

VIVE LA DIFFERENCE?

EGALITARIANISM, HOUSEWORK, AND SEXUAL
FREQUENCY IN MARRIAGE

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Abstract

Changes in the nature of contemporary marriage have spurred a debate about the consequences of shifts to more egalitarian relationships, and media interest in the debate recently crystallized around a set of claims that men who participated in housework 'got' more sex. However, there is relatively little systematic or representative research that supports the claim that women, in essence, exchange sex for men's participation in housework. Although there are a variety of theoretical reasons to expect that egalitarian marriages are higher quality, other research underscores the ongoing importance of traditional gender roles and gender display in marriage. Using data from Wave II of the National Survey of Families and Households, this research investigates the links between men's participation in core (traditionally female) and non-core (traditionally male) household tasks, gender ideology, and sexual frequency. Results show that both husbands and wives in couples with more traditional housework arrangements report higher sexual frequency. However, this relationship is conditional on their gender ideology, suggesting the importance of gender display rather than marital exchange for sex in marriage.

Introduction

In the U.S., a new narrative is emerging to describe contemporary marriage. Challenging the notion of marriage as an institution ensnared in a “stalled” gender-revolution, this new perspective asserts that today’s marriages are more egalitarian, flexible and fair than those of 30 years ago (Sullivan 2006; Sullivan and Coltrane 2008). In recent years, this theme of convergence between the roles of wife and husband has taken center stage at high-profile conferences on the family, such as those of the Council on Contemporary Families, in policy pieces on marriage and feminism (Gornick 2002; Marshall and Sawhill 2004; Fagan, Rector and Noyes 2003), and in academic work that heralds the demise of the male breadwinner model in the industrialized West (Crompton 1999).

The debate about the nature of today’s marriages – about how much they have changed from traditional models – often boils down to changes in the division of labor (cf. Bianchi et al. 2000). More specifically, it hinges on whether married men’s participation in household work has increased meaningfully. Advocates of the gender-role convergence perspective argue that recognition of change has been lost because scholars typically highlight women’s larger share of household work, but fail to recognize married men’s adjustments in their greater participation in housework and childcare in response to the dramatic rise in wives’ employment and paid labor supply (Sullivan 2006).

Although this debate can resemble a struggle over whether the glass is half-empty or half-full, evidence is accumulating that husbands in the United States are, in fact, doing more unpaid family work, particularly in the realm of childcare, than their counterparts of yesteryear. From the 1960s to the beginning of the 21st century, men's contribution to housework doubled, increasing from about 15 to over 30 percent of the total (Robinson & Godbey 1997; Bianchi et al. 2000; Fisher et al. 2006). Similar trends are evident for industrialized countries throughout the world, where men's proportional contribution to family work (including housework, child care and shopping) increased, on average, from less than one-fifth in 1965 to more than a third by 2003 (Hook 2006).

Accompanying the effort to track secular change in wives’ and husbands’ work roles are efforts to document whether egalitarian practices are “good” for marriage. Interest in the interconnections between role similarity or complementarity, the couple’s cohesiveness, and marital well-being is longstanding in social science (Parsons and Bales 1955; Becker 1981; Glenn 1990), but

seems to have intensified in tandem with the recent claims of work-role convergence (Amato et al. 2003, 2007; Brines and Joyner 1999). Here again, special attention is devoted to the effects of husbands' participation in unpaid family work. For example, research shows that when men do more housework, wives' perceptions of fairness and marital satisfaction tend to rise (Amato et al. 2003; Pedersen-Stevens, Kiger, and Mannon 2005) and couples experience less marital conflict (Coltrane 2000). Other research shows that U.S. couples who have more equal divisions of labor are less likely to divorce than couples where one partner specializes in breadwinning and the other partner specializes in family work (Cooke 2006).

However, few claims about the greater "health" of today's egalitarian marriages have captured more public attention than reports that couples who share housework have more sex. Here again, husbands' contributions to housework seem decisive, the implications of which were recently spun in one headline: "Men: Want More Sex? Do the Laundry!" This claim so captured the popular imagination (or at least, the imagination of reporters) that it led to an Associated Press story subsequently featured online by media giants ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, FOX, as well as smaller sites like the Huffington Post and the China Daily.

Although the notion that egalitarian marriages are "sexier" was widely broadcast following the release of this report in 2008, there in fact remains little empirical support for this view. The claim seems to rest on the unpublished results of a small-scale (N=300) survey and reports of couples in therapy (Chethik 2006, cf. North 2007). Moreover, other research suggests that for all the possible benefits of "peer marriage," couples who achieve the egalitarian ideal in their marriages seem beset by lackluster sex lives, and that this is not explained by a shortage of time (Schwartz 1996).

In this paper, we use nationally representative data to test the claim that among married couples, sharing housework has positive effects on sexual frequency. Drawing from theory and research on the performance of gender in marriage, we explore whether husband's greater contributions to housework spice up a couple's sex life, or whether, instead, sexual frequency increases when husbands and wives spend time doing traditionally masculine or feminine tasks. In addition, to gauge whether the effects of sex-typed housework performance on sexual frequency reflect the enduring relevance of gender display in marriage, we examine whether these effects are

magnified when partners hold more traditional views about gender roles. Our results show that simple claims that husbands who do more housework “get more sex,” or that couples with an egalitarian division of labor benefit from more activity in the bedroom, are misleading, and that the relationships among gender ideology, the household division of labor, and a couple’s sex life are considerably more complex.

