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Perceived Equity in the Gendered Division of Household Labor

Despite huge imbalances in the division of housework between women and men, previous studies have found perceptions of equity on the part of women to be much more frequent than feelings of injustice. Taking a comparative perspective on the basis of International Social Survey Program (ISSP) 2002 data (N = 8,556), we find that, on the individual level, the explanatory frameworks that have been found to influence the actual inequality of household division of labor (time availability, resource dependence, and gender ideology) contribute to the explanation of perceptions of equity, in that they interact with the inequality of the household division of labor. On the country level, the gender-wage ratio and the average level of inequality are important predictors.

In recent decades, labor-force participation of women has considerably increased in most industrialized societies and so has the proportion of dual-earner households. Nevertheless, in all industrialized countries, the household division of labor remains unbalanced and gender dependent (Orloff, 2002), and women are still left with the major responsibility for housework and child care. Though the amount of time women invest in housework has declined in recent decades, the increase in time spent by men on household chores has only partially offset this reduction (Coltrane, 2000; Gershuny & Sullivan, 2003) except for highly educated professionals (Klumb, Hoppmann, & Staats, 2006). Comparative studies have consistently found that women perform the lion's share of housework but that there are also country differences in the amount of time invested in housework and in gender segregation of household chores (Stier & Lewin-Epstein, 2007).

Despite the huge imbalances in the distribution of household labor, scholars have been surprised by the relatively low prevalence of perceptions of injustice on the part of women. Following a review of the literature, Mikula (1998) concluded that only 20% – 30% of women regard the existing division of household labor as unjust. Other authors find similar distributions (DeMaris & Longmore, 1996; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994). It is often expected that the actual inequality in the division of household labor should determine

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feelings of equity or inequity. This ignores, however, the fact that inequality might mean different things to different people.

There is a dearth of internationally comparative studies on issues of perceived equity in the division of household labor. Existing studies are restricted to special populations of women and to a comparison of only a few countries. Some studies restrict the analyzed population to married couples, dual-earner couples, or even to couples in which both partners have full-time jobs. Although in all countries housework is unequally distributed by gender, it is unclear whether women in different countries evaluate the household division of labor in the same way. Moreover, identification of factors at the macro level that may explain variation in the perception of equity and variation in the effects of individual-level variables is nearly impossible when studying only a few countries. A central purpose of the present study is, therefore, to provide such an analysis using the 2002 International Social Survey Program (ISSP) data. To the best of our knowledge, the only comparative analysis using ISSP 2002 data on equity perceptions is by Amâncio (2007) which, however, gives mainly a descriptive overview.

This paper aims to make two main contributions in accounting for variation in women's perceived equity: First we will suggest going back to the three approaches that have commonly been used in the study of household division of labor—time availability, resource dependence, and gender ideology—and argue that these factors might also serve as “legitimizing principles” that shape the perceptions of fairness. These legitimizing principles are assumed to work in interaction with the actual inequality of the household division of labor, and just analyzing the main effects would lead to biased results. Inequality might appear legitimate to women—at least under certain conditions explicated below—if they are only marginally involved in the labor market (high time availability) and strongly dependent on their partners' income (high resource dependence). Also if they adhere to a traditional gender ideology, they might accept an unequal division of household labor. Our approach would also explain why the results of studies investigating the effect of gender ideology on equity perceptions have been mixed. Some did find such an effect (Greenstein, 1996; Layte, 1998), whereas others did not or found only a very small one (Blair & Johnson, 1992; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994).

Second, we will proceed to an intercultural design in order to investigate whether individual differences in the perceptions of equity depend on specific country-level contexts. We focus mainly on the general level of gender inequality and argue that, in more egalitarian environments, inequalities within the family are less likely to be tolerated. Accordingly, we expect that greater gender equality will not only (negatively) affect the perception of fairness, but also mediate the ways in which the actual housework inequality is interpreted by individuals to be fair or unfair. We also expect the context to provide norms of behaviors and standards of comparison against which individuals evaluate their own familial arrangements.

LEGITIMIZING BELIEFS

Three approaches have commonly been used in the study of household division of labor—time availability, resource dependence, and gender ideology. We argue that these factors also serve as “legitimizing principles” that shape the perceptions of equity in family and household. The application of the time availability and resource dependence approaches to equity considerations can be related to equity theory (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Fairness is a consequence of equal ratios of input and output of both partners. Although equity theory makes no predictions which kind of input or output enters into the calculations of the individuals, time spent in market activities is usually treated as a prominent input (which relates to the time availability approach) and income earned as an output variable (which relates to resource dependence theory).

