two other tasks is associated with relationship discord for women. Results show that the division of cleaning has become less consequential across periods for women's reports of physical arguments and discussions of separating. Male responsibility for home maintenance is associated with lower odds of discussing separation among women in the mid-2000s cohort, whereas no association was observed in the early 1990s cohort.

As shown in Table 5, the division of housework tasks is rarely associated with relationship quality for men in the early 1990s. Only responsibility for bill paying, the nonroutine task most likely to be shared, lowers relationship quality compared with sharing equally ($p < .10$). Men report marginally greater relationship satisfaction when their partners do the majority of the laundry compared to sharing equally. For men in the mid-2000s, responsibility for routine tasks other than cooking, the second least likely task to be shared, results in lower relationship satisfaction compared with sharing equally. In addition, men report marginally lower relationship satisfaction when their partners do the majority of the shopping.

Table 3. Negative Binomial and Ordinary Least Squares Regression of Division of Individual Routine Housework Tasks on Sexual Frequency and Sexual Satisfaction for Married and Cohabiting Couples with Minor Children in Home.

	Sexual Frequency per Month		Sexual Satisfaction	
	1992–1994 NSFH2[a]	2006 MARS[b]	1992–1994 NSFH2[a]	2006 MARS[b]
	B (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)
Division of meal preparation/cooking (ref = shared equally)				
She does majority of meal preparation/cooking	.068 (.048)	−.095 (.082)	.050 (.057)	−.176* (.088)
He does majority of meal preparation/cooking	.005 (.068)	−.065 (.115)	−.031 (.077)	−.296** (.113)
Division of dishes (ref = shared equally)				
She does majority of dishes	.091* (.044)	−.008 (.074)	.057 (.050)	−.148† (.076)
He does majority of dishes	−.089 (.072)	−.128 (.096)	−.071 (.079)	−.345*** (.107)
Division of cleaning (ref = shared equally)				
She does majority of cleaning	.115* (.048)	−.044 (.081)	.031 (.058)	−.125 (.083)
He does majority of cleaning	.052 (.080)	−.196† (.104)	−.047 (.111)	−.425*** (.129)
Division of shopping (ref = shared equally)				
She does majority of shopping	−.004 (.037)	.018 (.077)	−.044 (.040)	−.172* (.078)
He does majority of shopping	−.008 (.070)	−.104 (.104)	.033 (.068)	−.313* (.124)
Division of laundry (ref = shared equally)				
She does majority of laundry	.025 (.053)	.059 (.091)	.001 (.060)	−.010 (.087)
He does majority of laundry	−.045 (.093)	.082 (.117)	−.148 (.114)	−.278* (.138)
Division of home maintenance (ref = shared equally)				
She does majority of home maintenance	−.044 (.058)	−.090 (.115)	−.183** (.061)	−.135 (.131)
He does majority of home maintenance	.017 (.037)	−.048 (.083)	−.024 (.044)	−.158 (.096)
Division of bill paying (ref = shared equally)				
She does majority of bills	−.039 (.033)	−.098 (.088)	−.064 (.040)	−.152 (.092)
He does majority of bills	−.047 (.042)	−.062 (.100)	−.070 (.047)	−.106 (.106)

Note: All models include controls for gender, respondents' age, marital status, his and her hours in paid work per week, total couple income, her share of income, couples' total hours of weekly housework, respondents' religion, both attend religious services at least weekly, respondents' and partners' health, amount of time couple spend alone together, number of children under age 2, number of children ages 2 to 5, number of children ages 6 to 12, and respondents' education. MARS = Marital and Relationship Survey; NSFH2 = wave 2 of the National Survey of Families and Household; ref. = reference category.

[a]n = 2,628.

[b]n = 932.

†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Unlike women, dishwashing arrangements matter little for men's reports of relationship discord. Rather, it is meals, shopping, and laundry where changes have occurred. In the early 1990s male responsibility for meal preparation and cooking was associated with higher levels of discord compared with sharing this task equally. In the mid-2000s, there is little to no effect of the division of meal preparation and cooking on discord. Moreover, in the case of having discussed separating, male responsibility for meals lowers the odds of having discussed separating compared with sharing meal preparation and cooking. Sharing shopping and laundry appear to have become more important predictors of relationship troubles for men. In the mid-2000s, male responsibility for these tasks is associated with higher odds of reported relationship troubles. For shopping, female responsibility is also associated with greater odds of relationship troubles. In the early 1990s, differences were nonsignificant or only marginally so. Female responsibility for laundry among male respondents in the early 1990s cohort is associated with lower odds of relationship troubles and having discussed separating, but these differences disappear in the mid-2000s, suggesting that traditional arrangements no longer provide couples with advantages in these domains.