Sex in Marriage

Sex in marriage, and what leads to more or less of it, reliably excites the popular imagination.¹ Interest in these questions has a more uneven history in the social sciences. Kinsey’s early attempts to develop a science of the *terra incognita* of human sexual behavior made note of marital intercourse as the “chief medium of sex outlet” for the adults in his samples (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948; Blumer 1948: 522). Moreover, sex (in addition to money and power) was identified as a key “good” around which marriages – indeed all intimate partnerships – were organized in another classic work, *American Couples* (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983).

However, changing family demographics and the related preoccupations of policy have arguably steered attention away from research on sexual frequency in marriage over the last quarter-century. Indeed, several researchers have noted the relative scarcity of work on sex among married and committed couples (Call, Sprecher, and Schwartz 1995, Christopher and Sprecher 2000, Greenblat 1983), despite the emergence during the late 1980s and 1990s of several nationally representative surveys that gather reliable data on respondents’ sexual behavior.

What we do know about sexual frequency in marriage is that older couples report lower sexual frequencies than younger married couples (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983, Brewis and Meyer 2005; Call et al. 1995, Greely 1991; Greenblat 1983). Biological aging is the most common explanation for the decline of sexual frequency with age of couple. Declines in the capacity and desire to engage in sexual intercourse have been attributed to decreased male desire and physical ability, decreased testosterone levels among women, and increased morbidity (Call et al. 1995). Kinsey and

¹ To use the subject matter of this paper as an example, a search for the terms “men,” “housework,” and “sex” on Google returned 635,000 hits in December 2008.

his colleagues' pioneering works (1948, 1953) reported that men's sexual responsiveness peaks at age 17 and gradually declines thereafter. In contrast, women's sexual responsiveness peaks somewhere between their late twenties and middle forties, declining after menopause (Brewis and Meyer 2005; Kinsey et al. 1953). The negative correlation between age and sexual frequency has also been attributed to marital duration and habituation, the latter phenomenon considered largely responsible for the "honeymoon effect" of sharply declining sexual frequency after the early years of marriage (Blumstein & Schwartz 1983, James 1981). However, marital duration has no significant impact after the first year of marriage in models that control for other time-related variables (Call et al. 1995).

Other variables correlated with the frequency of sex in marriage include the presence of children, pregnancy, marital satisfaction, employment, race, income, education, and religion² (Christopher and Sprecher 2000). Not surprisingly, marital satisfaction is the second largest predictor, after age, of sexual frequency (Call et al. 1995). Some opportunity constraints may also matter. The presence of young children is negatively associated with sexual frequency, but sexual frequency does not decline when both partners are employed full-time (Call et al. 1995, Greely 1991). However, shift work is associated with a higher degree of sexual problems and dissatisfaction among married couples (White & Keith 1990), suggesting that some, but not all, opportunity constraints impose costs on a couple's sex life.

Egalitarianism, Marital Satisfaction, and Sexual Frequency

The idea that in marriage, egalitarian work arrangements lead to more sex gains plausibility from recent empirical and theoretical work on what enhances marital quality and satisfaction. Much of this work is motivated by the question of how the secular shift from "traditional" marriages, where men specialize in paid work and women in unpaid work, to more egalitarian forms, where men and women share both paid and unpaid work, has affected marital quality (cf. Glenn 1990, 1993; Rogers and Amato 2000).

Recent studies show that husbands' participation in household labor is often associated with wives' reports of higher marital quality (Amato et al. 2003; Pedersen-Stevens, Kiger, and Mannon

² Call, et al. 1995, finds being Catholic is negatively associated with sex frequency.

2005). Other work (Chethik 2008) appears to draw from this result to explain why husbands' sharing of housework might lead to greater frequency of sex in marriage: wives feel "more supported and happier" in their marriages when their husbands do more chores, and these positive feelings promote more sex as a side benefit. Using similar logic, work examining the link between partners' household effort and "sexual effort" shows a positive though insignificant relationship between the two (van der Rijt and Macy 2006). Theoretical work ranging from the stipulation that a sense of distributive justice in marriage promotes coital frequency (Jasso 1987) to economic models that locate today's gains to marriage in partner similarities that maximize joint consumption rather than joint production (Lam 1988; Lundberg and Pollack 1996) also lend credibility to the idea that an egalitarian division of labor results in a "sexier" marriage.

Of particular interest are the predictions of social exchange theory (Homans 1961; Sprecher 1998; Van der Rijt and Macy 2006). Because spouses (the parties to the exchange) possess different resources, they benefit from exchanging a resource they possess for another scarce resource their partner possesses. Sex, in this view, is a resource that partners might use for exchange. A self-interested view of social exchange suggests that individuals exchange when each party benefits. Thus, partners will "trade" sex for other scarce resources such as time, money, commitment, or other goods when they benefit from doing so (Baumeister and Vohs 2004). Yet while the general condition of mutual-benefit suggests a gender-free venue for exchange, both popular and scholarly understandings see sex as a female, rather than a male resource. Indeed, Baumeister and Vohs (2004) argue compellingly that sex should be seen as a female resource, due to the "principle of least interest" – that if men want sex more than women, they must induce women to engage in sex by offering other benefits. A review of a wide variety of measures of sex drive suggests that men want sex more than women³ (Baumeister, Catanese, and Vohs 2001). Whether greater sexual desire results from biological or cultural factors is immaterial, in that either condition results in women's possession of a scarce resource. In a marital context, this perspective suggests that women use sex as a resource to exchange for men's participation in household labor, or, alternatively, that women withhold sex when

³ To list only a few of the differences in the review, Baumeister and colleagues found that men desired sex more often, were more frequently aroused, initiate sex more frequently, refuse sex less frequently, and have more permissive attitudes. Other evidence on initiation and refusal can be found in Byers and Heinlein (1989).

men do not participate in household labor. Some qualitative evidence supports this view. “Nancy,” in *The Second Shift*, noted, “when Evan refused to carry his load at home... I used sex. I said, ‘Look, Evan, I would not be this exhausted and asexual every night if I didn’t have so much to face very morning’” (Hochschild and Machung 1989:45).

