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Working Hard and Hardly Working: Domestic Labor and Marital Satisfaction Among Dual-Earner Couples

This article examines the effect of domestic labor, gender ideology, work status, and economic dependency on marital satisfaction using data obtained from self-administered questionnaires for 156 dual-earner couples. Analytic distinctions were drawn among three aspects of domestic labor: household tasks, emotion work, and status enhancement. The effects of each of these elements of the division of domestic labor on marital satisfaction were tested. We also tested the effects of a respondent's satisfaction with the couple's division of domestic labor on marital satisfaction. Finally, we tested the effects of gender ideology, hours spent in paid work each week, and economic dependency on marital satisfaction. For women, satisfaction with the division of household tasks and emotion work and their contributions to household and status-enhancement tasks were the most significant predictors of marital satisfaction. Satisfaction with the division of labor around both emotion work and housework were significant predictors for men's marital satisfaction. Partner's status-enhancement work was also predictive for men. Economic dependency, paid work hours, gender ideology, partner's hours spent on housework, contributions to emotion work, and number of children and preschool-age children had only indirect effects on women's marital sat-

isfaction. For men, hours spent on housework, contributions to emotion work, partner's emotion work, hours spent in the paid labor force, and number of preschool children had an indirect effect on marital satisfaction.

How do a couple's division of domestic labor, hours spent in the paid workforce, relations of economic support, and gender ideologies influence marital satisfaction? We might expect, following Blumstein and Schwartz (1983), that marital satisfaction is highest for couples who have worked out an agreeable division of household labor and arrangements for resolving financial issues in the relationship. This is not to say that marital satisfaction requires couples to share household tasks equally or share fifty-fifty in economic resource contributions; we argue that marital satisfaction hinges on couples developing a mutually agreed upon division of household labor and financial arrangement. Time spent in the workplace, divergent gender ideologies of partners, and different levels of satisfaction with domestic labor and financial arrangements may significantly influence the relationship between domestic labor and marital satisfaction.

Empirical studies have not systematically examined the complex nature of the combined effects of these relationships on marital satisfaction. Given the widespread societal concern about the high divorce rate, it is important to understand factors that influence marital satisfaction. This article develops and tests a model that predicts that

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the division of domestic labor, satisfaction with that division of labor, average hours spent at work per week, economic dependency, and gender ideologies influence marital satisfaction. The analysis uses data from a random sample of dual-earner couples in a Western state to assess the effects of these variables on marital satisfaction.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Domestic Labor

Sociological research on domestic labor and marital satisfaction has tended to define domestic labor as synonymous with household tasks. According to this perspective, household labor is typically operationalized as how many hours per week a respondent devotes to housework (Shelton & John, 1996). We argue, following the theoretical work of Coverman (1989), that domestic labor includes much more than housework. Domestic labor encompasses, as well, emotion work—taking care of the emotional life of the relationship—and status enhancement—activities by one partner that enhance the employment status of the other partner (e.g., organizing and managing a dinner party for one's partner's boss).

Satisfaction With Division of Domestic Labor and Marital Satisfaction

Research examining the relationship between quality of marriage and satisfaction with domestic labor arrangements is not extensive, and findings remain inconclusive. Kluwer, Heesink, and Van de Viert (1996) found wives' dissatisfaction with contributions to the division of labor resulted in overt marital conflict, whereas husbands' dissatisfaction did not. Suito (1991) found, across almost all life cycle stages, satisfaction with domestic labor arrangements to be only moderately related to marriage quality for men and women. Benin and Agostinelli (1988) studied dual earner couples and found wives reported that arguments result when they or their husbands experience dissatisfaction with the division of labor. Pina and Bengtson (1993) found married women with egalitarian gender ideologies and who were employed full-time perceived less support from their husbands when domestic labor contributions were viewed as unequal. These women also indicated lower levels of marital and personal happiness than did wives reporting equal amounts of house-

hold labor. Neither relationship was found for traditional and non-full-time employed wives.

Clear and consistent findings on the relationship between household labor and marital satisfaction remain elusive. Inconsistent findings may in part be due to the socially constructed nature of a "satisfactory" division of household labor. Relative-resource theorists and researchers argue that negotiations between spouses over housework are influenced by the economic and human-capital resources each partner brings to the relationship (Becker, 1981; Blood & Wolfe, 1960; McDonald, 1981). In a traditional relationship, the couple might view a situation where a woman who does most or all of the housework as satisfactory because her husband is the "breadwinner." Each partner views his or her contribution to the relationship as important and the distribution of responsibilities as satisfactory. A couple might make an overtly rational decision based on earning potential. To the extent that the gap between men's and women's earning power is still substantial, decisions about housework and paid employment might be dictated by economics.

Labor Force Participation

In their review of the literature on the consequences of the division of household labor, Shelton and John (1996) reported that the studies investigating the relationship between women's paid work hours and men's hours of housework are inconclusive. Findings range from no relationship to a positive one. They found few studies examining the association between the hours men work in the paid labor force and women's hours of housework.

