

# Division of Housework, Communication, and Couples' Relationship Satisfaction

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Daniel L. Carlson<sup>1</sup> , Amanda J. Miller<sup>2</sup>, and Stephanie Rudd<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

The gendered division of housework is an important predictor of relationship satisfaction, but the mechanisms linking these variables remain poorly understood. Using data on  $N = 487$  couples from the 2006 Marital and Relationship Survey, the authors examine the association of heterosexual partners' communication quality with the division of housework and the role of partners' communication quality in the association between the division of housework and relationship satisfaction. Results from instrumental variable models and Actor-Partner Interdependence Models indicate that the quality of women's communication with their male partners predicts how couples divide housework. The quality of men's communication with their female partners, however, appears to be an outcome of domestic arrangements. Men's communication quality mediates the association between the division of housework and women's relationship satisfaction, while women's communication quality confounds the association for men.

## Keywords

housework, relationship satisfaction, communication quality, perceived equity, fairness

## Introduction

For individuals in intimate relationships, relationship satisfaction is an important determinant of relationship stability and psychological well-being (Carlson and Kail 2018; Frisco and Williams 2003; Hawkins and Booth 2005; Williams 2003). Couples who are satisfied with their relationships are more likely to stay together and less likely to exhibit symptoms of psychological distress. Although numerous factors shape relationship satisfaction, the way couples divide housework appears to matter a great deal. The association appears strongest for employed women, but research finds that sharing housework is optimal for couples' overall relationship quality (Carlson et al. 2016; Carlson, Miller, and Sassler 2018; Schieman, Ruppanner, and Milkie 2018).

Why egalitarian sharing of housework is associated with relationship satisfaction remains unclear, nonetheless. One factor that may play an important role linking the division of labor to relationship satisfaction is partner communication. Individuals who have partners with strong communication skills generally report greater relationship satisfaction (Gottman 1994; Litzinger and Gordon 2005; Zamir et al. 2018), and strong communication skills may be an outcome of sharing domestic work. According to equity theory (Lively, Steelman, and Powell 2010; Walster, Walster, and Berscheid 1978), feelings of fairness stemming from the

division of labor may shape partners' positive and negative communication, affecting not only their own relationship satisfaction but also that of their partners. Egalitarian divisions of housework are seen, on average, as more fair than other arrangements and are associated with greater overall relationship satisfaction (Amato et al. 2003; Carlson et al. 2016; Frisco and Williams 2003; Schieman et al. 2018; Wilkie, Ferree, and Ratcliff 1998). The quality of one's partner's communication may therefore constitute a mechanism through which the division of labor and feelings of equity affect the one's relationship satisfaction.

Another explanation for the association between egalitarianism and relationship satisfaction is that some partners may have the communication skills necessary to build close, intimate bonds that are associated with both egalitarian divisions and greater levels of relationship satisfaction (Giddens 1992). Some research suggests that the quality of partner communication shapes the division of housework and feelings of domestic equity (Komter 1989; Miller and Carlson

<sup>1</sup>University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT, USA

<sup>2</sup>University of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, IN, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Daniel L. Carlson, Department of Family and Consumer Studies, University of Utah, 225 E 1400 S. Alfred Emery Bldg Rm 228, Salt Lake City UT 84112, USA.

Email: [daniel.carlson@fcs.utah.edu](mailto:daniel.carlson@fcs.utah.edu)



2016). Direct, open communication is associated with a greater likelihood of egalitarian labor arrangements at home, while negative communication (i.e., ignoring, hostility) is associated with conventional arrangements. The associations between the division of housework and each partner's feelings of equity and relationship satisfaction may therefore be spurious and confounded by how partners communicate with one another.

In this article, we use the 2006 Marital and Relationship Survey (MARS) to (1) assess causal directionality between partners' communication and the division of housework using instrumental variable (IV) models and (2) examine how partners' communication quality accounts for the association of housework divisions with individuals' relationship satisfaction. Results from Actor-Partner Interdependence Models (APIM) indicate that the quality of partner's communication largely explains the associations between the division of housework and perceived equity with one's relationship satisfaction. However, the causal pathway varies for men and women.

## Background

In and of itself, marriage is emotionally advantageous for both men and women (Carlson 2012); however, being in a low-quality or unhappy marriage is negatively associated with psychological well-being (Hawkins and Booth 2005; Williams 2003). In particular, being in an unhappy marriage is linked to lower levels of self-esteem, health, happiness, and overall life satisfaction (Frisco and Williams 2003; Hawkins and Booth 2005; Williams 2003). In fact, being in a low-quality marriage is worse for mental and physical health than dissolving a low-quality relationship (Hawkins and Booth 2005). Relationship satisfaction is also crucial to relationship stability. Relationship satisfaction and stability are considered by Amato and colleagues (2007:41) to be "conceptually distinct, but empirically correlated." For both men and women, higher levels of relationship satisfaction are associated with greater relationship stability (Frisco and Williams 2003; Ruffieux, Nussbeck, and Bodenmann 2014; Williams 2003).

Relationship satisfaction is important for both individual- and couple-level well-being, and perhaps in no arena of couples' lives is it more scrutinized than the day-to-day aspects of household living: shared routine housework. Couples who share routine housework—cleaning, dishes, cooking, laundry, and shopping—report higher levels of relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction as well as less relationship discord than couples who do not, though the sharing of certain tasks may matter more than the sharing of others (Carlson et al. 2016; Carlson et al. 2018; Schieman et al. 2018). Despite the growth of egalitarian arrangements over time, couples who share routine housework equally remain among the minority (Carlson et al. 2018; Gerson 2010).