An alternative conceptualization of social exchange and sexuality focuses on the importance of equity in relationships (Sprecher 1998). Rather than emphasizing straightforward exchange, this view emphasizes individuals’ perceptions of equity. When relationships are inequitable, individuals experience distress, leading to lower sexual frequency. While both men’s and women’s experiences of equity are important, men’s greater sexual desire should mean that inequity is less important among men. We thus focus on women’s experiences of inequity. Women perceive inequity in marital relationships under two conditions: when there is an unequal division of household labor and when they hold relatively egalitarian gender ideologies (Greenstein 1996). This perspective therefore predicts that couples in which these conditions held would experience lower sexual frequency than would those with a more equal division of household labor.

Despite differences in the process leading to decisions about sex, both variants of the exchange perspective predict that sexual frequency should, on average, increase when men participate more in household labor. In addition, an equity version of social exchange theory predicts that this association will be particularly strong under conditions when women perceive inequity in the relationship. In the case of household labor, this is more likely to occur when women hold liberal gender ideologies, leading to the prediction that a relationship between men’s participation in housework and sexual frequency should be strongest when women hold liberal gender ideologies.

Sexual Scripts: Doing Gender, Difference, and Desire.

However, there are also compelling reasons to predict a very different relationship between housework division and sexual frequency. First, it is not unambiguously clear that the trend toward egalitarianism in marriage has been accompanied by greater marital satisfaction. In fact, some studies document secular increases in gender egalitarianism alongside declines in some measures of marital

quality, including the frequency of marital interaction (Rogers and Amato 2000, Amato et al. 2007). Research focusing solely on women's participation in paid labor generally shows few differences in marital happiness or marital quality between couples with egalitarian and traditional breadwinning arrangements (Furdyna, Tucker and James 2008, Gong 2007, Schoen, Rogers, and Amato 2006). Others investigating the relationships among egalitarianism, emotion work, and well-being in marriage find that otherwise gender-traditional beliefs and practices are often associated with not only greater marital happiness, but with men's participation in emotion work in the family (Wilcox and Nock 2006).

Second, several perspectives suggest that the *frisson* of heterosexual attraction and intimacy continues to be organized around the enactment of difference or complementarity between the sexes (Goffman 1977; Rich 1982). These arguments are consistent with research showing, for example, that among heterosexual couples in their teens, pairs with a self-rated very masculine boy and self-rated very feminine girl are most likely to have sex, and to have sex sooner than are other romantic pairs (Udry and Chantala 2004). Although these results pertain to young dating couples, Schwartz (1994; 2007) reports that egalitarianism in committed heterosexual relationships is associated with occasional boredom and a "sibling-like" tonality to the relationship that undermines sexual desire. Along with other researchers and clinicians, Schwartz avers that "introducing more distance or difference, rather than connection and similarity, helps to resurrect passion in long-term, stable relationships" (2007: 2).

These observations recommend an alternative conceptualization of heterosexual marriage, one emphasizing the ongoing relevance of gender norms that might override a logic of exchange (Berk 1985; West and Zimmerman 1987; Brines 1994). Drawing on this central insight and on sexual script theory (Gagnon and Simon 1973), we argue that the performance of gender is critically important for sexual activity in marriage. To the extent that masculinity and femininity are central parts of both the household division of labor and sexuality, we expect that households with more traditionally gendered divisions of labor will experience greater sexual frequency. Below, we discuss sexual script theory as well as how gender display in housework should be linked to sexual frequency.

Sexual script theory suggests that, prior to any possibility of intercourse, there must exist a script which defines a situation as potentially sexual (Gagnon and Simon 1973). Sexual scripts may

specify when, why, and how individuals should act sexually (Laumann et al. 1994, p. 6). As a simple example of a script, intercourse typically takes place in a series of relatively tightly scripted stages, typically moving from kissing to fondling and then to coitus (Gagnon and Simon 1973). Research on sexual scripts has often focused on how adolescents learn and use sexual scripts and gender differences in the scripts learned (Kimmel 2005).

How might sexual scripts work in marriage? While there is relatively little theory surrounding sexual scripting in marriage – other than regarding the sources of decline in sexual frequency with increasing marital duration – we suggest that sexual desire in marriage is often tightly linked to the expressive enactment of masculinity and femininity. In marriage, a central way in which people engage in this form of gender display is through household labor (Berk 1985; Brines 1994; South and Spitze 1994; Greenstein 2000; Bittman et al. 2003). Thus, the extent to which husbands and wives do housework in ways that signify masculinity or femininity should be linked to sexual frequency because these activities are part of scripts linking gender performance to expressions of difference in the context of heterosexual desire.

Of course, a script that prescribes a traditional performance of masculinity or femininity is not an immutable feature of the social environment. Instead, it reflects expectations about gender that are specific to a particular time and place. For many, these expectations have already begun to wane, as they subscribe to less traditional beliefs about gender roles. For those holding egalitarian beliefs, traditional enactments of gender through housework should be less tightly linked to sex than for individuals who subscribe to more traditional beliefs about gender. In contrast, for those with less egalitarian – and more conservative – beliefs about the organization of gender and the family, these images should still be particularly salient and traditional gender performances should be tightly linked to sexual desire and frequency.