Economic Dependency

Economic dependency has been hypothesized to influence the division of household labor and satisfaction with household-labor arrangements. For men, there is a curvilinear relationship between economic dependency and participation in household labor (Brines, 1994). Both men who earn more than their partners and men who earn less tend to do less household labor but for different reasons. If men earn more than their partners, they view their responsibility as "breadwinner" as compensating for doing housework. It is argued that men who earn less than their partners eschew housework to protect and assert their threatened masculinity (Brines, 1994). If partners' incomes

are roughly equal, men tend to contribute proportionately more to housework but not much more than their male counterparts who earn substantially more or less than their partners (Presser, 1994).

The resource-bargaining theories predict that the more resources (human-capital and economic resources) a woman contributes to the household, the more likely she is to define an unequal division of household labor as unfair (Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994). If a traditional division of household labor is viewed as fair because the woman is taking care of the home while the man is the breadwinner, then the logic of this model dictates that the man should contribute more to housework when the woman begins to contribute more to family income. Nonetheless, numerous studies suggest that wives' employment leads to a negligible increase in husbands' participation in housework (and a decrease in her own hours of household labor; Berardo, Sheehan, & Leslie, 1987; Coverman, 1989; Pleck, 1985; Shelton & John, 1996). Women whose relative contribution to family income is high are more likely to perceive an unequal division of household labor as unfair than are women whose contributions to family income are less than their partners'.

Conversely, a person who is economically dependent on his or her partner will not likely view an unequal division of household labor as unfair. Brines (1994, p. 657) defined economic dependency as "one spouse's reliance on the other for his or her current income standard." Although the economic-dependency perspective does not inherently connect gender and dependency, most wives earn less than their husbands and are reliant on them for substantial support. And, most wives do the majority of housework. According to this model, housework is provided in exchange for economic support.

Brines (1994, p. 662) notes, however, that housework also serves "as part of the scaffolding that supports the interpersonal enactment of gender within marriage." Housework is "women's work," and men express their "essential" nature by avoiding it. Doing or not doing housework, then, becomes a symbolic representation of "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Given this cultural view of the relationship between gender and housework and the predictions of economic-dependency theory, what happens to a husband's contribution to housework when his wife's income exceeds his? Relative-resource theory would predict he would contribute more to

housework, but given cultural notions of masculinity and femininity, we might expect the husband to do even less housework to protect his masculinity. Indeed, in her interviews with 50 dual-earner couples, Hochschild (1989) found that among those couples where the wife's income exceeded her husband's, none of the men were categorized as sharing equally in the housework (i.e., accounting for 45% or more of the time spent on housework).

Gender Ideology

The competing predictions of relative-resource and economic-dependency theories are conditioned by another factor: gender ideology. According to this perspective, men and women with traditional gender-role ideologies will be more likely to have an unequal division of household labor and will be less likely to perceive that inequality as unfair than couples with egalitarian gender-role attitudes. For example, a man holding a traditional ideology may view himself as "entitled" to have his wife perform a disproportionate share of domestic labor (Sanchez, 1994).

Research findings indicate that a positive relationship between an egalitarian gender-role ideology and a more egalitarian division of household labor holds more for men than women (Pleck, 1985; Presser, 1994). Interestingly, the association between egalitarian gender-role attitudes among men and their participation in housework is due to the men's proportionate contributions. That is, "egalitarian" men tend to be married to women who do relatively less housework than "traditional" homemakers.

Blair and Johnson (1992) examined employed wives' perceptions of fairness regarding household labor and found gender ideology explained little of the variation in their perceptions. Conversely, Greenstein (1996) noted that gender ideology influences whether inequalities in marriage are perceived as inequities. He found that wives with egalitarian gender ideologies are more likely to perceive inequalities as inequities and that perceptions of inequity affect marital quality more for wives with an egalitarian ideology than those with a traditional orientation. The discrepancy in these findings has not been reconciled.

Control Variables

Most studies show that there is a relationship between number of children, particularly preschool

children, and marital satisfaction (for a review of this literature, see Teachman, Polonko, & Scanzoni, 1999). The number of children is associated with a mother's attenuated participation in the paid labor force, an increase for her regarding time spent on domestic labor, and a transformation for her toward a more traditional gender ideology. All of these factors operate to increase a father's power in the relationship. Moreover, the presence of children, particularly preschool children, decreases the time parents have to spend with each other and the quality of that time.

The Study

The analyses that follow address three issues. First, we drew an analytical distinction among the elements of domestic labor. Previous studies have typically conceptualized domestic labor as household tasks. We operationalized domestic labor more broadly than previous studies, to include household tasks, emotion work, and status enhancement. Only a few studies have examined emotion work (e.g., Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Erickson, 1993). Fewer still have investigated status enhancement (Pavalko & Elder, 1993). We integrated all three elements of domestic labor and examine the effects of each on marital satisfaction.

Second, we examined not only the division of domestic labor among couples, but each partner's satisfaction with the couple's division of labor. These satisfaction measures address not only the issue of "who does what" but how couples feel about the arrangement.