## Variations in the Division of Housework and Relationship Satisfaction

Couples divide housework in different ways. These range from conventional arrangements (in which the female partner does most of the routine housework), to egalitarian (often defined as within a 35–65 percent split) (cf. Risman 1998), to counterconventional (male partners take on most of the routine housework). On average, egalitarian divisions of routine housework are associated with higher relationship satisfaction among women compared to conventional arrangements (e.g., Barstad 2014; Carlson et al. 2016; Carlson et al. 2018; Demaris and Longmore 1996). For men, findings are more equivocal. Some research shows that men are more satisfied in egalitarian arrangements (Ruppanner, Brandén, and Turunen 2018; Schieman et al. 2018), but other research shows no difference in relationship satisfaction between conventional and egalitarian housework arrangements (e.g., Barstad 2014; Carlson et al. 2018) or indicates that men are more satisfied in conventional arrangements than in egalitarian ones (Wilkie et al. 1998). This may be because, for men, specific tasks (shopping especially) rather than overall divisions of housework are related to relationship satisfaction (Carlson et al. 2018), and measurement of housework isn't consistent across studies. Although research is scant, counterconventional divisions of routine housework, in which the male partner does most of the housework, appear to be associated with less relationship satisfaction compared to egalitarian arrangements (Carlson et al. 2016; Carlson et al. 2018; Schieman et al. 2018).

## Domestic Division of Labor, Communication, and Relationship Satisfaction

Despite evidence that egalitarian sharing of housework between partners is generally associated with greater relationship satisfaction, the reason for this relationship remains unclear. One potentially important factor that has received little consideration to date is communication. It is well established that good communication is vital to relationship satisfaction (Gottman 1994; Litzinger and Gordon 2005; Zamir et al. 2018). Research also suggests that good communication is associated with an egalitarian sharing of housework (Komter 1989; Ledbetter, Stassen-Ferrara, and Dowd 2013; Miller and Carlson 2016). How communication is causally associated with the division of housework, however, is open for debate. On one hand, equity theory (Lively et al. 2010; Walster et al. 1978) suggests that good communication is an outcome of an equitable division of labor. On the other hand, a gender power perspective (Komter 1989; Sassler and Miller 2017) indicates that communication may predicate equal sharing.

## Communication and Relationship Satisfaction

As couples move away from companionate relationships guided by social norms and held together by specialization in

the division of labor (Cherlin 2004), Giddens (1992) explains, couples increasingly seek out relationships that are personally fulfilling and that involve mutual self-disclosure and emotional intimacy. Communication is core to this. Indeed, compared to the romantic love of companionship, which is often rooted in gendered roles and female subjugation, modern relationships are built on confluent love—open communication, trust, cooperation, and a presumed “equality in emotional give and take” (Giddens 1992:62). These elements all contribute to an overall sense of intimacy, togetherness, and ultimately relationship satisfaction among partners.

Communication is a multifaceted concept that has been examined most often through a combination of self-reported questionnaires and behavioral observations (e.g., Gottman 1994; Zamir et al. 2018). Thematically, communication is often divided into (1) *negative traits*, such as negative affect, contempt, criticism, withdrawal, and conflict (Gottman 1994; Graber et al. 2011; Sullivan et al. 2010; Woodin 2011); (2) *positive traits*, including positive affect, intimacy, validation, and spousal support (Graber et al. 2011); and (3) *effectiveness*, like understanding intent, communicating before making important decisions, and not avoiding particular topics (Navran 1967). Taken as a whole, high-quality communication involves low levels of negative traits and high levels of positive traits and effectiveness (Gottman 1994).

The quality of partner communication is positively associated with relationship satisfaction since the ways in which one’s partner communicates can result in feelings of validation—or rejection—increasing or decreasing both personal and relational satisfaction (e.g., Gottman 1994; Johnson, Zabriskie, and Hill 2006; Litzinger and Gordon 2005; Zamir et al. 2018). A study by Lavner, Karney, and Bradbury (2016), using cross-lagged panel modeling, suggests a possible reciprocal association between communication and relationship satisfaction. That is, being happier may improve one’s own and one’s partner’s communication. Findings, nonetheless, were inconsistent and limited to a community sample of Hispanic adults. Given the body of evidence regarding the association between communication and relationship satisfaction, we propose the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1:* One’s partner’s communication quality is positively associated with one’s relationship satisfaction.

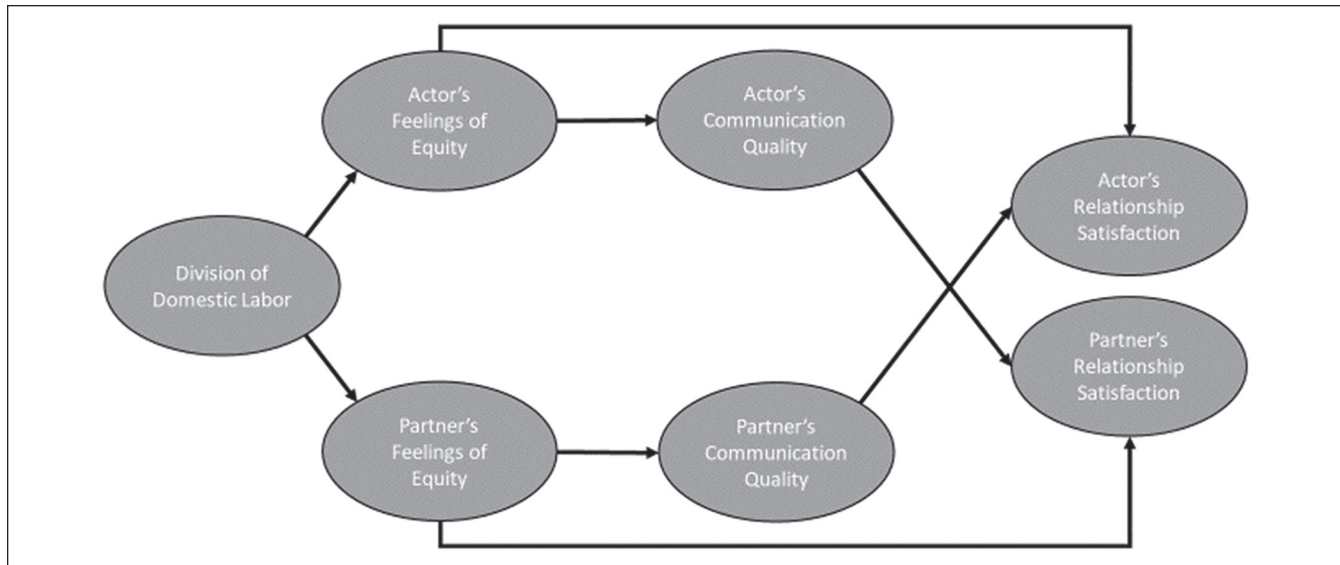
If partner’s communication quality is important to understanding relationship satisfaction, understanding the predictors of partner’s communication is equally important. One factor that may be especially germane to shaping partner’s communication is partner’s perceived equity regarding the division of housework.