According to the *time availability* approach, spouses who allocate more of their time to market work reduce their participation in housework. In line with this argument, women's labor market employment has been found to influence the time they devote to housework (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Kalleberg & Rosenfeld, 1990), and in some cases, also the participation of men in household chores (Davis & Greenstein, 2004; Lewin-Epstein, Stier, & Braun, 2006). Several processes are relevant here: As market employment restricts the time available for household work, the standards might be reduced (Bianchi et al.) or some household work might be delegated to other household members or outsourced (Lewin-Epstein et al.). The corresponding legitimizing

belief would be that individuals who have less of their time already absorbed by labor market participation should do a larger share of household work. Equity theory would predict that an unequal division of household labor would be regarded as fair by women if their partners compensate for it, for instance by longer working hours. Time availability can assume such a legitimizing function only if the decision regarding how much time each spouse invests in market work was consensual in the first place. On the contrary, if the man deliberately works long hours and forces the woman to stay at home, this would not apply. Therefore, time availability is an incomplete legitimizing principle.

Resource dependence theory focuses on spouses' relative power, which derives from their access to own resources (often defined as income or education). Women's access to money of their own gives them alternatives outside of marriage and, therefore, greater bargaining power (Brines, 1994; Bittman, England, Sayer, Folbre, & Natheson, 2003). Fewer alternatives to marriage and less economic resources have been found to enhance fairness judgments among women (Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994). The corresponding legitimizing belief would be that individuals who (are able to) contribute less to the household income should assume a larger share of household work. The legitimizing role of resource dependence might be limited, however, because in intimate relationships any trade-off between earning potential and hours spent on housework might be regarded as unacceptable.

Finally, the *gender ideology* hypothesis holds that women subscribing to a nontraditional gender ideology will try to achieve a more egalitarian division of labor in their households and they will be more successful in achieving this than more traditional women. Yet gender ideology should also have an impact on the perception of equity in that it interacts with the actual inequality. Traditional women are likely to accept an imbalanced division of household labor as an integral part of a proper woman's role, irrespective of the amount of their labor market employment and even if it leaves them alone with the household work. For them, an unequal division of labor is something that they are accustomed to by their own socialization, which matches their normative standards and which they therefore regard as legitimate (Lavee & Katz, 2002). At the opposite end of the gender-ideology scale, however, nontraditional

women would reject any arrangement that deviates from an equal division of household labor.

THE "ELEVATOR EFFECT"

Inequality of the division of housework can exist irrespective of the total amount women devote to this activity. Yet, the question remains whether inequity is perceived even with very low absolute amounts of household labor. In addition, outsourcing of household work usually done by a woman, such as doing the laundry and cleaning, to third parties might demonstrate her partner's readiness to earmark financial resources to ease her burden. Thus, the lower the total amount of work that is performed in the household and the more of it is outsourced, the more equity might be perceived, irrespective of the actual division of housework between spouses. This is analogous to the "elevator effect" (Beck, 1992) used to explain acceptance of income inequality by less privileged social classes as long as the overall welfare level is high or increasing. To allow for this possibility we will introduce measures of the absolute amount of work a woman performs and of the existence of household helpers for predominantly "female" tasks into our analysis.

CROSS-NATIONAL ANALYSIS

Although in all countries housework is still gendered, there is a considerable variation in the extent to which men participate in housework (Hook, 2005; Stier & Lewin-Epstein, 2007). Because inequality in the division of housework is a key determinant of equity perceptions, it is reasonable to expect variation among countries in the level of equity. Two country-level characteristics are expected to influence the perception of equity: the extent of gender economic inequality and the average inequality in the household division of labor.

Recent studies have found that in less gender-egalitarian countries women profit less from their assets and efforts, such as time spent in gainful employment or income earned (Stier & Lewin-Epstein, 2007). We posit that structural arrangements also have an impact on the extent to which women perceive their share of housework as just. Structural arrangements that allow women to increase their economic independence (i.e., through employment and access to lucrative jobs) influence their expectations within marriage (and alternatives outside the marriage). Thus, in

countries where women achieved higher equality with men in the labor market, their tolerance toward an unequal division of household labor is reduced. Therefore, a high gender-wage ratio (i.e., higher gender equality in wage) should be negatively related to perceptions of fairness in the household. Moreover, we argue that in countries with lower gender-wage inequality, the influence of housework inequality on the perceptions of equity will be more pronounced. An interaction effect is therefore proposed between the gender-wage ratio at the country (macro) level and housework inequality at the individual level.