We examined the relative effects of the three elements of domestic labor on marital satisfaction. Some previous work has shown that an unequal division of household labor is associated with problems in a couple's marriage relationship, whereas an unequal division of emotion work is not (Tingey, Kiger, & Riley, 1996). Erickson (1993), while looking only at emotion work, found that an unequal division of emotion work was associated with lower marital satisfaction for women, but not for men. We extend this research avenue by examining the relative effects of all three elements of domestic labor as well as satisfaction with arrangements surrounding all three elements of domestic labor on marital satisfaction.

Third, to the extent that Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) have argued that marital satisfaction is related to working out a mutually agreeable division of household tasks and financial arrangements, we examined economic-dependency

patterns and their effects on marital satisfaction. The relationships between economic dependency and two elements of domestic labor (emotion work and status enhancement) have never been explored. Finally, we took into account the mediating effects of hours of workforce participation and gender ideology on the relationship between domestic labor, economic dependency, and marital satisfaction.

METHOD

Sample

Data were taken from the Work and Family Dynamics study, a survey of a random sample of households in a state in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States. Random selection of households was generated from a list of utility billings provided by local government officials. To qualify for inclusion in the study, couples had to be married or cohabiting dual earners. If a couple qualified, then each partner was given a self-administered questionnaire and instructed to complete it without discussing the questionnaire with one's partner. Our research assistants returned within 48 hours to pick up the questionnaires. The response rate was 83%, yielding a total of 156 couples. Regression equations are estimated separately for male and female partners. Difference scores also were calculated for couples; because the regression equation using difference scores was less easily interpretable and did not advance the model, we do not present this material in our analysis.

The average age of respondents was 37.2 years for women and 39.7 for men. The mean number of years of education was 13.8 for women and 14.6 for men. Men worked an average of 46.23 hours per week in the paid workforce; women worked an average of 35.91 hours.

Measures

Dependent variable. The dependent variable, marital satisfaction, was measured using Spanier's (1976) 7-item scale. The alpha reliability coefficient for the scale was .79 (.81 for men and .78 for women). Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with seven aspects of their relationship: (a) the way money is handled in your relationship; (b) the things you and your partner do together when you go out visiting or for entertainment; (c) the amount of affection in your

relationship; (d) the way chores around the house are performed in your relationship; (e) the way you and your partner deal with in-laws; (f) sexual relations in your relationship; and (g) religious beliefs in your relationship. The response categories were: *always dissatisfied*, *often dissatisfied*, *sometimes dissatisfied*, *often satisfied*, and *always satisfied*. The items were summed to obtain an index score. The higher the score, the more satisfied the respondent was with the marital relationship.

Independent variables. We measured three elements of domestic labor: (a) household tasks, (b) emotion work, and (c) status enhancement. We were interested in two dimensions of each element of domestic labor. First, we examined perceptions of each partner regarding the actual division of domestic labor between partners. Second, we examined perceptions of partners regarding satisfaction with the division of domestic labor. Perception of time spent on household tasks is measured by asking the respondent "on average, how much time do you and your partner spend on housework during a typical week?" Respondents then indicated number of hours for self and for partner.

Perception of emotion work was measured by a 7-item index adapted from Blumstein and Schwartz (1983), Erickson (1993), and Tingey et al. (1996). Admittedly, emotion work is complex, and its many facets are difficult to capture in a single scale. We combined items from previous research in an attempt to create a more comprehensive measure of emotion work than has been used previously. Respondents were asked: "In general, who in your relationship does each of the following?" Items included (a) confides innermost thoughts and feelings, (b) tries to bring partner out of a bad mood, (c) praises partner, (d) suggests a workable solution to our problems, (e) raises problems couple needs to work on, (f) initiates talking things over, and (g) senses when partner is disturbed about something. The response categories were coded so that 1 = *partner much more*, 3 = *we do this equally*, and 5 = *I much more*. The scores were summed in an index. The higher the index score, the more the respondent did the emotion work in the relationship. For partner's relative contribution to emotion work, that partner's response to the same scale was used. The alpha reliability coefficients were .79 for men and .69 for women. This difference may be attributed to the primacy of emotion work in women's lives. Given that they do more emotion work than their partners, they may think more critically about it

and therefore respond less consistently. In the case of men, who do less emotion work and for whom emotion work is less central, responses may be more global and fall into a response set.

Status enhancement was measured by response to the item: "I substantially contribute to my partner's career (for example, building goodwill with partner's colleagues or clients, ensuring partner has time to devote to work or to work overtime, or other ways of helping with partner's work)." The response categories were: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, and 4 = *strongly agree*. For partner's contribution to status enhancement, their response to the same question is used.

For two of the elements of domestic labor, household tasks and status enhancement, each respondent was asked "How satisfied are you with this arrangement?" The responses were coded: *very dissatisfied*, *dissatisfied*, *satisfied*, and *very satisfied*. To measure emotion work satisfaction, respondents were asked how satisfied they were with each of the seven measures in the emotion work scale outlined above. The alpha reliability coefficient for the emotion work satisfaction index was .79 for men and .86 for women.