### *Egalitarian Sharing, Perceived Equity, and Communication*

A derivative of exchange theory, *equity theory* (Adams 1965; Homans [1961] 1974; Walster et al. 1978) suggests that individuals try to maximize rewards in interpersonal relationships. When individuals perceive relationships as equitable—when the amount of rewards received is perceived as fair, deserved, and in balance with one’s contributions—they are most satisfied. In contrast, individuals who perceive inequities become distressed (Mirowsky 1985), with greater inequities’ leading to greater distress. Those who feel they get less out of the relationship than they feel is fair are *underbenefited*, while those who get more out of the relationship than they think is fair are *overbenefited*. Both forms of inequity produce distress and negative feelings (Canary and Stafford 1992; Sprecher 1986). Those who are underbenefited exhibit feelings of anger, resentment, sadness, frustration, and depression, while those who are overbenefited also exhibit feelings of anger and depression in addition to guilt (Lively et al. 2010; Mirowsky 1985; Sprecher 1986).

Individuals who perceive an equitable division of housework in their romantic relationships are more satisfied with their relationships than those who find their relationships inequitable (Amato et al. 2003; Chong and Mickelson 2016; Frisco and Williams 2003; Greenstein 1996; Wilkie et al. 1998), and those with egalitarian divisions of housework are most likely to feel their arrangements are equitable (Amato et al. 2003; Carlson et al. 2016; Frisco and Williams 2003; Schieman et al. 2018; Wilkie et al. 1998). Although feelings of equity are most strongly linked to egalitarianism, especially for women (Carlson et al. 2016; Frisco and Williams 2003; Schieman et al. 2018) not all women, even those employed full-time, find conventional housework arrangements inequitable (Demaris and Longmore 1996; Greenstein 1996; Nordenmark and Nyman 2003). The reason is that feelings of equity depend on what people think they deserve, and thus perceived equity surrounding the gendered division of labor is conditional to some degree (Greenstein 1996; Lavee and Katz 2002; Qian and Sayer 2016).

Although research has focused almost exclusively on how feelings of equity are associated with one’s own relationship satisfaction, one’s feeling of equity likely also affects one’s partner’s relationship satisfaction through the way one communicates. Figure 1 presents a causal model detailing this association. As shown, the division of labor affects an actor’s own relationship satisfaction via two pathways. The first is through one’s own feelings of equity. The other is through one’s partner’s feelings of equity and communication. Research shows being both under- and overbenefited is associated with lower-quality communication with one’s partner (Canary and Stafford 1992; Ledbetter et al. 2013; Sprecher 1986). The association between perceived equity and communication appears, however, to apply largely to women



**Figure 1.** Communication as mediator of domestic labor.

(Canary and Stafford 1992; Ledbetter et al. 2013; Stafford and Canary 2006). Negative communication for female partners who perceive inequities may help explain the fact that although men often prefer gender-conventional divisions of housework, and are highly satisfied with them, they are generally not more satisfied with their overall relationships than men in egalitarian relationships (e.g., Carlson et al. 2016). Following an equity theory framework, we hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 2:* A couple's division of housework is associated with one's relationship satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 3:* Both an actor's and his or her partner's perceived equity mediate the association between the division of housework and one's relationship satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 4a:* The association between the division of housework and one's relationship satisfaction is mediated by one's partner's communication quality.

*Hypothesis 4b:* The association between one's partner's perceived equity and one's relationship satisfaction is mediated by one's partner's communication quality. This is the case especially for men.

### **Gender Power, Communication, and Egalitarian Divisions of Labor**

Most research on the division of housework implies that housework arrangements are causally antecedent to relationship satisfaction. Nevertheless, most of these studies are cross-sectional in nature and cannot establish causal ordering. This is important since two studies on relationship quality using longitudinal data and methods (e.g., fixed-effects regression, lagged dependent variables)—one by Carlson and colleagues (2011) and another by Schober (2012)—suggest

that relationship quality may be antecedent to the division of domestic labor. Carlson et al. found that both mothers' and fathers' relationship quality predicted fathers' frequency of engagement with children. Schober found that mothers' relationship quality predicted fathers' frequency of childcare but that fathers' frequency of childcare predicted fathers' relationship quality. Focusing on the division of childcare, Schober found that fathers' shares of childcare predicted mothers', but not fathers', relationship quality.