The second macro-level factor we consider is average inequality in the household division of labor in a country. Perceptions of injustice have in fact been found to be reduced by the selection of an appropriate comparison referent on the individual level. Other men, who contribute less than the own husband to household work, could constitute such a referent (Freudenthaler & Mikula, 1998). Similarly, in countries where high inequality in housework is the standard, women may perceive their own unequal effort as fairly equitable. We postulate that the less equal the average household division of labor is in a country, the more likely is a woman to interpret her own situation as reflecting a fair arrangement.

HYPOTHESES

On the basis of the above arguments we derive several testable hypotheses. At the individual level, we expect important interaction effects between the actual inequality of household division of labor and the three legitimizing principles on perceptions of equity. (1) With regard to time availability we posit that, for women who are employed only part-time or not at all, the effect of housework inequality on perceived equity will be weak. (2) The relationship between housework inequality and equity will also be weaker the more dependent the woman is on her spouse. (3) A traditional gender ideology should attenuate the relationship between housework inequality and perceived equity. An additional hypothesis states that (4) the influence of gender ideology on the relationship between housework inequality and equity will be more pronounced than the influence of time availability and resource dependence (because the latter constitute only incomplete legitimizing principles). We also posit that (5) a low absolute amount of household labor and the existence of household aids increase per-

ceived equity. Referring to the effect of the social context we hypothesize that (6) women in more equitable countries realize their labor market opportunities and should be less accepting of inequality and that (7) women will perceive more equity when the average level of inequality in the division of household labor in their countries is high.

As control variables, we consider age, education, presence of children in different age groups, and whether a couple is cohabitating versus married (Brines, 1994; Frisco & Williams, 2003). Older women should perceive more equity because an unequal division of housework has been typical for their cohort, and the corresponding behaviors might have long been established as daily routines in their households. Women with higher education might be more critical with regard to the given division of household work. The presence of children might also influence equity perceptions, as child care impinges on time availability of women. We expect women in a cohabitating relationship to perceive less equity because the insurance function that formal marriages in most countries provide is not given, thus making relationship-specific investments less likely. It should be noted that, in predicting the household division of labor, marriage has been found to increase inequality (Batalova & Cohen, 2002; South & Spitze, 1994).

METHOD

We use the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) 2002 module on Family and Changing Gender Roles for a subset of married or cohabitating women of 25 countries (Zentralarchiv für Empirische Sozialforschung, 2004). We limit our analysis to women aged 18 to 65 in order to facilitate comparison with the literature on the determinants of household division of labor. We analyze a pooled file that consists of data from the following countries: Australia, Belgium (Flanders, only), Britain, Chile, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Israel, Japan, Latvia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United States. Sample sizes range from 171 in Portugal to 662 in France. Response rates range from 20.6% in France to 82.8% in Mexico (4 countries used substitution and a response rate cannot be calculated). Surveys in 6 countries were conducted by mail, in 14 as a personal

interview, and in 5 as a self-completion in attendance of the interviewer. All countries used samples representative for the general population living in private households.

Our dependent variable, perceived equity, is measured by the question: "Which of the following best applies to the sharing of household work between you and your spouse/partner?" Response categories are "I do much more than my fair share of the household work," "I do a bit more than my fair share of the household work," "I do roughly my fair share of the household work," "I do a bit less than my fair share of the household work," and "I do much less than my fair share of the household work." Women who state that they do much more or a bit more than their fair share of the household work represent 28.2% and 27.2% of the sample, respectively. They are assigned the code 0. Women who report doing roughly their fair share or a bit or much less than their fair share represent 40.4%, 2.9%, and 1.2% of the sample, respectively. They are assigned the code 1. Previous analyses have used such a measure either as a quantitative variable in linear regression or dichotomized in logistic regression, as will be done here because of the very skewed distribution of the variable. Results were found not to differ substantively between the two techniques (DeMaris & Longmore, 1996). The same applies to the present analysis. It might be argued that women who report doing less than their fair share should also experience inequity. The main interest here, however, is in learning whether women regard themselves as being treated unfairly or not. Moreover, a multinomial model that we estimated in addition showed that those women who report they do less than their fair share do not differ from those who report doing their fair share with regard to most of the theoretically central variables of this paper. In any case the number of women in this category is too small to actually analyze as a separate category.

Our measure of actual inequality of the household division of labor is a global measure of relative time investment by the woman. It is based on the question "On average, how many hours a week do you personally spend on household work, not including childcare and leisure time activities" and a parallel question on the partner. Our measure consists of the number of hours the man works in the household, subtracted from the number of hours the woman works. The difference is then divided by the total number of hours

worked in the household. This measure can vary between -1 (if only the man performs any household work) and 1 (if only the woman performs any household work). We are confident in this measure because, overall, women estimate rather similar values for themselves as men do for their partners and vice versa: In the entire ISSP data set, among respondents having a partner, men estimate their own contribution on average as 9.0 hours per week and their female partner's contribution as 21.3 hours, and women estimate their own contribution as 21.4 hours and their male partner's contribution as 7.5 hours. But we cannot rule out that at least some women who perceive a lack of equity tended to underestimate their spouse's participation in household work. This is a potential limitation of our study and could only be remedied by time budget data for both partners.