How does this perspective on sexual scripts translate into testable hypotheses about the link between gender role beliefs, the division of housework, and sexual frequency in marriage? In short, this perspective suggests that compared to other married couples, those who come closer to following a strict practice of egalitarianism may actually have *less* active sex lives. It also suggests that, like our earlier arguments drawing from exchange theory, the relationship between housework and sexual

frequency is conditional on gender role beliefs. However, unlike those earlier predictions, this perspective on sexual scripts -- and the enactment of difference and desire through gender -- suggests that housework and sex will be *less* highly correlated for couples who espouse egalitarian or non-traditional gender role beliefs.

Data and Measures

To investigate the relationships among sexual frequency, marital satisfaction, and the division of household labor, we use data from Wave II of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) (Sweet and Bumpass 1996). While the data are somewhat older than might be desired for generalizability to the present day (interviews occurred from 1992 to 1994), to our knowledge, it is the only data set with detailed measures of both sexual frequency and actual participation in household labor.⁴ In this analysis, we present results separately for men and for women in the NSFH, using self-reports of sexual frequency and the division of household labor. On average, men's and women's reports of both sexual frequency and their share of time spent in household labor often differ, so we analyze their reports separately in order to avoid introducing bias which could result from relying solely on reports from men or women. There are two types of respondents in the NSFH: primary respondents for a household and their spouses. In order to take full advantage of the available data, we rely on both the primary respondents and the spouses in the NSFH. Thus, our analysis using men's reports relies on both the male primary respondents and the male spouses of the female primary respondents. Similarly, our analysis using women's reports relies on both female primary respondents and female spouses of male primary respondents.⁵

Reports of household labor in the NSFH are self-reports of time spent in the last week on nine distinct tasks: preparing meals, washing dishes, cleaning house, outdoor tasks, shopping, washing and ironing, paying bills, auto maintenance, and driving. Following the schema laid out by Bianchi and

⁴ Other data sets typically contain measures of satisfaction with household labor and sex life but not measures of sexual frequency or measures of the actual amount of time spent on household labor.

⁵ One alternative strategy would be to combine men's and women's reports and consider them as different reports of the same underlying phenomenon. However, because primary respondents and their spouses may respond to the survey at different points in time, we worry that much of the difference in their responses may simply be due to the fact that they are reporting on different time periods.

colleagues (2000), we separate these into core and non-core tasks, which map closely to female and male tasks, respectively. We calculate share measures using respondents' reports of their own and their spouses' time spent on these activities. We rely only on self-reports of individuals' and their spouses' labor because husbands and wives do not complete the survey at the same time, so their reports may diverge because of differences in the labor performed during the reported week. Because a small number of respondents report extremely high hours on certain activities, we recode these values to the 95th percentile of the distribution. In addition, there are substantial amounts of missing data for the reports on individual activities. Listwise deletion is not a useful strategy in this case because it would remove a substantial amount of data, but mean imputation for missing values would result in smaller variances and lower standard errors. We thus rely on multiple imputation to deal with missing values for all variables. Precise details of the multiple imputation methods are included in Appendix 1.

Table 1 shows the hours spent by men and women and the ratio of men's to women's time for core and non-core household labor using women's and men's reports. As other research has demonstrated (Bianchi et al. 2000), women do the majority of core tasks which need to be done on a daily basis, while men do relatively more non-core tasks. Similar to other research, we also find that men's and women's reports diverge slightly: men report spending more time on both core and non-core activities than their wives report for them, and they report that women spend less time on core housework but more time on non-core housework than women report for themselves.

[Table 1 about Here]

Our measure of sexual frequency is a self-reported measure in which respondents were asked, "About how often did you and your husband/wife have sex during the past month?" As with measures of housework, we recode values of sexual frequency past the 95th percentile to values at the 95th percentile and impute values for all cases with missing data, including cases where respondents did not know or refused to answer. Table 2 shows descriptive statistics for this measure of sexual frequency as well as a number of other variables included in the analysis. As Table 2 shows, women on average reported having sex with their spouses slightly over five and a half times in the last month,

while men report lower frequencies, at about .4 times fewer over the last month. While it may appear surprising that husbands' reports are lower than their wives', existing research which compares husbands' and wives' reports in the U.S. context has found similar results (Clark and Wallin 1964; Kinsey et al. 1948; Terman 1938).

[Table 2 about Here]

We construct a scale of traditional gender and family ideology by summing together seven items. Respondents are asked whether they agree or disagree with a set of statements, where a value of one represents strong agreement and a value of five represents strong disagreement. In all cases, we have coded responses so that higher numbers represent more traditional beliefs. The statements include, "It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family," "It is all right for children under three years old to be cared for all day in a day care center," "Marriage is a lifetime relationship and should never be ended except under extreme circumstances," "Preschool children are likely to suffer if their mother is employed," "The Bible is God's word and everything happened or will happen exactly as it says," "It is all right for a couple with an unhappy marriage to get a divorce when their youngest child is under age 5," and "A husband whose wife is working full-time should spend just as many hours doing housework as his wife." The scale is relatively consistent, as it has a Cronbach's alpha of .64 for women and .6 for men. Values for men are slightly higher than for women, indicating that men's attitudes are slightly more traditional than women's.

We also include a variety of measures of family structure and stage in the life cycle, as these may be important for both sexual frequency and the division of household labor. First, we include a measure of recent marriage – within the last year – to control for the possibility of a "honeymoon" effect in recent marriages leading to greater sexual frequency, although only three percent of our sample was married within the last year. We also include measures of the wife's and husband's age, as age is often an important predictor of sexual frequency and is related to the division of household labor. Finally, we include measures of the number of children living in the household, as well as a

measure of the number of children under the age of two. For these measures, the values in Table 2 are the same for men and women. This is because they are either based on self-reports from both spouses, as with wife's age and husband's age, or only on the primary respondents' responses, as in the case of the number of children.