In addition to study design and a focus on childcare, an important difference between these two studies and others is the assessment of relationship quality rather than relationship satisfaction. Both Carlson et al. (2011) and Schober (2012) use multi-item scales for relationship quality that measure one's perception of his or her partner's behavior. Relationship quality scales in both studies include multiple items that can aptly be labeled "partner communication quality" (e.g., partner listens to you, partner encourages you, partner understands your needs, partner insults or criticizes you). It is difficult, therefore, to compare these results to other studies focused solely on relationship satisfaction (e.g., how satisfied are you with your relationship?) or to disentangle the causal associations between partners' communication, relationship satisfaction, and the division of labor. Yet a data anomaly in the Millenium Cohort Study used by Schober may shed light on this issue. The multiwave Millenium Cohort Study data contained a relationship quality scale in all waves except for the last, where instead only a simple question about "relationship happiness" was asked. In this final wave, fathers' shares of childcare did not predict mothers' relationship happiness, although in all previous waves it had predicted mothers' relationship quality. Because the relationship quality scale included measures of women's partners' communication, the findings suggest, consistent with

equity theory, that male partners' communication may be an outcome of the division of household labor.

Taken together, nonetheless, the Carlson et al. (2011) and Schober (2012) studies suggest that female partners' communication, especially, may be a predicate of the division of domestic labor. If this is so, then the associations between relationship satisfaction, perceived equity, and the division of housework may be spurious rather than causal. This may be especially so for men's relationship satisfaction as it may depend on their female partners' communication quality. Alternatively, the division of housework and feelings of equity may mediate the association between partner's communication and relationship satisfaction.

Good communication skills may help foster egalitarian divisions of housework in couples. In fact, it should be of little surprise that shifts in relationship ideals from romance to confluence are associated with significant shifts toward gender equality during the latter half of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Couples do not spontaneously arrive at egalitarian arrangements. Rather, the default division of housework is to follow hegemonic conventional norms (Blaisure and Allen 1995). To overcome hegemonic conventions, couples, women especially, must utilize strong communication and negotiation skills to craft an egalitarian arrangement (Sassler and Miller 2017).

Whether egalitarian beliefs are predictive of good communication is an open question, but good communication and sharing housework appear to be correlated. Sharing tasks is correlated with greater positivity, openness, and assurances between partners (Ledbetter et al. 2013). In her classic qualitative work on gender and marital power, Komter (1989) found that only when wives exercised manifest power via direct, open communication were husbands willing to contribute equal shares of housework. Recent work by Miller and Carlson (2016), examining gender power among cohabitators, found something similar, revealing through in-depth interviews that egalitarian couples were more likely than conventional couples to have explicit and detailed conversations about the division of housework. Couples who enacted conventional divisions of labor in both studies used more negative or ineffective communication tactics. In contrast to women who used direct, open communication, women who were hostile or passive-aggressive were less likely to achieve an egalitarian division of labor. In efforts to rebuff female partners' attempts to achieve gender-egalitarian arrangements, men also exercised negative or ineffective communication tactics like avoidance, ignoring/stonewalling, criticizing, and hostility. Due to small sample sizes, neither qualitative study was able to investigate counterconventional arrangements. It also should be noted that even the most egalitarian couples did not always seamlessly arrive at their divisions, nor were the most equal among them always without conflict (Miller and Carlson 2016). As ideology and practice come into conflict, these divisions must be frequently negotiated using what Hochschild and Machung

(1989) termed "gender strategies." Frustration may further bubble up as female partners in egalitarian relationships often have the added responsibility of ensuring that their divisions of labor remain equal (Risman 1998).

Figure 2 presents a causal path model for communication, the division of housework, and relationship satisfaction based on a gender power perspective. The model presents two sets of pathways. The first pathway (marked by solid lines) is one of spuriousness, where one's partner's communication quality is causally prior to the division of housework, an actor's perceived equity, and an actor's relationship satisfaction, confounding these associations. The second pathway (marked by dashed lines) demonstrates that the division of labor, along with both partners' feelings of equity, mediates the association between communication and relationship satisfaction. From the model we hypothesize the following:

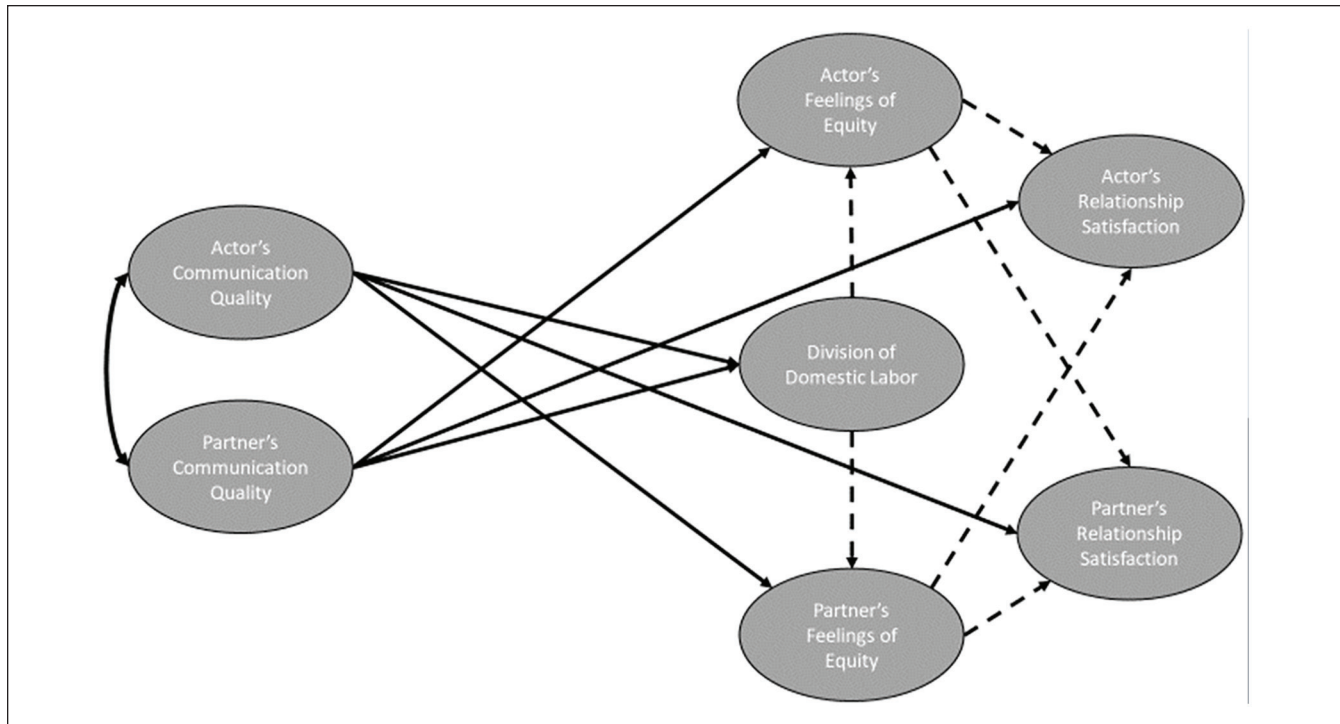
*Hypothesis 5:* A couple's division of housework is an outcome of each partner's communication quality, but female partners' communication quality is likely more important than male partners' communication quality.