Level of workforce participation was measured using an open-ended question asking for the average number of hours the respondent spent in paid work per week.

Economic dependency was measured, following Brines (1994, p. 668), by the formula:

$$\frac{(\text{Respondent's Income} - \text{Partner's Income})}{(\text{Respondent's Income} + \text{Partner's Income})}$$

The values fall between -1 and 1. The higher the value, the less economically dependent a partner is on the respondent. Zero indicates equal contribution to family income.

Gender ideology was measured by a 10-item scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1978, p. 237). The items include (a) swearing and obscenity are more repulsive in the speech of a woman than a man; (b) when the wife works outside the home, the husband should share in household tasks such as washing dishes and doing the laundry; (c) women should worry less about their rights and more about becoming good wives and mothers; (d) women should assume positions in business and all professions, along with men; (e) a woman should not expect to have quite the same freedom of action as a man; (f) the leadership of a com-

TABLE 1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR VARIABLES USED IN THE ANALYSIS

Variables	Men			Women		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
<i>Dependent Variable</i>						
Marital satisfaction ^a	26.72	4.42	143	26.21	4.66	147
<i>Independent Variables</i>						
Household labor (hrs/wk) ^b	6.81	6.42	146	14.89	11.44	152
Partner's household labor ^c	14.88	11.20	146	5.50	5.28	150
Emotion work ^d	19.53	4.65	148	23.59	4.15	148
Status enhancement ^e	2.90	.76	147	3.01	.67	152
Household labor satisfaction ^a	2.77	.66	146	2.52	.84	153
Emotion work satisfaction ^a	20.29	3.16	143	19.56	3.89	144
Status enhancement satisfaction ^a	2.99	.51	146	3.03	.53	153
Average hours worked per week	46.23	13.51	156	35.91	13.79	156
Economic dependency score ^e	.40	.43	150	-.20	.47	151
Gender ideology ^f	17.93	5.16	147	16.28	4.31	148
Number of children	1.44	1.46	156	1.55	1.59	156
Number of preschool children	.45	.70	156	.49	.78	156

Note: Listwise deletion of missing data within scales.

^aThe higher the score, the more satisfied the respondent. ^bThe reported number of hours the respondent spends in an average week doing household tasks. ^cScore represents perceived number of hours per week partner spends doing household tasks. ^dThe higher the score, the more the respondent engages in the activity for their partner. ^eOn a scale of -1 to 1, a higher score indicates less economic dependency on the other spouse. ^fThe higher the score, the more traditional the respondent's gender ideology.

munity should be largely in the hands of men; (g) women should be given equal opportunity with men for apprenticeship in the various trades; (h) sons in a family should be given more encouragement to go to college than daughters; (i) in general, the father should have greater authority than the mother in rearing of children; and (j) there are many jobs in which men should be given preference over women in being hired. The response categories were *strongly disagree*, *disagree somewhat*, *agree somewhat*, and *agree strongly*. The appropriate items were reverse coded so that the higher the scale score, the more traditional the respondent's gender ideology. The alpha reliability coefficients were .82 for men and .73 for women.

Measures of the number of children were determined by the open-ended question, "How many children live with you?" Three age-graded categories were presented for which respondents supplied the appropriate number, including 0-5 years old, 6-11 years old, and 12-18 years old. Number of children 0-5 years old was used to represent preschool-age children. The three responses were summed to determine total number of children for each respondent.

Although there appeared to be a degree of conceptual overlap with the variable of domestic-labor satisfaction and marital satisfaction, the data only showed a moderately strong correlation be-

tween the two (men = .54; women = .53). A careful examination of the wording indicates that the first item showed how satisfied they were with the division of labor, whereas the second was concerned with the manner in which chores were performed.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for the variables used in the analyses are presented in Table 1. As indicated in the table, women reported spending an average of nearly 15 hours per week on household tasks, whereas men reported 6.8 hours. Women indicated less satisfaction with this arrangement than men. Women reported doing more emotion work in their relationships than men and less satisfaction with the division of emotion work. Women's gender-ideology scores were less traditional than those of men. Status-enhancement activities and satisfaction with those activities were almost identical for men and women. Difference scores were calculated for couples. Statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between men and women were found for performance of emotion work, satisfaction with the division of emotion work, and gender ideology scores. The bivariate correlations between marital satisfaction and the independent measures are presented in Table 2.