We included four measures of employment to gauge husbands and wives' time availability for household labor and sex, and to assess their contributions to the economic well-being of the household. Two are income related, measuring the share of the income provided by the wife and total household income. In addition, we include measures of the number of hours spent by husbands and by wives in paid work. As a proxy for differences in schedules or work that requires travel and as a general control for availability, we also include a measure of time spent alone with the spouse over the past month. Respondents answered the question, "During the past month, about how often did you and your husband/wife spend time alone with each other, talking, or sharing an activity?" They were given six options for a response: never, about once a month, two or three times a month, about once a week, two or three times a week, and almost every day. We collapse these six categories to four. Interestingly, nearly half of respondents said that they spent time alone with their spouse once a week or less over the past month.

In addition, we include controls for education and religious membership. We measure education using a series of dichotomous variables measuring completion of high school, attendance of some college, and completion of a college degree using husbands' and wives' self-reports. We also include dichotomous variables measuring whether the primary respondent is Baptist, Catholic, Jewish, or identifies as a member of some other religion. Finally, we include measures of both wife's and husband's self-rated health. Health is reported using a five point scale, where higher values represent greater perceived health.

Methods

Because sexual frequency is distributed as a count variable, the use of ordinary least squares is inappropriate. Poisson regression is perhaps the most popular method for modeling count data. Yet because sexual frequency is also overdispersed – that is, the distribution of sexual frequency violates

the assumption in poisson regression that the mean and variance are equal – we use negative binomial to assess the links between men’s and women’s participation in different types of household labor and sexual frequency. Negative binomial regression models the variability in the process generating the count while relaxing the assumption that the variance of the distribution is equal to the mean (Mwalili, Lesaffre and Declerck 2008).

The model takes the form:

$$\log(\lambda_i) = x_i\beta, \quad \text{var}(Y) = \lambda\tau,$$

where $\lambda_i = E(Y)$, Y is sexual frequency, β is a set of coefficients produced by the model including an intercept, x_i is the set of independent variables, and τ is a shape parameter modifying the variance of Y .

Because we expect the relationship between sexual frequency and men’s participation in housework to differ by gender ideology and to ensure that we do not obscure any differences by gender, we analyze the determinants of sexual frequency in six different regressions. We separate individuals into three groups by gender – those with ideology scores below the 25th percentile representing those with the most egalitarian gender ideologies, those with ideology scores above the 75th percentile representing those with the most traditional gender ideologies, and between the 25th and 75th percentiles representing a set of individuals with intermediate gender ideologies. Below, we present results for these six different regression models, focusing mostly on coefficients for men’s share of core and non-core household labor.

Determinants of Sexual Frequency

Table 3 shows results from the regression models described above. This model contains all of the independent variables discussed, but we show coefficients only for the main terms of interest – husbands’ share of core and non-core household labor – for both husbands’ and wives’ reports. We also present the full set of results for these models in Appendices 2 and 3. For purposes of brevity, we limit discussion of these results in the main text. Briefly, our findings are similar to much previous research on sexual frequency: wife's self-rated health, wife's age, the presence of young children in the

home, and the amount of time that the respondent reported spending alone with their spouse were all significant predictors of sexual frequency. The direction and significance of these coefficients are similar across husbands' and wives' reports and, while there is some variability by respondents' gender ideology, the results across these models are generally similar.

Our main question of interest, however, is whether and how men's participation in household labor is linked to sexual frequency, and in particular whether this effect varies by respondents' gender ideology. The results presented below suggest that the link between men's participation in household labor and sexual frequency is governed by enactments of masculinity that inscribe, on the one hand, appropriately gendered performances of household labor, and, on the other, sexual scripts that organize heterosexual desire. Moreover, we find that the nature of this relationship varies depending on the gender ideology of the respondent. As Table 3 shows, there is substantial variability in the size (and even direction) of coefficients for men's participation on both core and non-core household labor by respondents' gender ideology - regardless of whether respondents are male or female. The coefficient for men's share of core housework is negative in all cases, though it fails to reach significance in the reports of husbands and wives who hold the most egalitarian beliefs. For their counterparts who embrace more traditional attitudes, however, coefficients are negative and significant. These effects are also substantively large: a shift from a household in which husbands did no core household labor to one in which they did all core household labor would be accompanied by a decline in the predicted value of sexual frequency of nearly 1.7 times per month.⁶ Given that the mean sexual frequency is around 5 times per month, this represents a substantial decrease. More traditional divisions of household labor are also conditionally associated with higher sexual frequency for men's share of non-core household labor. For respondents with traditional gender ideologies, sexual frequency is higher when men do more (traditionally male) non-core housework. Among traditionalists, the size of the coefficient for men's non-core housework is similar, although in the

⁶ This value was calculated by setting values for other independent variables to the mean for husbands with intermediate gender ideologies.

opposite direction, to the coefficient for men's share of core housework.⁷ However, among other groups, there is relatively little effect of men's participation in household labor.

[Table 3 about Here]

The other important finding from Table 3 is the variability in the size and significance of these links by the gender ideology of the respondent. While there are differences between the patterns for men's share of core housework and men's share of non-core housework, in both cases we find that a more traditional division of household labor – in which men do more non-core housework and less core housework – has less of an impact on sexual frequency for respondents with more egalitarian gender ideologies. The link between men's share of non-core housework and sexual frequency is very close to zero and non-significant in men's reports for both those with liberal and intermediate gender ideologies, while it is strongly positive and significant among those with the most traditional gender role beliefs. The results are similar for women, although the distinction between those with egalitarian and traditional gender ideologies is less significant. Additionally, the same pattern holds for reports about men's share of core housework.