*Hypothesis 6a:* For men especially, the association between the division of housework and relationship satisfaction is spurious, confounded by partner's communication quality.

*Hypothesis 6b:* For men especially, the association between one's perceived equity and relationship satisfaction is spurious, confounded by partner's communication quality.

*Hypothesis 7:* The association between one's communication quality and relationship satisfaction is mediated by the division of housework and both partners' perceived equity.

**The Current Study.** The gendered division of housework is associated with feelings of equity and relationship satisfaction for both men and women. The quality of communication between partners also is associated with relationship satisfaction, feelings of equity, and the division of domestic tasks. The role of communication in this association is nevertheless unclear. On one hand, partner communication may be a mediator. A partner in an unequal arrangement, who feels his or her relationship is inequitable, may communicate poorly with the significant other and thus reduce the significant other's relationship satisfaction. This may be especially the case for male partners' communication and women's relationship satisfaction. On the other hand, how partners, female partners especially, communicate may determine whether couples divide domestic tasks equally, which may subsequently affect significant others' feelings of fairness and satisfaction. It could also mean the relationships between the division of labor, perceived equity, and relationship satisfaction, for men in particular, are spurious. Using IV modeling and APIM, this study aims to better specify these relationships and



**Figure 2.** Communication as confounder of division of domestic labor.

provide theoretical clarity about the causes of the division of housework and its consequences.

## Method

### Data

For this study we use data from MARS. MARS is a cross-sectional probability sample of heterosexual U.S. couples with children conducted in March and April of 2006 by Knowledge Networks. The MARS sample was restricted to married and cohabiting couples with coresident minor children and female partners younger than 45. MARS also oversampled low- to moderate-income couples. The median family income of MARS couples was \$40,000. As of 2006, the median family income for married couples in the United States was \$69,716 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2007). Information was collected independently from both partners for a total of 1,095 individuals in 605 couples. We limit our sample to the  $N = 487$  couples among whom both partners completed the survey. Missing values ( $n = 92$ ) were imputed using the set of “mi” procedures in Stata 14. We produced and combined  $m = 10$  iterations of the data.

### Measures

**Actor's Relationship Satisfaction.** *Relationship satisfaction* is a continuous measure derived from a single item asking respondents to note their level of satisfaction with their

romantic relationship. The item ranges from 0 to 10, with higher scores indicating more satisfaction with one's romantic relationship. The distribution of scores for relationship satisfaction is negatively skewed. We therefore conducted supplemental analyses using the  $\log(10)$  transformation of relationship satisfaction as the dependent variable to correct for skew. Results did not differ from those using the original relationship satisfaction scale. We standardize (z-score) the scale in our models for comparison with other studies.

**Actor's Reports of Division of Housework.** To construct measures for the division of housework we use actors' own estimates of the division of housework given discrepancies in actors' and partners' reports (partner's reports are only moderately correlated;  $r = \sim .6$ ). Using actors' reports is consistent with a large tradition of research on perceived equity and relationship quality that measures the division of labor from a respondent's own point of view (e.g., Bianchi et al. 2000).

MARS respondents reported their divisions on the following core/routine items (Coltrane 2000): washing dishes, doing laundry, house cleaning, cooking and preparing meals, and grocery shopping. We focus our analysis on routine housework for several reasons. First, routine housework is at the center of gender inequality at home and is the area most contested within couples (Goldscheider, Bernhardt, and Lappegård 2015; Hochschild and Machung 1989). Second, routine housework constitutes the vast majority of time spent in housework. Third, routine housework is arguably more important

to relationship satisfaction than nonroutine housework (Carlson et al. 2018). Last, the measures of nonroutine housework in MARS (e.g., yard maintenance, car repair, bill paying) are sparse and not comprehensive enough to warrant analysis of this housework domain.