Among the nonroutine tasks, only home maintenance was associated with men's reports of relationship discord. The findings indicate that traditional arrangements are associated

Table 4. Ordinary Least Squares and Binomial Logistic Regression of Division of Individual Routine Housework Tasks on Relationship Satisfaction, Relationship Trouble, Discussed Separating, and Physical Arguments for Married and Cohabiting Women with Minor Children in Home.

	Relationship Satisfaction		Relationship Trouble		Discussed Separating		Physical Arguments	
	1992–1994 NSFH2[a]	2006 MARS[b]	1992–1994 NSFH2[a]	2006 MARS[b]	1992–1994 NSFH2[a]	2006 MARS[b]	1992–1994 NSFH2[a]	2006 MARS[b]
	B (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)
Division of meal preparation/cooking (ref = shared equally)								
She does majority of meal preparation/cooking	−.025 (.093)	−.256* (.124)	.102 (.203)	.463 (.303)	−.080 (.238)	.316 (.363)	−.126 (.308)	.027 (.427)
He majority of meal preparation/cooking	−.091 (.135)	−.141 (.174)	.366 (.284)	−.638 (.458)	.095 (.333)	−.184 (.496)	−.163 (.436)	−.521 (.708)
Division of dishes (ref = shared equally)								
She does majority of dishes	−.141† (.084)	−.317** (.100)	.286 (.220)	1.056*** (.270)	.374 (.234)	.718* (.335)	.690* (.340)	2.872** (.911)
He does majority of dishes	−.038 (.145)	−.096 (.153)	−.015 (.338)	.054 (.431)	.089 (.360)	.292 (.495)	.068 (.498)	1.719 (1.171)
Division of cleaning (ref = shared equally)								
She does majority of cleaning	−.061 (.099)	−.261* (.128)	.319 (.226)	−.376 (.314)	.506† (.285)	.194 (.354)	.408 (.366)	.175 (.439)
He does majority of cleaning	−.122 (.197)	−.211 (.177)	−.407 (.410)	−.439 (.515)	.278 (.554)	.069 (.552)	1.297* (.506)	.052 (.696)
Division of shopping (ref = shared equally)								
She does majority of shopping	−.120† (.066)	−.194† (.104)	.087 (.148)	.303 (.249)	.172 (.203)	.209 (.307)	.151 (.254)	.422 (.385)
He does majority of shopping	−.027 (.115)	−.090 (.174)	−.039 (.286)	−.386 (.463)	−.014 (.342)	−.990 (.692)	.523 (.382)	−.528 (.853)
Division of laundry (ref = shared equally)								
She does majority of laundry	−.044 (.113)	−.204 (.134)	−.079 (.256)	.347 (.296)	−.175 (.297)	.014 (.329)	−.193 (.364)	.855 (.531)
He does majority of laundry	−.019 (.174)	−.152 (.167)	−.068 (.385)	−.178 (.428)	.239 (.428)	.230 (.500)	−.611 (.712)	.472 (.737)
Division of home maintenance (ref = shared equally)								
She does majority of home maintenance	−.101 (.116)	−.054 (.170)	.271 (.220)	.377 (.346)	.028 (.285)	.121 (.419)	.069 (.359)	−.374 (.528)
He does majority of home maintenance	.020 (.082)	.011 (.121)	.026 (.157)	−.264 (.278)	.202 (.194)	−.554† (.329)	−.361 (.249)	−.505 (.414)
Division of bill paying (ref = shared equally)								
She does majority of bills	−.042 (.078)	−.208 (.146)	.150 (.163)	.083 (.319)	.176 (.193)	.623 (.435)	−.021 (.245)	.660 (.535)
He does majority of bills	.042 (.091)	−.099 (.164)	−.049 (.204)	−.171 (.364)	−.022 (.224)	.603 (.496)	−.261 (.324)	.694 (.611)

Note: All models include controls for gender, respondents' age, marital status, his and her hours in paid work per week, total couple income, her share of income, couples' total hours of weekly housework, respondents' religion, both attend religious services at least weekly, respondents' and partners' health, amount of time couple spend alone together, number of children under age 2, number of children ages 2 to 5, number of children ages 6 to 12, and respondents' education. MARS = Marital and Relationship Survey; NSFH2 = wave 2 of the National Survey of Families and Households; ref. = reference category.