Overall, the pattern of results suggests the existence of a gendered set of sexual scripts, in which the traditional performance and display of gender is important for the creation and performance of sexual desire and activity. Among those who endorse a more traditionally gendered division of labor, men's performance of "men's" or "women's" chores is indeed linked to sexual frequency, while among those with more egalitarian views, the link is much weaker. While we are quite confident about the broader set of findings that men's participation in core housework is associated with lower sexual frequency but men's participation in non-core housework is associated with higher sexual frequency,⁸ we suggest some caution in the interpretation of differences in the effects of men's

⁷ For this group, the correlation between men's share of core and non-core household labor is .2, so while there is some offsetting effect of the two, the correlation is not large enough to create a true offset.

⁸ In models in which we do not separate respondents by gender ideology, we find that men's share of core housework is significantly negatively related to sexual frequency in both women's and men's reports. While men's share of non-cores housework is not significantly related to sexual frequency in pooled models, the differences between coefficients across groups are significant among men's reports. We have also tried other

participation in core and non-core housework by the gender ideology of the respondents. The significance tests we present are for the null hypothesis that coefficients are different from zero, rather than that coefficients are different from each other. Indeed, 95% confidence intervals for coefficients would overlap slightly in these cases, with the exception of results from men's reports for their participation in non-core household labor.

Nonetheless, we feel the pattern suggests the conditional importance of men's and women's performances in the arena of household labor as expressions of masculine and feminine “difference” that mobilize desire in heterosexual relationships. Because the sexual salience of married men’s housework is elastic and depends on the beliefs respondents hold about gender and family roles, our findings are consistent with nonessentialist views of gender and sexuality that see both as reflexive and responsive to cultural templates rather than driven entirely by “nature” or biology. Were our findings to show only that couples with husbands who do traditionally masculine chores have more sex, it might constitute support for the idea that men in these marriages are naturally more masculine and virile, in the sense that they are predisposed to excel at “men’s” work and to have a high sex drive. But our findings are not unconditional in ways that support this alternative interpretation. In addition, our failure to find significant links between men's participation in household labor and sexual frequency among those with more egalitarian gender ideologies is itself a finding that supports a cultural interpretation of the links between egalitarianism, housework, and marital sex. We discuss this interpretation in greater detail below.

Conclusion

We began this paper by noting the existence of a debate over how much American marriage has changed and what the consequences of any changes have been for today’s husbands and wives. While it seems clear that the contemporary landscape of American marriage is quite different than that of fifty or even twenty years ago, it has been more difficult to offer a clear interpretation of how a shift towards egalitarianism in marriage has impacted married women and men. In this paper, we focused on the determinants of sexual frequency. Sexual frequency in marriage has received little

modeling strategies, including ordinary least squares regression, alternative treatments of missing data, and zero-inflated models, all of which produce similar results.

recent attention, but it is an important correlate of marital satisfaction (Elliott and Umberson 2008), and is one of the most important determinants of individual happiness (Blanchflower and Oswald 2004).

Following up on the widely-publicized claim that by doing more housework, husbands in more egalitarian marriages “got more sex,” we sought to investigate the links between men’s participation in different types of housework, gender ideology, and sexual frequency using nationally representative data. Our findings suggest the importance of gender display for sexual frequency, as couples where men participate more in core tasks – work done typically by women – report lower sexual frequency. Similarly, couples where men participate more in non-core, “traditionally masculine” tasks report higher sexual frequency, suggesting the importance of participation in appropriately gender-typed activities. As an additional test, we examined how gender ideology modified this relationship. If the link between the doing of housework and the frequency of sex is sensitive to situational conditions that elicit and support traditional modes of gender display, this relationship should be stronger for those with more traditional ideologies than for those with more egalitarian ideologies. We found results which were consistent with this expectation: participation in traditionally gendered types of housework had stronger effects on sexual frequency among those with traditional ideologies.

Because the bulk of housework done in American households involves the traditionally female or “core” tasks of cooking, cleaning, and laundry (Bianchi et al. 2000), our findings stand in marked contrast to the published claim motivating this paper: that husbands who do more housework “get” more sex. At the same time, one can understand how this claim might have gained currency. To the casual observer, husbands who do more of the traditionally masculine tasks in a marriage may in fact populate the mental category of “husbands who do more to help around the house.” While men who do more yard work, car maintenance, exterior painting, and the like might make sizable contributions to the division of labor at home, to characterize these efforts as emblematic of egalitarianism is misleading. Moreover, these housework contributions are linked to greater sexual frequency in marriage primarily among those who hold traditional gender-role beliefs. At the very

least, our results are difficult to reconcile with the idea that one benefit of gender “role convergence” in marriage is more frequent sex.

More generally, our results indicate the continuing but conditional importance of traditional modes of “doing gender” in contemporary marriage. On average, traditional divisions of household labor are associated with greater sexual frequency. Even among those holding quite egalitarian ideologies – at the 90th percentile of the distribution – dividing the housework in traditional ways is linked to more sex, although the size of the effect is quite modest.

Perhaps it is unsurprising that the performance of a traditionally gendered division of household labor leads to greater sexual frequency among those with traditional gender ideologies. By holding these ideologies, these wives and husbands place a greater value on traditional performances. It is perhaps more remarkable that among those with egalitarian ideologies, men’s participation in housework has comparatively little effect on sexual frequency regardless of the type of household tasks men do, since these households should value men’s participation in housework. One explanation for the failure of men’s domestic labor to increase sexual frequency among those with nontraditional beliefs may be that gender egalitarianism in these relationships is tied to an attempt to decouple intimacy from the performance of both paid and unpaid labor. That is, rather than women exchanging sex for men’s participation in housework, in egalitarian marriages, sex *and* the doing of housework become less tethered to culturally-coded, or at least gendered, sets of bargains in the household. In fact, it is precisely this decoupling of behavior from gender codes, or what Goffman (1977) refers to as cultural “warrants” of gender accountability, that might embody if not define egalitarianism as it is practiced in contemporary marriage.