Each routine housework item had 5 possible responses: 0 (*I do it all*), 1 (*I do most of it*), 2 (*we share it equally*), 3 (*my partner does most of it*), and 4 (*my partner does it all*). Each measure was recoded to indicate the gendered division of the task (e.g., 0 = *she does it all*, 2 = *we share it equally*, and 4 = *he does it all*). Each item was summed, then averaged to create a mean scale—*male partner's share of routine housework*—that ranged from 0 to 4. Higher scores indicate that the male partner does greater amounts of routine housework. From the mean scale we created three dummy variables to indicate conventional, egalitarian, and counterconventional divisions of labor. Each dummy stands for approximately one third of the distribution of housework shares. *She does most of the housework* equals 1 when respondents have a scale score of less than 1.4 (approximately less than 35 percent of housework). *Housework shared equally* equals 1 when scale score is between 1.4 and 2.6 (between approximately 35 and 65 percent), and *he does most of the housework* equals 1 when scale score is greater than 2.6 (approximately 65 percent or more of housework). In line with past research showing that counterconventional arrangements of housework may be problematic for relationship quality, routine housework is measured as both a scale and a series of dummies to test for the possibility of nonlinearity in the association with both communication and relationship satisfaction.

**Actor's Report of Partner's Communication Quality.** Each respondent reported on his or her partner's communication. *Quality of partner's communication* is a 5-item mean scale ( $\alpha = .78$ ) comprising the following items: (1) My [spouse/partner] listens to me when I need someone to talk to, (2) I find it hard to tell my [spouse/partner] certain things because I am not sure how [he/she] will react, (3) My [spouse/partner] and I discuss things together before making an important decision, (4) It is hard for me to talk with my [spouse/partner], (5) When we are having a problem, my [spouse/partner] often gives me the silent treatment. Item 1 measures partner support, an element of positive communication; items 2 and 5 indicate negative affect and withdrawal, which are aspects of negative communication; and items 3 and 4 indicate mutual decision making and avoidance, aspects of (in)effective communication. Each item ranges from 0 = *strongly disagree* to 3 = *strongly agree*. Items 2, 4, and 5 are reverse coded so that higher scores indicate higher-quality communication. Although different dimensions of communication are assessed, principal component factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis both indicated that all five items load on a single factor, supporting the use of a singular scale. We standardize (z-score) the scale for ease of

interpretation and comparison with the results of other studies.

**Actor's and Partner's Perceived Equity.** Each respondent reported his or her perceived fairness of the division of housework on a five-point scale: 1 = *very unfair to me*, 2 = *somewhat unfair to me*, 3 = *fair to both of us*, 4 = *somewhat unfair to my partner/spouse*, and 5 = *very unfair to my partner/spouse*. *Perceived equity in housework* is a dummy variable; respondents are given a value of 1 if the division is reported as fair to both of them.

**Control Variables.** We control for several variables in our models. Unless otherwise noted, we include measures for these variables for both partners in models. Controls include *respondent's age* (in years), *education*, *religious affiliation*, *hours of paid work per week*, *self-rated health*, and *egalitarian gender ideology*. Egalitarian gender ideology is a seven-item summary scale ( $\alpha = .60$ , range = 0–21) assessing respondents' level of agreement with the following statements: (1) It is ok for a woman to keep her maiden name, (2) A woman should quit working if her husband can support her, (3) A mother working outside the home is just as warm as a stay-at-home mom, (4) Better for everyone if husband is the breadwinner, (5) Men should share housework with women, (6) Women should make work a priority, and (7) Men and women should share child-rearing equally. Each item ranges from 0 = *strongly disagree* to 3 = *strongly agree*. Items 2 and 4 were reverse coded.

We combine information from both partners for the following controls at the couple level: *couples' total yearly income*, *female partner's relative share of income*, and whether *both partners attend religious services weekly* (1 = *yes*). Couple-level controls for the *number of children younger than age 2 in household*, *number of children ages 2 to 5 in household*, *number of children ages 6 to 12 in household*, and whether the couple is *married* are derived from a respondent's own reports. Descriptive statistics for all variables are shown in Table 1.

## Analytic Strategy

Analyses for this study are conducted using APIM. APIM is appropriate due to the dyadic nature of the MARS data and the nonindependence of observations. Preliminary analyses showed that partners' relationship satisfaction ( $r = .56$ ;  $p < .001$ ), feelings of equity in housework ( $r = .31$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and quality of communication ( $r = .53$ ;  $p < .001$ ) were all significantly correlated. Both *actor effects (A)*—how one's own attributes predict one's outcomes—and *partner effects (P)*—how one's partner's attributes predict one's outcomes—are estimated in our models. The inclusion of partner effects controls for the possibility of interdependence and reduces bias in estimating both actor and partner effects (Cook and Kenney 2005).

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics ( $N = 487$ ).

	Men		Women	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Individual-level controls</b>				
Relationship satisfaction	.02	.97	.01	.99
Partner's communication quality	2.10	.56	2.07	.64
Male partner's share of routine housework	1.27	.87	1.00	.82
She does majority of routine housework	.56		.69	
Routine housework shared equally	.38		.26	
He does majority of routine housework	.06		.05	
Perceived equity in housework	.53		.50	
Hours spent in paid labor per week	36.93	21.21	15.31	18.49
Protestant	.37		.40	
Catholic	.18		.21	
Other religion	.22		.24	
No religion	.23		.16	
Age	37.90	7.55	34.68	6.20
Self-reported health	3.52	.99	3.46	.95
Less than high school	.10		.09	
High school	.35		.33	
Some college	.37		.40	
Bachelor's degree or more	.19		.18	
Egalitarian gender ideology	11.00	2.80	12.22	2.78
<b>Couple-level controls</b>				
	<i>M</i>		<i>SD</i>	
Hours of housework per week	42.25		34.56	
Couples' total income (in \$)	53,368.00		153,593.81	
Her share of income	.29			
Number of children younger than age 2 in household	.11		.31	
Number of children age 2 to 5 in household	.57		.73	
Number of children age 6 to 12 in household	.87		.95	
Currently cohabiting	.11			
Both attend religious service weekly	.30			