[a] $n = 2{,}628$.

[b] $n = 932$.

†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

with lower odds of physical arguments and discussion of separation in the mid-2000s, while there is no association between the division of home maintenance tasks and relationship discord for male respondents in the early 1990s.

Discussion

Contemporary scholars question whether and how the gender revolution has spread, with some arguing that egalitarianism has not yet spread to the poor and working class (e.g., Cherlin 2014) and others finding that despite their more conventional attitudes, lower classes have adapted egalitarian behaviors (e.g., Shows and Gerstel 2009; Silva 2013; Williams 2010). Our examination of two different cohorts of middle- to low-income couples with children shows that contemporary couples are now more often sharing routine housework tasks than previous cohorts and provides evidence that, for contemporary couples, equal sharing of the domestic division of labor

Table 5. Ordinary Least Squares and Binomial Logistic Regression of Division of Individual Routine Housework Tasks on Relationship Satisfaction, Relationship Trouble, Discussed Separating, and Physical Arguments for Married and Cohabiting Men with Minor Children in Home.

	Relationship Satisfaction		Relationship Trouble		Discussed Separating		Physical Arguments	
	1992–1994 NSFH2[a]	2006 MARS[b]	1992–1994 NSFH2[a]	2006 MARS[b]	1992–1994 NSFH2[a]	2006 MARS[b]	1992–1994 NSFH2[a]	2006 MARS[b]
	B (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)	*B* (*SE*)
Division of meal preparation/cooking (ref = shared equally)								
She does majority of meal preparation/cooking	.074 (.080)	−.116 (.100)	−.031 (.197)	.025 (.287)	−.277 (.232)	−.172 (.332)	−.143 (.303)	−.442 (.424)
He majority of meal preparation/cooking	−.026 (.132)	−.063 (.142)	.478† (.288)	−.124 (.383)	.649* (.321)	−.752† (.438)	.347 (.441)	−.762 (.583)
Division of dishes (ref = shared equally)								
She does majority of dishes	.044 (.074)	−.031 (.098)	−.200 (163)	.243 (.287)	−.316 (.207)	.020 (.313)	−.320 (.254)	−.024 (.313)
He does majority of dishes	.031 (.128)	−.305* (.123)	.117 (.297)	.549 (.334)	.062 (.351)	−.009 (.384)	−.650 (.523)	−.512 (.547)
Division of cleaning (ref = shared equally)								
She does majority of cleaning	.072 (.085)	−.008 (.128)	−.301 (.188)	−.219 (.306)	−.168 (.235)	−.194 (.333)	−.016 (.274)	.180 (.454)
He does majority of cleaning	.124 (.151)	−.385* (.163)	−.003 (.348)	.489 (.373)	.450 (.382)	.179 (.417)	−.278 (.567)	−.476 (.619)
Division of shopping (ref = shared equally)								
She does majority of shopping	−.026 (.062)	−.165† (.094)	.282† (.155)	.534* (.270)	.282† (.155)	.212 (.303)	.119 (.242)	−.026 (.419)
He does majority of shopping	−.020 (.103)	−.334* (.144)	.288 (.260)	.700† (.367)	.288 (.260)	.418 (.409)	.362 (.376)	.420 (.513)
Division of laundry (ref = shared equally)								
She does majority of laundry	.189† (.106)	.061 (.117)	−.357† (.198)	.012 (.297)	−609* (.247)	−.148 (.338)	.124 (.364)	−.387 (.464)
He does majority of laundry	.146 (.192)	−.306† (.167)	.186 (.377)	1.183** (.409)	.165 (.472)	.940* (.433)	.106 (.607)	−.006 (.582)
Division of home maintenance (ref = shared equally)								
She does majority of home maintenance	.137 (.124)	−.114 (.195)	−.050 (.291)	.127 (.434)	−.049 (.387)	−.338 (.512)	−.042 (.433)	1.045† (.618)
He does majority of home maintenance	−.019 (.076)	−.130 (.133)	−.029 (.185)	−.098 (.326)	.031 (.233)	−.735* (.343)	.006 (.289)	−.079 (.475)
Division of bill paying (ref = shared equally)								
She does majority of bills	−.043 (.058)	.044 (.131)	−.105 (.149)	−.123 (.291)	−.004 (.195)	−.253 (.342)	−.051 (.246)	−.302 (.466)
He does majority of bills	−.154* (.076)	−.077 (.154)	−.057 (.177)	−.074 (.342)	.228 (.223)	−.191 (.400)	−.146 (.286)	−.264 (.541)

Note: All models include controls for gender, respondents' age, marital status, his and her hours in paid work per week, total couple income, her share of income, couples' total hours of weekly housework, respondents' religion, both attend religious services at least weekly, respondents' and partners' health, amount of time couple spend alone together, number of children under age 2, number of children ages 2 to 5, number of children ages 6 to 12, and respondents' education. MARS = Marital and Relationship Survey; NSFH2 = wave 2 of the National Survey of Families and Households; ref. = reference category.