The study of domestic labor has prompted con-

TABLE 2. ZERO ORDER CORRELATION MATRIX FOR VARIABLES USED IN THE ANALYSIS FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Variables	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8	X9	X10	X11	X12	X13	X14	X15
X1: Marital satisfaction	—														
X2: Household labor (hrs/wk)	-.05	-.24**													
X3: Partner's household labor (hrs/wk)	-.15	.33**	.09												
X4: Household labor satisfaction	.28**	-.16	-.01	-.27**											
X5: Emotion work	-.16	.35**	-.08	-.18*	-.25**										
X6: Partner's emotion work	-.17	-.05	-.11	-.06	-.25**	-.05									
X7: Emotion work satisfaction	.54**	-.09	-.07	.29**	-.21*	-.18*	.53**								
X8: Status enhancement	.02	.05	-.02	.01	.04	-.05	.00	.21**							
X9: Partner's status enhancement	.25**	.08	-.05	-.17*	.01	.03	.06	.06	.35**						
X10: Status enhancement satisfaction	.33**	-.14	-.03	.33**	-.13	-.14	.31**	.03	-.03	.40**					
X11: Average hours worked per week	-.11	-.12	.02	-.20*	.02	.14	-.20*	.01	.02	-.04	.04	.01	-.18*		
X12: Economic dependency	-.07	.06	.29**	-.04	-.05	.01	-.19*	.03	-.03	-.06	-.37**	-.36**	-.09	-.08	-.13
X13: Gender ideology	-.05	-.08	.12	.13	.11	-.13	-.02	-.14	-.08	-.13	-.01	.07	-.02	-.22**	-.09
X14: Number of children	-.18*	.18*	.22**	-.07	-.04	.09	-.08	.07	-.02	-.18*	.09	.27**	.00	-.04	.00
X15: Number of preschool children	-.16	.19*	.11	-.08	.11	.08	-.10	-.01	.19*	-.15	.04	.05	-.02	.44**	—

Note: Pairwise deletion of missing cases. Coefficients above the diagonal represent female respondents. Coefficients below the diagonal represent male respondents. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

siderable controversy over whether scholars ought to examine domestic labor itself or focus instead on a person's perception of fairness or satisfaction with the domestic-labor arrangement in the relationship (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Thompson, 1991). We analyzed the effects of both sets of measures on marital satisfaction.

For both men and women, satisfaction with the couple's emotion-work arrangement had a statistically significant positive association with marital satisfaction. Men's marital satisfaction was also significantly positively associated with their status enhancement satisfaction. Women's marital satisfaction was significantly positively associated with their satisfaction with household task arrangements and with their own status-enhancement performance. The relationship between women's marital satisfaction and hours they spent on household tasks was negative. Thus, the fewer hours of household tasks women did, the more status-enhancement work they performed, and the more satisfied they were with the household task arrangement, the higher their satisfaction with their marriages. Also, the more emotion work their husbands performed, the less satisfied women reported being in their marriages.

For men, two spheres of their partner's domestic labor, hours she spent on household tasks and her status enhancement work, were significantly associated with men's marital satisfaction. The fewer hours of housework and the more status enhancement work their wives did, the higher the men's reported marital satisfaction. The R^2 values for the full model were high: .40 for men and .45 for women. The results for the full model are reported in Table 3 and are presented visually in Figures 1 and 2.

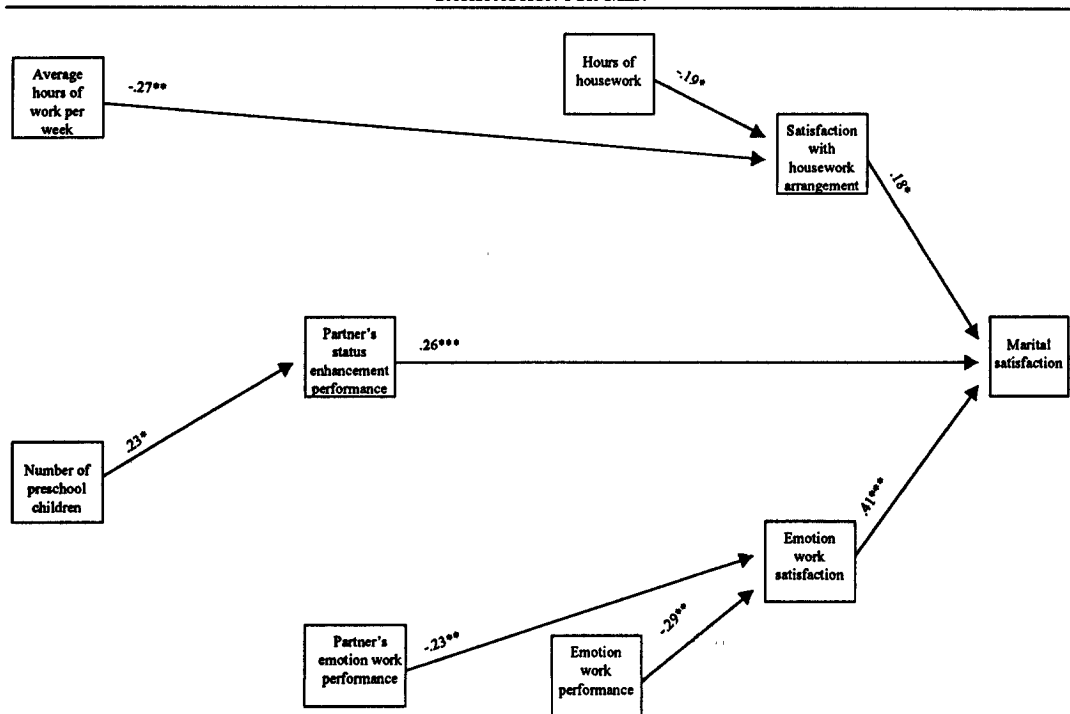
Next, measures of satisfaction with each of the three elements of domestic labor were tested. For women, satisfaction with the housework arrangement was positively associated with the hours her partner spent on household tasks and with her gender ideology. The more hours he worked around the house and the more traditional her gender ideology, the more satisfied she was with the housework arrangements. Her satisfaction with the housework arrangement was negatively associated with the number of hours she did housework; the fewer hours she spent on housework, the greater the reported satisfaction. Men's satisfaction with the housework arrangement was negatively associated with the hours the men reported spending on household tasks and the average