As the literature argues in favor of including a variable measuring men's participation in female-typed tasks (Blair & Johnson, 1992; DeMaris & Longmore, 1996; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994), we also estimated models that included such a variable and its interactions instead of the global measure of relative time investment by the woman. The question included in the ISSP asks whether the man or the woman does each of the following tasks "always," "usually," or whether both do them "about equal or both together," or whether it "is done by a third person": doing laundry, cleaning, preparing meals, and shopping. This measure has two shortcomings, however: First, we have no information on the time involved in these different tasks. Second, in those cases in which a task is mainly done by a third person, we do not have any information on the distribution of any remaining work between the spouses. Nevertheless, for the theoretically central variables in our study, the results remain fundamentally the same but are not presented here.

Time availability is measured by the number of weekly hours the respondent works for pay. *Resource dependence* of spouses is captured by a direct question posed to respondents regarding spouses' relative earnings. This measure ranges from 1 (*only the wife earns money*) (i.e., total independence) to 7 (*only the husband earns money*) (total dependence). In other words, a higher value indicates higher dependence of the wife on her husband. This measure is commonly used in studies that are based on ISSP data (see, e.g., Fuwa, 2004). It is preferred over

the calculation of spouses' relative income because the ISSP provides data on respondent's and family's income but not on that of the spouse. *Gender ideology* is measured by the following statements: "A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works," "All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job," "A job is alright, but what most women really want is a home and children," "Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay," and "A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family." The answers range from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). The mean score is calculated for the five items so that a high score on the combined measure represents a more egalitarian disposition. Exploratory factor analysis revealed that all five items score highly and approximately equally on one factor ($\alpha = .74$).

In addition to the above variables, we include in our analysis the number of hours the woman spends on housework and the presence of household aides in order to test a possible elevator effect. The latter was measured by an indicator denoting whether any of four household tasks (doing laundry, cleaning, preparing meals, and shopping) is performed by a third party. Additional individual-level indicators included are age, education (because of the large variation in education institutions across countries, we measure education simply as the years of schooling completed), two dummy variables denoting the presence of preschool children and children aged 6 to 17, and a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is cohabitating or not.

We use two macro-level variables: The gender-wage ratio is calculated as women's average earnings divided by the average earnings of men (United Nations, 2002). The average level of inequality of household division of labor is computed by aggregating the individual-level information obtained from the ISSP data within each country. Descriptive statistics for individual and macro-level variables are available from the authors upon request.

As we are interested in modeling the effects of individual and country-level characteristics at the same time, we employ multilevel modeling (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). This method allows us to identify the factors that affect country differences in the level of perceived equity and also to test whether individual-level predictors such as the

actual division of household work or gender ideology of the respondent have similar effects on the perception of equity across countries. All analyses were performed with STATA 10 (Rabe-Hesketh & Skrondal, 2008; StataCorp, 2007).