[a] $n = 2{,}628$.

[b] $n = 932$.

†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

generally result in higher quality relationships, but that the division of some tasks matters more than others.

Despite or perhaps because of changes in work and family structures, there has been a good deal of movement toward egalitarianism among the working class and poor. For all routine housework tasks other than shopping, MARS couples in the mid-2000s more often shared in the completion of housework than early 1990s NSFH2 couples. Although routine housework was the primary responsibility of women in four fifths of early 1990s couples, this was the case in just two thirds of couples in the mid-2000s. Not only were couples more likely to share tasks, but the proportion with men responsible for routine housework tasks also increased, doubling for many tasks. Couples in the early 1990s most often shared shopping and this was true of couples in the mid-2000s as well, but there was no significant change across cohorts, suggesting perhaps a structural and institutional cap on egalitarian sharing for middle- to low-income couples. Although the division of most routine tasks shifted toward egalitarianism, this was not the case for nonroutine tasks; indeed, bill paying became more gendered across cohorts.

Table 6. Summary Table of Associations between the Divisions of Particular Household Tasks and Relationship Quality.

	Men								Women							
	1992–1994 NSFH2				2006 MARS				1992–1994 NSFH2				2006 MARS			
	SF	SS	RS	RD	SF	SS	RS	RD	SF	SS	RS	RD	SF	SS	RS	RD
Meal preparation				+/+		+		−						+	+	
Dishes	−						+		−		+			+	+	+/+/+
Cleaning	−				+	+	+		−			+/+	+	+	+	
Shopping				+/+		+	+	+			+			+	+	
Laundry			−	−/–			+	+/+						+		
Home maintenance		+			+			−/+		+						−
Bills			+													

Note: RD = relationship discord; RS = relationship satisfaction; SF = sexual frequency; SS = sexual satisfaction. Relationship discord is composed of three separate measures; a plus sign indicates that egalitarian arrangements result in better outcomes than conventional or counter-conventional arrangements, and a minus sign indicates that egalitarian arrangements result in worse outcomes than conventional or counter-conventional arrangements.

Shifts toward egalitarianism coincided with increasingly positive associations between the equal sharing of tasks and relationship quality. The findings are summarized in Table 6. Among the early 1990s cohort, when couples had conventional arrangements for the routine tasks of dishes and cleaning, they reported having significantly more sex; in contrast, there were no individual tasks that were related to sexual frequency among the mid-2000s cohort. More important, perhaps, mid-2000s couples reported greater sexual and relationship satisfaction with more egalitarian distributions of all routine tasks, a significant difference from the early 1990s. Although the importance of particular tasks for relationship discord varied by gender, the general findings suggest that egalitarian arrangements were associated with less discord, especially among the mid-2000s cohort. Clearly, despite data suggesting little to no change in the division of labor for U.S. couples since the 1990s (Sayer 2016), the gender revolution did not stall for middle- to low-income families from the early 1990s to the mid-2000s.

Of importance is the prevalence of particular behaviors. When it was more common for all couples to share a task, conventional task divisions were most problematic, on average. The rarer it was that all couples shared a task, on the other hand, the less problematic a conventional task division appeared to be; in some instances, more conventional task divisions were even beneficial. It is likely no coincidence that shifts in the consequences of dividing particular tasks mirror shifts in the division of those tasks across cohorts. Indeed, the prevalence of relationship troubles was lower in the mid-2000s, and this coincided not only with a shift in the odds of reported troubles associated with sharing tasks like dishwashing and laundry but also a large increase in the proportion of couples who shared these tasks. Indeed, of all routine housework tasks, the sharing of dishwashing responsibilities has become increasingly important for relationship quality, especially for women. This may be due to the role these tasks play in shaping feelings of relationship equity or the fact that they can be done in partnership (e.g., you wash, I'll dry), leading to greater closeness and communication in one's relationship. Investigating why these tasks matter is beyond the scope of this study, but future research should certainly investigate the mechanisms linking particular tasks to relationship quality.