Appendix 1: Details of Multiple Imputation for Sexual Frequency.

In the course of this paper, we faced several relatively unique challenges in constructing imputed data sets for use with multiple imputation techniques. The first challenge we faced was that we needed to impute missing data for housework items which were to be combined to produce estimates of husbands' and wives' total time spent in different kinds of housework, and we were primarily interested in the relationship between these composite measures and sexual frequency rather than the individual measures. Yet to create the measures, we needed imputed values for each of the types of housework. We thus needed to first impute values for the individual variables before combining them to help impute values for other missing data.

The second challenge was that we wanted to impute values for a variable – sexual frequency – which is not normally distributed. Existing research suggests that using multivariate normal methods to impute missing data and then rounding to maintain categorical or binary variables creates biased estimates (Horton, Lipsitz, and Parzen 2003; SAS Institute 2005). However, we wished to preserve the integer format of the variable since negative binomial regression seemed by far the most appropriate method of analyzing this overdistributed count variable. However, in the software we used (SAS 9.2), nonlinear imputation is only available when there is a monotone pattern of missingness. Monotone missingness exists when there is missing data on only one variable, a condition which did not naturally exist in the NSFH data.

We thus proceeded with imputation in several steps. First, as noted above, we recode variables to eliminate extreme values, re-coding the housework and sexual frequencies beyond the 95th percentile of their respective distributions to values at the 95th percentile of the distribution. We generate 20 imputed data sets using only information on hours of housework spent in each of the tasks. These, and all other data sets, are generated separately for men and women in this data set. We then create summary measures of men's and women's participation in core and non-core housework tasks and impute values for all other missing variables with the exception of sexual frequency within each of these 20 data sets, including separate imputations for each of the variables which make up the composite ideology measure. Using these data sets, we create the final versions of all variables involved in the regression analyses presented here and use these variables to impute missing values for sexual frequency. Sexual frequency is imputed using ordinal logistic regression with all variables in the regression model used as predictors. For all of the imputations, we use the seed "98195" (the zip code of the institution where the research began) as the random seed.

Appendix 2: Coefficient estimates from negative binomial regressions using husbands' reports from the NSFH. Estimates show the effects of husband's share of housework and other variables on sexual frequency.

	Husband's Gender Ideology								
	Egalitarian		Intermediate		Traditional				
	Coeff.	SE	Coeff.	SE	Coeff.	SE			
Husband's share of core housework	-.29	.20	-.41	.11	***	-.37	.19	*	
Husband's share of non-core housework	-.05	.18	.02	.10		.42	.15	**	
Total hours spent on core housework	.00	.00	.00	.00		.00	.00	*	
Total hours spent on non-core housework	.00	.00	.00	.00		.00	.00		
Recently married	-.03	.12	.00	.10		.04	.25		
Share of Income from Wife	.08	.10	.06	.07		-.03	.10		
Total Household Income	.00	.00	.00	.00		.00	.00		
Wife's Age	-.03	.01	***	-.02	.00	***	-.03	.01	***
Husband's Age	-.01	.01		-.02	.00	***	-.01	.01	*
Education									
Did not Complete High School	.13	.13		.06	.06		.15	.10	
High School Graduate	.22	.08	**	.14	.05	**	.15	.08	
Completed Some College	.12	.07		.13	.05	**	.08	.08	
College Degree (reference category)									
Religion									
No Religion (reference category)									
Baptist	.11	.11		-.01	.08		-.21	.14	
Catholic	.01	.09		-.12	.07		-.21	.15	
Jewish	.26	.14		.03	.17		.34	.32	
Other Religion	.05	.08		-.07	.07		-.24	.14	
Wife's Self-Rated Health	.05	.04		.06	.02	*	.06	.04	
Husband's Self-Rated Health	.09	.04	*	.10	.02	***	.05	.03	
Wife's Hours in Paid Work	.00	.00		.00	.00		.00	.00	
Husband's Hours in Paid Work	.00	.00		.00	.00		.00	.00	
# of children age 2 to 6 in household	-.03	.07		-.06	.04		-.09	.05	
# of children age 6 to 13 in Household	.07	.04		.06	.02	**	.03	.03	
# of Children <2 in Household	-.25	.07	***	-.14	.04	***	-.24	.07	***
How often Spent Time Alone with Spouse in Past Month									
Never (reference category)									
Once a Month to Once a Week	.83	.29	**	.27	.11	*	.38	.19	
Two or Three Times a Week	1.09	.29	***	.52	.12	***	.53	.20	**
Almost Every Day	1.27	.29	***	.65	.12	***	.70	.19	***
Intercept	1.36	.44	**	1.95	.22	***	2.13	.35	***
τ	.46		***	.55		***	.43		***
n	982			3283			1066		

Note: Data shown are regression coefficients. *:p<.05, **:p<.01, ***:p<.001, two-tailed tests.

Appendix 3: Coefficient estimates from negative binomial regressions using wives' reports from the NSFH. Estimates show the effects of husband's share of housework and other variables on sexual frequency.