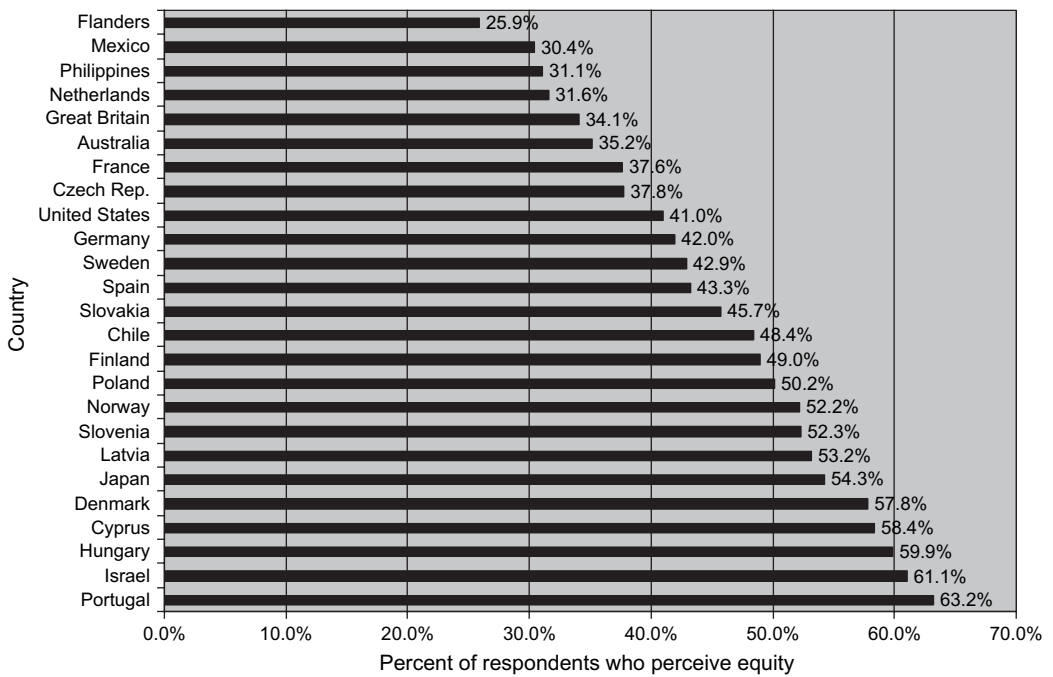
RESULTS

Over all countries, 44.6% of women find the household distribution of labor fair to themselves; that is, they state they do not do more than their fair share of the household work. The cross-country variation of the proportion of women who perceive equity ranges from 25.9% in Flanders to 63.2% in Portugal (Figure 1). There is not a clear pattern according to which perceptions of equity are distributed across countries, however. As an example, Mexico and Flanders are very different in a number of characteristics, but similar in their low equity perceptions. Three Mediterranean countries (Portugal, Israel, and Cyprus) share similarly high values, but this does not apply to Spain. The formerly socialist countries are scattered across nearly the entire range. Nevertheless, some of the countries that could be expected to be similar are located in a narrower range; for instance, the liberal welfare states (Great Britain, Australia, and the United States) are all located more toward the low-equity pole.

Turning to the multilevel modeling of determinants of equity, we estimate several models. We start with an empty model without any explanatory variables to decompose the variance between the individual and the country level (Model 0, not presented here). We then add variables to successively estimate more complex models (Table 1). We present both odds ratios and z ratios. Model 1 includes only the effect of housework inequality on perceptions of equity; Model 2 includes also the main effects of other individual-level variables; in Model 3, we add the interaction effects between actual household division of labor on the one hand and time availability, resource dependence, and gender ideology on the other. Finally, in Model 4, country-level variables are added. Likelihood-ratio tests are performed to establish significant differences in fit between the models.

In logistic multilevel models, variance on the individual level is fixed to $\pi^2/3$. Thus, with a variance component on the country level of .177 in Model 0, 5.1% of the total variance in the model derives from country differences (computed

FIGURE 1. RANKING OF COUNTRIES WITH REGARD TO EQUITY PERCEPTION (PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO PERCEIVE EQUITY).



as $.177/((.177 + \pi^2/3))$. The remainder of 94.9% is individual-level variance.

Model 1 includes the fixed effect of inequality of housework at the individual level (basically, this effect is like a weighted average of the regression coefficients across countries). As expected, the more inequality is present, the less equity is perceived. An odds ratio of 1 would mean that the actual inequality has no effect on equity perceptions. With the dependent variable coded as 1 if equity is perceived and 0 for absence of equity, a value higher than 1 indicates that equity perceptions increase with inequality and a value lower than 1 that they decrease with inequality. If the woman does all the household work, the chance for her to perceive equity is reduced by nearly 90% compared to equal participation by both partners.

In Model 2, the remaining individual-level determinants of perceived equity and the controls are included. The effect of inequality of household work remains by a wide margin the largest (as measured by the z statistic). But other effects are also considerable and in line with the theoretical arguments. When the absolute amount of

household labor that the woman performs is low and if there are other persons doing the major part of the work, perceived equity increases. This relates to the elevator effect. Feelings of equity decrease when time availability is low, that is, if the woman spends a large share of her time on market activities. Resource dependence increases perceived equity. Time availability and resource dependence show roughly equal strengths. There is no significant effect of gender ideology. Finally, as for the control variables, we find only the presence of children in the older age group and cohabitation to have significant effects.