Why the positive consequences of equal task sharing increase as sharing becomes more common is unclear. One explanation in line with the concept of relative deprivation is that couples' happiness with their own relationships depends upon their observations of others' (Hochschild and Machung 1989). Despite the inequality, couples with conventional arrangements may be relatively satisfied as long as most others are also in similar arrangements. As equal sharing becomes more prevalent, conventional couples may reevaluate their arrangements, finding them increasingly unfair relative to others.

Some scholars have argued that the performance of conventional gender roles through household labor is a necessary part of sexual scripts that eroticize difference. Men, especially, risk emasculation and decreased sexual performance (Cornwell and Laumann 2011) from egalitarianism, according to this perspective. Additionally, new home economics suggest that relationship stability and quality rest on separate, but complementary roles for partners (Becker 1981). There was some evidence to support this among couples in the mid-2000s. Men report having less sex, for example, when their female partners do the majority of the home maintenance, and compared with those who share the housework equally, couples report lowered sexual satisfaction when the male partner does the majority of any routine chore. Still, this does not support the idea that there is no "eroticization of sameness" (Schwartz 1995) but, rather, that reversing convention entirely seems to be beyond the boundaries of the sexual preferences of middle- to low-income couples. Still, when it comes to more global relationship satisfaction, individuals are perfectly happy to bend convention as long as the

division of labor appears to benefit themselves. The consequence, however, is that although one partner may be reasonably satisfied with the relationship, the other is not, a direct contrast to the supposed benefits of separate spheres.

Of course, our study is not without limitations. First, although questionnaire items pertaining to relationship quality are almost identical across surveys, there were slight variations. Additionally, although MARS respondents answered categorical questions asking who did the majority of a particular household task, respondents to the NSFH reported their hours spent in housework tasks, from which we derived categorical measures for task division akin to those in the MARS. We are confident that these measurement differences are minimal and unlikely to affect observation of period differences in housework tasks and their consequences. Not only do survey measures of individual household tasks yield results as consistent as time diary measures (Schulz and Grunow 2011), but qualitative work also shows that assessments of task division by partners are consistent with reports of hours spent in tasks (Sassler and Miller 2017). Nevertheless, estimates of change may be somewhat overstated if categorical reports of who does the majority of particular task are biased toward egalitarian divisions (Risman and Johnson-Sumerford 1998).

Because of the nature of the mid-2000s MARS sample, we also cannot speak to the application of the gender equality paradox (Usdansky 2011), because we lack a concurrent upper-class sample. It could be, for example, that whereas today's working-class parents are more egalitarian than their counterparts in a previous cohort, college-educated couples of today have pulled even further ahead or equal divisions of specific chores has greater effects on other aspects of college-educated couples' relationships, such as sexual frequency or satisfaction. Additionally, we were able to examine divisions of particular household tasks, but we do not have a sense of when and how that work is accomplished. Couples may be sharing the laundry by folding at the same time, which could provide the opportunity for conversation and shared time together. But, because nonroutine shifts are relatively common among the working class (Beers 2000; Presser 2000), couples may also be engaging in a domestic task variant of Rudd and Root's (2008) aptly named chapter "We Pass the Baby Off at the Factory Gate," with one partner starting a task and the other finishing it later. Last, our examination of nonroutine housework is limited to just two tasks. Although the division of these tasks appears to be rather inconsequential for couples' relationships, this may not be the case for other tasks such as taking out the trash or recycling and yard maintenance.

Despite reservations that the gender revolution has advanced only among the economically advantaged (Cherlin 2014), our findings suggest that at least some egalitarian practices have become more common among the middle- to low-income couples as well. Furthermore, this movement toward equality is now associated with positive evaluations of their relationships. Indeed, these couples appear to be embracing egalitarianism at home in the face of changing workplace roles rather than eschewing change. These changes, however, were not uniform across household task, highlighting the importance of examining tasks individually. Moreover, just as progress has been made in individual routine tasks, it seems to have stalled or even regressed a bit for nonroutine tasks. Furthermore, although egalitarianism in most tasks has become increasingly beneficial to couples' well-being, role reversal has become more deleterious. Increases in stay-at-home fatherhood and male homemaking have been lauded as signs of progress, but these results suggest that whether it is conventional or counter-conventional arrangements, inequality undermines relationship quality, which is best enhanced by equally sharing routine domestic labor. Our findings suggest that although the gender revolution continues to progress, it is certainly far from complete.

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