TABLE 3. REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR VARIABLES IN THE FULL MODEL EXAMINING MARITAL SATISFACTION (N = 156)

Variables	Men			Women		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Marital satisfaction by						
Household labor satisfaction	1.13	.54	.18*	1.70	.45	.32***
Household labor	-.03	.07	-.04	-.09	.04	-.24***
Partner's household labor	-.05	.04	-.13	.13	.08	.13
Emotion work satisfaction	.52	.11	.41***	.32	.11	.27**
Emotion work	-.03	.08	-.03	-.04	.10	-.03
Partner's emotion work	-.10	.09	-.10	-.11	.07	-.12
Status enhancement satisfaction	1.34	.79	.15	1.14	.72	.13
Status enhancement	-.39	.48	-.07	1.10	.52	.17*
Partner's status enhancement	1.60	.47	.26***	.49	.44	.08
Average hours worked per week	-.01	.03	-.02	-.05	.03	-.15
Economic dependency	1.15	.86	.12	.16	.76	.02
Traditional gender ideology	-.07	.07	-.08	.10	.08	.10
Number of children	-.13	.27	-.04	-.08	.26	-.03
Number of preschool children	-.55	.56	-.09	-.01	.51	.00
R ²	.40			.45		

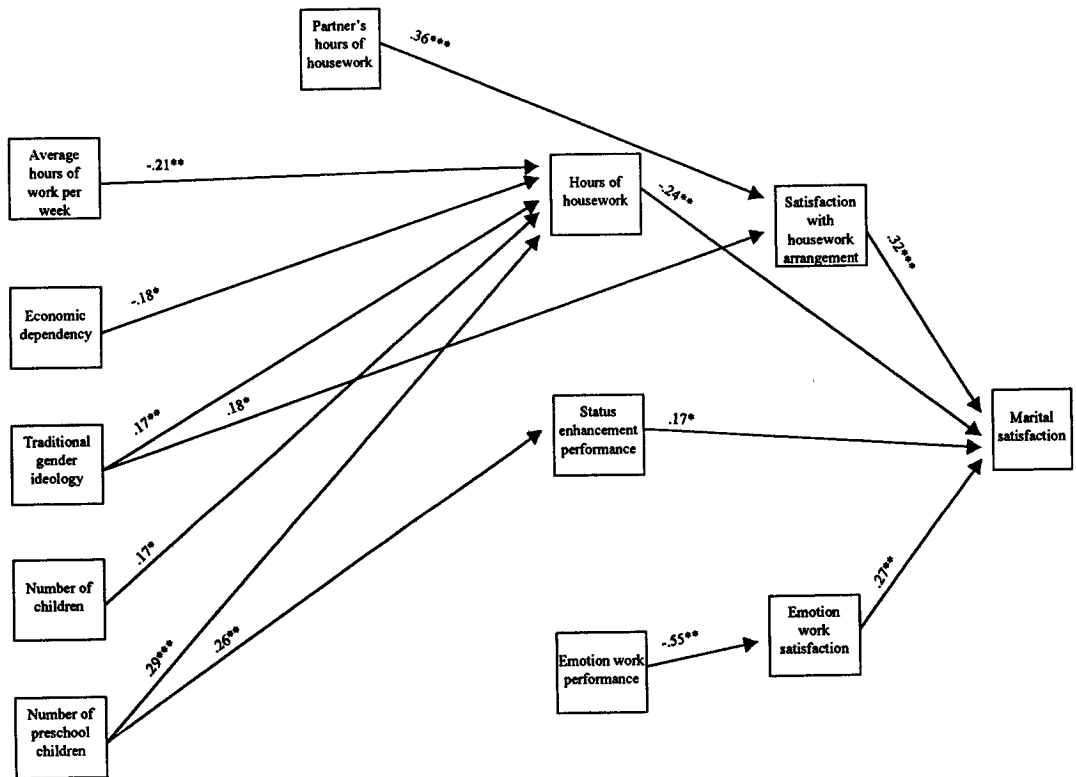
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

FIGURE 1. STANDARDIZED PATH COEFFICIENTS FOR THE MODEL EXAMINING DOMESTIC LABOR AND MARITAL SATISFACTION FOR MEN



Note. Only those paths that are statistically significant are presented. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001. R² = .36.

FIGURE 2. STANDARDIZED PATH COEFFICIENTS FOR THE MODEL EXAMINING DOMESTIC LABOR AND MARITAL SATISFACTION FOR WOMEN



Note. Only those paths that are statistically significant are presented.
 $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$. $R^2 = .44$.

number of hours men worked in the paid labor force each week.