Model 3 includes the interactions of the inequality of the household division of labor with the variables indexing the three legitimizing beliefs—time availability, resource dependence, and gender ideology. The main effect of household division of labor loses considerable strength, whereas the variables related to the elevator effect (absolute amount of housework and household aid) basically are not affected. To illustrate the effects of the legitimizing principles and its interactions with the actual division of household labor, Figure 2 shows the predicted values of equity

Table 1. *Logistic Multilevel Regression Models for Perceived Equity Using Full Maximum Likelihood Estimation (N = 8,556)*

	Perceived Equity							
	Model 1: Inequality		Model 2: Individual- Level Main Effects		Model 3: + Individual- Level Interactions		Model 4: + Country- Level Effects	
	Odds Ratio	z Ratio	Odds Ratio	z Ratio	Odds Ratio	z Ratio	Odds Ratio	z Ratio
Individual-level variables								
Inequality	.107*	−29.9	.099*	−28.7	.340*	−2.9	2.379	1.7
Abs. amount of housework			.991*	−4.3	.990*	−5.0	.989*	−5.4
Household aid			1.789*	5.7	1.846*	5.9	1.823*	5.8
Time availability (hours of work)			.993*	−4.5	.999	−0.4	.998	−0.8
Resource dependence			1.078*	4.1	.989	−0.4	.992	−0.3
Gender ideology			.959	−1.3	1.272*	4.9	1.213*	3.8
Inequality × time availability					.989*	−2.8	.991*	−2.3
Inequality × resource dependence					1.205*	3.8	1.189*	3.6
Inequality × gender ideology					.546*	−7.4	.593*	−6.3
Age			.999	−0.3	1.000	−0.1	1.000	−0.1
Education			.995	−0.6	.994	−0.7	.995	−0.6
Children <6 years			1.029	0.5	1.028	0.4	1.028	0.4
Children 6 – 17 years			.851*	−3.1	.852*	−3.1	.857*	−3.0
Cohabitation			.856*	−2.0	.833*	−2.4	.822*	−2.5
Country-level variables								
Gender-wage ratio							11.132*	2.0
Gender-wage ratio × inequality							.022*	−5.5
Average inequality							7.334*	2.0
Random components								
Country level	.323		.342		.325		.249	

**p* < .05.

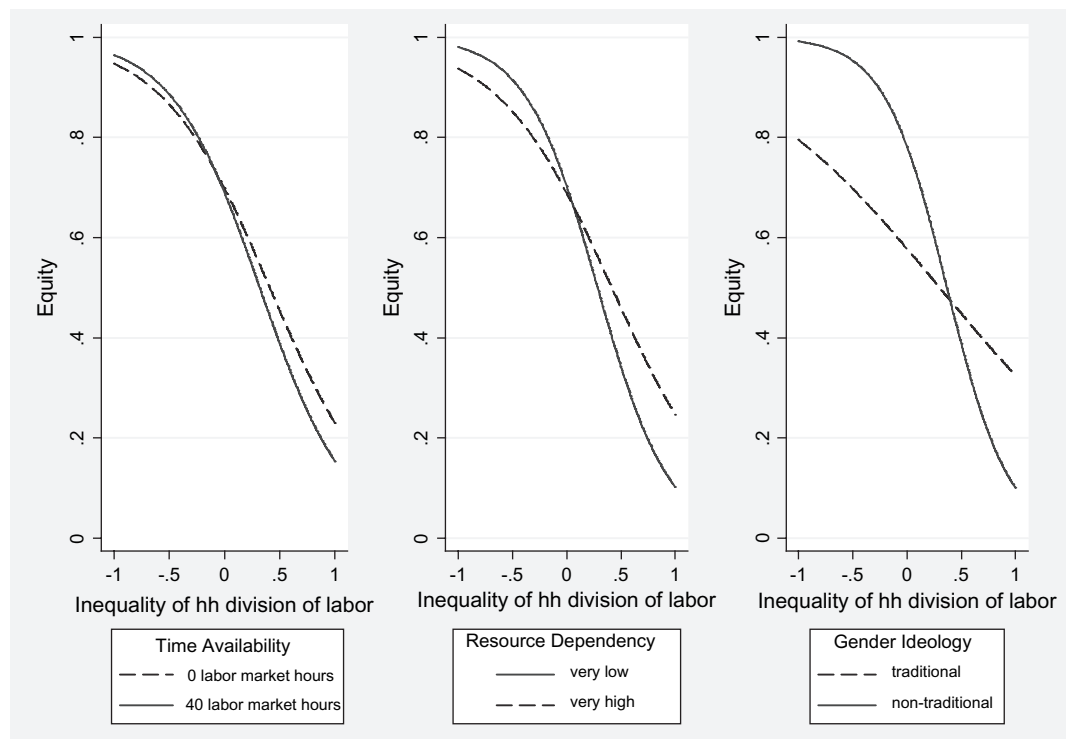
perceptions for Model 3 as the inequality changes from −1 (only the husband does the housework) to 1 (only the wife does the housework) for two extreme groups each: for time availability, women who are not active in the labor market and those who spend 40 hours per week in gainful employment; for resource dependence, those who are completely dependent on their spouse and those who are fully independent; for gender ideology, those with extremely traditional and nontraditional attitudes, respectively. All the other values are held at their respective means.