APIM can be conducted using ordinary regression techniques, structural equation modeling, or multilevel modeling (Cook and Kenney 2005). For the purposes of this study, regression modeling is used. Although regression models do not allow the researcher to estimate disturbance term correlation or estimate between and within dyad variation, the model is ideal for this study for a few reasons. First, we use IV models to estimate causal directionality between the division of housework and each partner's communication quality. Postestimation statistics assessing the quality of instruments can be calculated only using a regression approach. Second, measures for the division of housework are taken only from the actor's point of view, necessitating separate equations. Third, regression models do not require researchers to specify mediating and confounding pathways, which avoids possible model misspecification. In addition, although regression modeling requires separate models for each dyad member, it does not require specifying different path models in the case that causal directionality between the division of housework and communication varies by sex.

Our analysis proceeds as follows. First, as presented in equation 1, we estimate the associations of actors' reports of the division of housework ( $A_{dol}$ ), with actors' reports of their partners' communication quality ( $P_{comm}$ ), controlling for actors' communication quality ( $A_{comm}$ ), actor's characteristics ( $A_{cov}$ ), and partners' ( $P_{cov}$ ) characteristics.

$$A_{dol} = b_0 + b_1 P_{comm} + b_2 A_{comm} + \beta A_{cov} + \beta P_{cov} + e \quad (1)$$

We examine both continuous (ordinary least squares [OLS] regression) and categorical (multinomial logistic regression) measures of the division of housework to evaluate linearity. This is important as the second set of analyses estimate causal directionality between the division of housework and communication. This requires not only establishing correlation between variables but also utilizing appropriate estimation techniques based on the functional form of variables. For linear associations, we assess whether the quality of partner communication is endogenous to the division of housework using two-stage least square (2SLS) regression with IVs

for communication. For nonlinear associations we use probit with IVs. Analyses are conducted in Stata using the *ivreg2* and *ivprobit* commands. Equations 2 and 3 demonstrate the two-stage instrumentation process.

$$\hat{P}_{comm} = \pi_0 + \pi Z + v \quad (2)$$

$$A_{dol} = b_0 + b_1 \hat{P}_{comm} + \beta A_{cov} + \beta P_{cov} + e \quad (3)$$

Equation 2 is the IV estimator for predicted values of actors reports of partner's communication ( $\hat{P}_{comm}$ ) derived from a matrix of IVs ( $Z$ ). As noted by Bollen (2012), instruments must be related to the variable for which they are intended to proxy ( $\pi \neq 0$ ) and unrelated to the endogenous outcome variable of interest  $\{Cov(Z, A_{dol}) = 0\}$  and its disturbance term  $\{Cov(Z, e) = 0\}$ .

Equation 3 is the second-stage equation predicting the division of housework using the IV estimator derived in equation 2. Using instruments to proxy for actor's reports of partner's communication helps assess causal directionality between communication and the division of housework. If partner's communication is exogenous to the division of housework (i.e., equal division of housework is an outcome of good communication), estimates of communication quality from 2SLS regression and IV probit models will be similar to OLS regression and probit estimates. If, however, partner's communication quality is endogenous to the division of housework (i.e., good communication quality is an outcome of equal divisions), then estimates for communication should vary considerably and will likely be close to  $b_1 = 0$ .

Based on theory and past empirical research, two variables are chosen as instruments of actor's report of partner's communication: actor's reports of *family time spent at home in leisure activities* and *couple's time together in social activities with relatives*. For family time at home in leisure activities, partners were asked, "In a typical month, how often do you, your [spouse/partner], and the children do things at home as a family together, such as eat dinner at the table, play games, or watch videos?" For time with relatives, they were asked, "During the past month, about how often did you and your [spouse/partner] spend time together in social activities with relatives?" For both questions, responses included 0 = *almost never*, 1 = *once or twice a month*, 2 = *once a week or almost every week*, 3 = *more than once a week*, and 4 = *almost every day*.

Spending time together as a couple or family, in any capacity, is associated with stronger communication and conflict resolution skills (Caughlin 2003; Kumpfer and Alder 2003). Although it has not been a major topic of research, studies show no association between housework and its division with couples' or families' domestic leisure time (Thrane 2000; Voorpostel, van der Lippe, and Gershuny 2010).

Although research informs our choice of instruments, we take numerous steps to verify them. To assess the validity of

the instruments we estimate whether the IVs are correlated with actors' reports of partners' communication, but not the division of housework—a necessary but insufficient condition of instrumentation (Bollen 2012). We also report several post hoc diagnostics from our IV models. The Anderson canonical correlation likelihood ratio test (Hall, Rudebusch, and Wilcox 1996) and Cragg-Donald Wald F statistic (Cragg and Donald 1993) assess instrument strength, while the Hansen-Sargan Test (Sargan 1958) assesses whether they are associated with the disturbance term.