For men, satisfaction with emotion-work arrangements in the couple was significantly negatively associated with both their own and their partners' emotion work. For women, emotion work satisfaction in the couple was negatively associated only with her own emotion work. For both genders, one's own emotion work performance was negatively related to the partner's. For both men and women, status-enhancement satisfaction had a statistically significant positive association with their own status-enhancement contributions, but not with the contributions of their partner.

Also, for women, a significant negative association was found between hours worked outside the home and hours of housework. The more hours she worked in the paid labor force, the fewer number of hours of housework she performed. The more economically dependent she was on

him and the more traditional her gender ideology, the more hours of housework she performed. For both men and women there was a positive association between the hours they and their partners spent on housework.

Our findings provide no evidence for a direct association between number of children, including preschool children, and marital satisfaction. This result is in keeping with the research findings that mothers regard parenthood as satisfying and that the indirect effects of children on marital quality are largely through intervening variables such as an increase in amount of time spent on domestic labor (Hoffman & Manis, 1978). Indirect effects on marital satisfaction are detailed in Table 4.

DISCUSSION

In an attempt at a more comprehensive definition of domestic labor we included hours per week spent doing household tasks, contributions to

TABLE 4. REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR INDIRECT EFFECTS OF VARIABLES ON MARITAL SATISFACTION (N = 156)

Exogenous Variables	Endogenous Variables										
	Household Task Satisfaction		Hours of Housework per Week		Status Enhancement		Partner's Status Enhancement		Emotion Work Satisfaction		
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Hours of housework per week											
Partner's hours of housework per week	-.19*	.36**									
Partner's emotion work											
Average hours worked per week											
Economic dependency											
Traditional gender ideology											
Number of children											
Number of preschool children											

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

emotion-work, and status enhancement in our analysis. In addition to analyzing the contribution of both partners to domestic labor, we considered satisfaction with each of the three arrangements. Satisfaction with the division of labor around emotion work and housework emerged as useful predictors of marital satisfaction for men and women. Satisfaction with the housework arrangements and hours per week spent on housework exercised an important effect on marital satisfaction for women only. In the case of status-enhancement activities, women's contribution to status enhancement work was found to have a significant influence on marital satisfaction for both partners.

The effects of partner's contributions to domestic labor differed for men and women. Partner's status-enhancement work was a significant, direct predictor of marital satisfaction among the "partner" variables for men. For men and women, none of the exogenous variables exercised a statistically significant direct effect on marital satisfaction.

These findings suggest three important points. First, given our expanded definition of domestic labor, all three dimensions of domestic labor—household-task, emotion-work, and status-enhancement work—are associated with marital satisfaction. Marital-satisfaction studies typically only include household-task measures.

Second, both satisfaction with domestic-labor arrangements and the labor itself are associated with marital satisfaction. Our findings are consistent with earlier research that indicates couples do not need to share fifty-fifty to be satisfied in their relationship (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). The crucial point is that they are satisfied with their particular arrangement.

For men, satisfaction with the emotion-work arrangement in the marriage exercises the greatest magnitude of influence on marital satisfaction ($\beta = .41$). The household-task-arrangement measure exercises less influence on marital satisfaction ($\beta = .18$) than emotion-work satisfaction. Satisfaction with status-enhancement-activities arrangement does not exercise a statistically significant effect on marital satisfaction.

Partners involve themselves somewhat more equally in emotion work than in household tasks, forcing men to be both cognizant of and responsible for emotional labor relations but not necessarily household labor relations. This is reinforced by the fact that for men in this sample, both their own and their partners' emotional-labor influ-

enced their satisfaction with emotion-work arrangements in the marriage, whereas their own but not their partners' participation in housework influenced their satisfaction with household labor.

In contrast, satisfaction with household-labor arrangements for women influences marital satisfaction with a magnitude greater than satisfaction with emotion work. Women feel resentful when they do the majority of housework and emotion work. This dissatisfaction influences the quality of the marital relationship. (For women, the more housework and emotion work they do, the less satisfied they are with the housework and emotion-work arrangements.)

Another interpretation of the link between emotion work and emotion-work satisfaction follows. High levels of emotion work are coupled with low levels of emotion-work satisfaction for both men and women. When men do more emotion work, women's marital satisfaction is negatively impacted, and when women do more emotion work, men's emotion-work satisfaction is negatively influenced. Coupled with the positive relationship between emotion-work satisfaction and marital satisfaction, emotion work may then be viewed as a gauge, albeit an indirect one, of marital satisfaction. Emotion work should not be considered a proxy for unhappy marriages, however, given that the former is a behavior and the latter an affective state. If this process is operating, then clearly emotion work is domestic labor that is distinguished from housework. It is difficult to imagine an individual dramatically increasing hours spent doing housework if he or she is dissatisfied with the division of household labor. (This would be especially surprising among male respondents.) This reading of our results certainly identifies fruitful avenues for future research.