	Egalitarian		Wife's Gender Ideology			Traditional			
	Coeff.	SE	Coeff.	SE		Coeff.	SE		
Husband's share of core housework	-.17	.17	-.51	.11	***	-.41	.17	*	
Husband's share of non-core housework	.21	.17	.16	.10		.31	.15	*	
Total hours spent on core housework	.00	.00	.00	.00		.00	.00	*	
Total hours spent on non-core housework	.00	.00	.01	.00	**	.00	.00		
Recently married	-.01	.13	-.17	.10		-.16	.23		
Share of Income from Wife	.00	.11	.07	.07		-.05	.10		
Total Household Income	.00	.65	.00	.68		.00	1.14		
Wife's Age	-.03	.01	***	-.02	.00	***	-.02	.01	**
Husband's Age	-.01	.01		-.01	.00	**	-.02	.01	***
Education									
Did not Complete High School	.13	.15		.04	.07		.25	.10	*
High School Graduate	.09	.08		.11	.05	*	.14	.08	
Completed Some College	.11	.07		.06	.05		.15	.09	
College Degree (reference category)									
Religion									
No Religion (reference category)									
Baptist	.17	.12		-.04	.07		.00	.14	
Catholic	-.02	.09		-.08	.07		-.13	.14	
Jewish	.01	.14		.10	.15		-.10	.43	
Other Religion	.00	.09		-.05	.06		-.05	.13	
Wife's Self-Rated Health	.11	.04	**	.08	.02	***	.14	.03	***
Husband's Self-Rated Health	.04	.04		.05	.02	*	.06	.04	
Wife's Hours in Paid Work	.00	.00		.00	.00		.00	.00	
Husband's Hours in Paid Work	.00	.00		.00	.00		.00	.00	
# of children age 2 to 6 in household	.02	.06		-.01	.04		.02	.06	
# of children age 6 to 13 in Household	.11	.04	**	.09	.02	***	.05	.03	
# of Children <2 in Household	-.26	.07	***	-.13	.04	**	-.22	.06	***
How often Spent Time Alone with Spouse in Past Month									
Never (reference category)									
Once a Month to Once a Week	.15	.18		.49	.10	***	.38	.16	*
Two or Three Times a Week	.44	.18	*	.70	.11	***	.67	.17	***
Almost Every Day	.63	.18	***	.84	.10	***	.74	.17	***
Intercept	1.82	.34	***	1.70	.21	***	1.52	.33	***
τ		.51	***		.52	***		.46	***
n	1130		3030			1193			

Note: Data shown are regression coefficients. *:p<.05, **:p<.01, ***:p<.001, two-tailed tests.

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Table 1: Wives' and Husbands' Time Spent on Core and Non-Core Household Labor, and Husbands' Share of Household Labor from Multiply-Imputed Data.

Time Spent on ...	Report of...	Wives' Time	Husbands' Time	Husbands' Share of Work
Core Labor	Wife	27.8	6.9	19.8
	Husband	26.7	7.9	22.9
Non-Core Labor	Wife	8.4	9.4	52.8
	Husband	9.1	11.1	54.9

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Sexual Frequency and other Couple Characteristics.

Variable	Husbands' reports			Wives' reports		
	N	Mean	S.D	N	Mean	S.D.
Sexual Intercourse with Spouse in Last Month	4516	5.12	4.51	4505	5.54	4.90
Traditional Gender Ideology Scale	5176	22.99	4.16	5185	22.09	4.49
Recently Married	5416	.03	.17	5416	.03	.17
Share of Income from Wife	5304	.31	.33	5304	.31	.33
Total Household Income	5393	37.99	36.98	5393	37.99	36.98
Wife's Age	5415	43.54	13.76	5415	43.54	13.76
Husband's Age	5415	46.02	14.21	5415	46.02	14.21
Education						
Did not Complete High School	5392	.17	.38	5398	.15	.35
High School Graduate	5392	.33	.47	5398	.37	.48
Completed Some College	5392	.23	.42	5398	.26	.44
College Degree	5392	.26	.44	5398	.22	.42
Religion						
No Religion	5418	.08	.27	5418	.08	.27
Baptist	5418	.20	.40	5418	.20	.40
Catholic	5418	.25	.43	5418	.25	.43
Jewish	5418	.02	.14	5418	.02	.14
Other Religion	5418	.45	.50	5418	.45	.50
Wife's Self-Rated Health	5293	3.97	.82	5293	3.97	.82
Husband's Self-Rated Health	5278	3.95	.82	5278	3.95	.82
Wife's Hours in Paid Work	5407	21.23	20.56	5407	21.23	20.56
Husband's Hours in Paid Work	5402	34.96	23.00	5402	34.96	23.00
# of children age 2 to 6 in household	5418	.21	.47	5418	.21	.47
# of children age 6 to 13 in Household	5418	.47	.78	5418	.47	.78
# of Children <2 in Household	5418	.18	.44	5418	.18	.44
How often Spent Time Alone with Spouse in Past Month						
Never	4895	.02	.15	4906	.03	.18
Between Once a Month and Once a Week	4895	.36	.48	4906	.35	.48
Two or Three Times a Week	4895	.21	.40	4906	.19	.39
Almost Every Day	4895	.35	.48	4906	.42	.49

Table 3: Effects of husbands' share of core and non-core housework on sexual frequency, as reported by husband and wife and by gender ideology. Gender ideology is reported by the same individual as reports of sexual frequency and the division of household labor.

		Gender Ideology		
		Egalitarian	Intermediate	Traditional
Men's share of core housework	Report of Wife	-0.17	-0.51 ***	-0.41 *
	Husband	-0.29	-0.41 ***	-0.37 *
Men's share of non-core housework	Wife	0.21	0.16	0.31 *
	Husband	-0.05	0.02	0.42 **

Note: Data shown are regression coefficients. *:p<.05, **:p<.01, ***:p<.001, two-tailed tests.

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