The more women are involved in market activities (low time availability), the stronger is their reaction to an increasingly unequal division of household labor. For dependent women, perceived equity decreases less with increasing

inequality of the actual division of household labor than with independent women. Finally, women subscribing to an egalitarian gender ideology react more strongly to an increasing inequality of household division of labor.

The causal structure of the model has changed completely. This reveals the complexity of the relationship between perceptions of equity and the organization of the household. The importance of interaction effects becomes obvious, which means that different groups of women react differently to inequality of the household division of labor. In particular, it should be noted that the effects (main effect and interaction) connected to gender ideology are among the strongest in Model 3, whereas the main effect of gender ideology was not significant in Model 2.

FIGURE 2. PREDICTED VALUES FOR EQUITY FROM MODEL 3 AS INEQUALITY OF HOUSEHOLD DIVISION OF LABOR CHANGES FROM LOW TO HIGH FOR EXTREME VALUES OF TIME AVAILABILITY, RESOURCE DEPENDENCE, AND GENDER IDEOLOGY (OTHER VARIABLES HELD AT THEIR MEANS).



As predicted, gender ideology is much more important as a legitimizing principle than time availability and resource dependence.

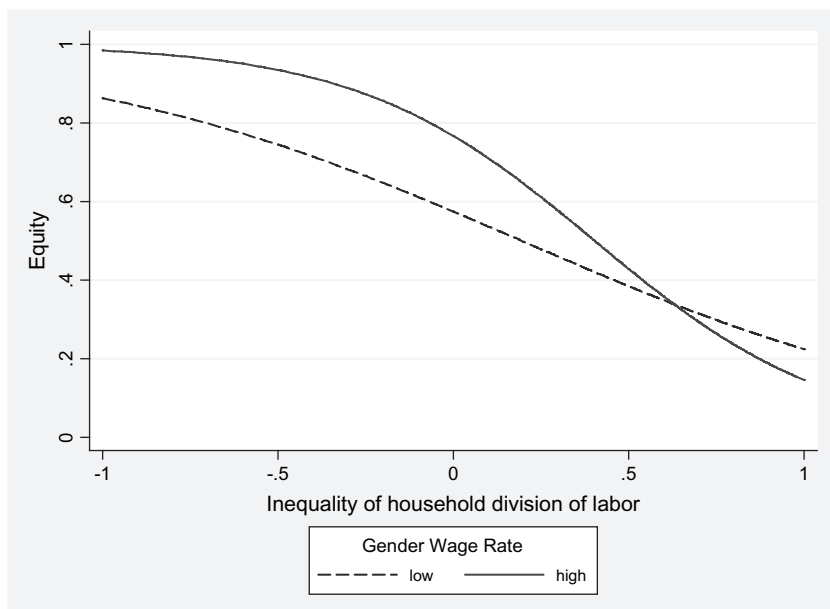
Model 4 introduces the country-level variables. Both the effect of gender-wage ratio and its interaction with the actual division of household labor are significant. Because it is easier to understand the meaning of these effects in a graphical representation, Figure 3 shows the predicted values of equity perceptions for Model 4 as the inequality changes from -1 (only the husband does the housework) to 1 (only the wife does the housework) for the lowest gender-wage ratio (i.e., highest gender inequality) and the highest gender-wage ratio found in this country sample. All the other values are held at their respective means.

In countries with a high gender-wage ratio, that is, where the advantage of men against women with regard to wages is less pronounced, the effect of an increasingly unequal division of labor in reducing the perception of equity is stronger

than in countries with a low gender-wage ratio. That means that women in the more equitable countries realize their labor market opportunities and are less accepting of an unequal household division of labor. The average level of the inequality of household division of labor in a country also works in the direction of our hypothesis: Women perceive more equity in their personal circumstances when the average level of inequality in the division of household labor in their countries is high. In these cases, the comparison referent is likely to be more negative than the personal experience of the woman, which leads to increased fairness perceptions.