Third, status-enhancement work by the woman in the relationship is associated with marital satisfaction for both men and women. That is, for women, the more status-enhancement work they do, the more satisfied they are in their marriages. For men, the more status-enhancement work their partners do, the more satisfied they are in their marriages. Status-enhancement work stands out from other dimensions of domestic labor in that the more status-enhancement work the woman does in the relationship, the more satisfied she is (and he is) with the marriage.

Given the salience of women's status-enhancement work for both men and women's marital satisfaction, this finding points to the gendered character of a spouse's support of one's job or career.

There is a cultural expectation that a woman will support her husband's career because his job is primary. The correlation between her status-enhancement work and their marital satisfaction might point to the peculiar nature of status-enhancement work. Because status-enhancement work might be seen as supportive, it does not have the same onerous qualities that attach to household tasks. And even though emotion work might be perceived as having supportive elements, it can be onerous if one is expected to take care of the relationship.

In our analyses, traditional gender ideology exercises an indirect effect on marital satisfaction for women. Traditional gender ideology influenced only women's involvement in and satisfaction with household labor. Those with more traditional gender ideologies were likely to perform more household labor and be more satisfied with the arrangement. For women who believe in a traditional division of labor in the home, housework may take on a moral quality, and their marital satisfaction may be greater when they feel they have fulfilled their household obligations. For these women, pride, and thus marital satisfaction, come from household management (Ahlander & Bahr, 1995). Traditional gender ideology was not significantly associated with any of the independent measures or marital satisfaction for men.

Whereas economic dependency did not have a direct influence on marital satisfaction for men and women, it did emerge in the model as having a significant impact on women's time spent in household labor, which was associated with marital satisfaction. In accordance with relative-resource theory, women who were more economically dependent performed more household labor. They did not indicate being more satisfied with the division of household labor, however, which would be expected from this perspective. This could be an indication that women are responding to cultural expectations (and husbands' expectations) that if they are economically dependent on their husbands, then they should do more housework. Our findings suggest that women are feeling some resentment about these expectations.

Although our lives are greatly structured around employment, our findings indicate that the direct influence of hours spent in the paid labor force was confined to household-task relations. As women increase the number of hours they work in the paid labor force, they decrease the number of hours they spend on household tasks. The indirect effect of hours spent per week in the paid

labor force on marital satisfaction is positive for women. Men reported less satisfaction with household-task relations as the number of hours they spent in the paid labor force increased. Perhaps this is due to their expectations that they will participate less in household labor as their hours of workforce participation increase, particularly if their hours are significantly more than their wives. The total indirect effect of hours spent in the paid labor force by men on their marital satisfaction is negative.

CONCLUSIONS

Our analyses emphasize that correlates of marital satisfaction vary by gender. Men and women's marital satisfaction is positively associated with housework and emotion-work satisfaction and women's status-enhancement work. Marital satisfaction is also a product of complex household-labor relations. Household-labor relations for women are influenced by her gender ideology, degree of economic dependency, number of hours she spends in the paid labor force, and the number of children in the household.

Women as a group reported less traditional gender ideologies than did men but ideology was not found to be directly related to marital satisfaction. We suggest rather than rejecting gender ideology outright, it might be useful to consider conceptualizing it differently. In a recent discussion of this issue, Kroska (1997) pointed out that gender ideology tends to be conceptualized and measured as an attitude/belief system rather than as an identity (e.g., feminist, traditionalist). She suggested that although individuals tend to behave in ways that fulfill the ideological identity they profess, it is not unusual for other factors to make it impossible to behave consistently with one's gender ideological identity.

Kroska (1997) proposed we look at gender ideology as a negotiated identity rather than as a stable attitude structure inherent in an individual. For example, all members of our sample are employed; in all likelihood some "traditional" women would rather not be employed. As a result, a "traditional" woman may have to reconstruct the meaning of her participation in the paid labor force and in domestic labor. In this case, working becomes more important than gender ideology. We did not find a direct relationship between economic dependency and marital satisfaction. Perhaps this is because couples in this sample are dual earners. Both contribute to the economic

well-being of the household and are thus both tied (at least to some degree) to the breadwinner role, minimizing the degree to which each is economically dependent.

Given the complexity of the model, a larger sample size would be desirable. Because of the sample size, we risk failing to see a relationship where there is one.

This study contributes to a relatively new body of literature developing around understanding the context in which the meaning of family work is constructed and fairness negotiated. Our work suggests that predicting marital satisfaction is a complicated business, with men and women responding differently to the same features in the relationship. For example, dissatisfaction with time spent on housework decreases women's marital satisfaction but not men's. Thus, although satisfaction with arrangements in the home is important, women's marital satisfaction is predicated on hours per week spent on housework, whereas this is not true for men. In addition, we note that although emotion work was not linked to emotion-work satisfaction in our model, it does negatively correlate with that measure; the more emotion work both men and women do, the more dissatisfaction with emotion-work arrangements and with the marriage. The causal sequencing here is not clear; perhaps a poor marriage requires a lot of emotion work. In any case, the relationship between domestic-labor measures and marital satisfaction is a complicated process.

NOTE

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