Most of individual-level fixed effects do not change compared to Model 3. Although the most pronounced change is observed for the main effect of the inequality of household division of labor (which is reduced to statistical nonsignificance), it is the interaction effects with the legitimizing principles that are relevant here. As in Model 3, gender ideology appears to be the most

FIGURE 3. PREDICTED VALUES FOR EQUITY FROM MODEL 4 AS INEQUALITY OF HOUSEHOLD DIVISION OF LABOR CHANGES FROM LOW TO HIGH FOR EXTREME VALUES OF GENDER-WAGE RATIO (OTHER VARIABLES HELD AT THEIR MEANS).



powerful principle, followed by resource dependence and time availability. Nontraditional, independent women with high involvement in the labor market are the most sensitive with regard to the impact the actual inequality of household division of labor has on equity perceptions. Likelihood ratio tests show that the improvements from Model 0 toward Model 4 are all statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

Despite huge imbalances in the housework division of labor between women and men, previous studies have found perceptions of equity on the part of women to be much more frequent than feelings of injustice. In this paper, we used the three main explanatory propositions that account for the actual inequality of the division of household labor—the time availability hypothesis, resource dependence theory, and the gender ideology framework—to also help explain equity perceptions. In particular, we used the actual inequality of the division of household labor together with its interactions with core variables from each of the three models. We also included

the absolute amount of household labor performed by the woman and the amount of outsourcing to capture a possible elevator effect that could render equity considerations fairly irrelevant. On the country level, the gender-wage ratio was included as well as the average inequality of the division of household labor. In addition, we entered the cross-level interaction between gender-wage ratio and the (individual-level) inequality of the division of household labor. The paper examined the effects of these individual- and country-level variables on the perception of equity in the division of housework with a set of multilevel models. Data came from 25 countries that participated in the ISSP 2002 survey on Family and Changing Gender Roles.

The interplay of the three legitimizing principles (time availability, resource dependence, and gender ideology) and the inequality of household division of labor is decisive. Inequality leads to perceptions of inequity when the woman encounters low time availability (i.e., is strongly involved in the labor market), when resource dependence is low, and when the woman adheres to a nontraditional gender ideology. Gender ideology turns out to be the most important legitimizing

principle. These results contribute to the explanation of why perceptions of inequity are relatively infrequent in spite of dramatic inequalities in the household division of labor. Introducing main effects for inequality, time availability, resource dependence, and gender ideology is not sufficient to account for equity perceptions. In addition, both the absolute time a woman spends on household work and outsourcing considerably influence equity perceptions in the sense of an elevator effect: If there is not very much household work to do in the first place, an unequal distribution between the spouses plays only a minor role.

On the country level, the gender-wage ratio turned out to be one of the most important determinants of equity perceptions. In countries with a low gender-income inequality, the effect of inequalities in the household division of labor is more pronounced than in countries with a lower gender-wage ratio. Women perceive less equity in the former than in the latter when the inequality of the division of labor is high. This has important implications over and above equity perceptions. For example, in countries that promote gender equality, where women's employment is highly supported and where they are able to achieve economic independence, inequality in the household division of labor is not tolerated by women and could consequently influence the quality of their marriage and its stability. This is one possible result toward which several studies point (e.g., Lavee & Katz, 2002). Policy implications, thus, are in the same direction with regard to the actual inequality of household division of labor and its acceptance by women: Policies promoting gender equality would at the same time reduce the inequality and—largely independent of this—the acceptance of remaining inequalities.

Finally, the average inequality of household division of labor in a country forms a comparison standard against which women evaluate the fairness of their own arrangements. It also has the predicted impact in that the higher the average inequality in a country the more women feel their personal circumstances to be just. The existence of such country-specific benchmarks can explain why individual women react differentially to inequalities in the household division of labor in different countries.

From the review of the literature on equity perceptions, it is clear that the explanatory variables considered here are by no means the only ones relevant in this context. Although unavailable in the data set used in this paper, some of the addi-

tional variables proposed in the literature could be easily integrated into the framework used here. Another limitation is a consequence of the measures we had to use to determine the involvement of women and men in household work. As both measures are subjective estimates from the women's perspective, it cannot be excluded that in particular those women who perceive inequity have corrected their estimate for their spouses' share in household work somewhat downward. Time budget data collected with the diary method would have helped here. Finally, the relatively small number of countries has restricted our abilities to include additional macro-level variables. A future replication of the ISSP study, we hope in many more countries, could ameliorate this limitation.

Yet the results demonstrate the usefulness of the approach adopted in this paper, that is, employing the various determinants of actual inequality in household division of labor also for the explanation of perceptions of equity. In proceeding this way, it was possible to shed light on the seemingly paradoxical situation of considerable inequality accompanied by genuine perceptions of equity. Nontraditional, independent women with high involvement in the labor market who live in countries characterized by low gender inequality in the labor market are the most sensitive with regard to the impact the actual inequality of household division of labor has on equity perceptions. The impact of inequality depends on the individual and contextual situation women find themselves in and is not constant across contexts for all women.

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