Once it is established whether quality of partners' communication is exogenous/endogenous to the division of housework, our final step is to examine how communication quality confounds or mediates the associations of the division of housework and perceived equity with relationship satisfaction. Analyses are conducted using OLS regression, as represented in equations 4 through 10.

$$A_{relsat} = b_0 + b_1 P_{comm} + b_2 A_{comm} + \beta A_{cov} + \beta P_{cov} + e \quad (4)$$

$$A_{relsat} = b_0 + b_3 A_{dol} + \beta A_{cov} + \beta P_{cov} + e \quad (5)$$

$$A_{relsat} = b_0 + b_3 A_{dol} + b_4 A_{equity} + b_5 P_{equity} + \beta A_{cov} + \beta P_{cov} + e \quad (6)$$

$$A_{relsat} = b_0 + b_1 P_{comm} + b_3 A_{dol} + \beta A_{cov} + \beta P_{cov} + e \quad (7)$$

$$A_{relsat} = b_0 + b_1 P_{comm} + b_2 A_{comm} + b_3 A_{dol} + \beta A_{cov} + \beta P_{cov} + e \quad (8)$$

$$A_{relsat} = b_0 + b_1 P_{comm} + b_3 A_{dol} + b_4 A_{equity} + b_5 P_{equity} + \beta A_{cov} + \beta P_{cov} + e \quad (9)$$

$$A_{relsat} = b_0 + b_1 P_{comm} + b_2 A_{comm} + b_3 A_{dol} + b_4 A_{equity} + b_5 P_{equity} + \beta A_{cov} + \beta P_{cov} + e \quad (10)$$

In the first model (equation 4), we examine the association of partner's communication quality with relationship satisfaction (hypothesis 1). In the second model (equation 5), we examine the association of the division of housework with actor's relationship satisfaction (hypothesis 2). In the third model (equation 6), we assess the association between actor's and partner's perceived equity and relationship satisfaction and how perceived equity mediates the association between the division of housework and relationship satisfaction (hypothesis 3). Model 4 (equation 7) tests hypotheses 4a and 6a by examining how partner's communication quality mediates/confounds the association between the division of housework and actor's relationship quality. In the fifth model (equation 8), we assess whether the association between

**Table 2.** Ordinary Least Squares and Multinomial Logistic Regression of Division of Housework on Partner's Communication Quality ( $N = 487$ ).

	Women			Men		
	Male Partner's Share	She Does Most	He Does Most	Male Partner's Share	She Does Most	He Does Most
	(Reference = Shared Equal)			(Reference = Shared Equal)		
Partner's communication quality						
B	.17***	-.31*	.27	-.13***	.17	-.68*
SE	.04	.13	.29	.04	.12	.27

Note: All models include statistical controls.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

actor's communication quality and relationship satisfaction is mediated by the division of housework (hypothesis 7). Model 6 (equation 9) assesses how partner's communication mediates or confounds the association between perceived equity and relationship satisfaction (hypotheses 4b and 6b). Finally, in the last model (equation 10), we assess whether feelings of equity mediate the association between actor's communication quality and relationship satisfaction (hypothesis 7).

## Results

### *Association between Division of Housework and Partner's Communication Quality*

Table 2 shows the results of OLS and multinomial logistic regressions for the association of quality of a partner's communication with the divisions of housework. All analyses included statistical controls. Examining women's reports, we see that higher-quality communication from male partners is associated with increases in men's shares of housework. When examining the division of housework categorically, we see that better communication among men is associated with significantly lower odds of having the female partner do the majority of housework compared to sharing this work equally. Although quality of male partner's communication is associated with greater odds of the male partner's doing most tasks compared to sharing equally, the difference is not statistically significant. The pattern of evidence, nonetheless, suggests a linear association between men's communication quality and men's shares of unpaid housework among women.

From men's reports we see that female partner's communication quality is linearly associated with a man's share of housework, but in the opposite direction. A man's share of housework appears to decrease as female partner's communication quality increases. Multinomial logistic regression results show that this pattern is driven by differences in the odds of sharing versus male responsibility for housework. Higher-quality communication among female partners is

associated with significantly lower odds of counterconventional (i.e., he does most) housework arrangements compared to sharing housework equally. No differences are found in the odds of conventional (i.e., she does most) and egalitarian arrangements by female partner's communication quality. Overall, the results suggest that higher-quality communication from one's partner is associated with a lower likelihood that one will be responsible for housework.

## IV Analysis

The results provide evidence that the division of housework at home is associated with quality of partner communication. Nevertheless, it is not clear whether communication affects the division of labor or whether communication quality is an outcome of housework divisions. Tables 3 and 4 show results from IV analyses used to establish the causal direction between the division of housework and partner's communication quality. Bivariate correlations for partner's communication quality, the division of housework, and instruments of communication quality in Table 3 provide evidence that the IVs for communication quality are significantly associated with partner's communication quality but not the division of housework, satisfying the first criteria of IVs.

Results from Table 2 provide evidence that the association of shares of housework with communication quality for both men and women is linear. This enables us to use 2SLS regression to examine endogeneity for quality of partner's communication. The results of IV analysis (see Table 4) indicate that male partner's communication quality is endogenous to the division of routine housework whereas female partner's communication quality is exogenous. This provides support for hypothesis 5 but for female partner's communication only.

Results from OLS regression analysis with statistical controls are identical to results from Table 2. A one standard deviation increase in partner's communication quality for women is associated with a .17 point increase ( $p < .001$ ) in male partner's share of routine housework. Results from

**Table 3.** Bivariate Correlations for Partner's Communication Quality, Division of Housework, and Instrumental Variables.

	1	2	3	4
<b>Women</b>				
1. Partner's communication quality	—			
2. Male partner's shares of routine housework	.15***	—		
3. Time in social activities with relatives	.17***	.05	—	
4. How often family together at home	.33***	-.06	.15**	—
<b>Men</b>				
1. Partner's communication quality	—			
2. Male partner's shares of routine housework	-.21***	—		
3. Time in social activities with relatives	.10*	.01	—	
4. How often family together at home	.31***	-.07	.18***	—

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 4.** OLS and 2SLS Analyses Assessing Endogeneity of Partner Communication Quality.

	Women	Men
	Male Partner's Share of Routine Housework	Male Partner's Share of Routine Housework
<b>OLS partner communication</b>		
B	.17***	-.13**
SE	.04	.04
<b>2SLS partner communication</b>		
B	-.03	-.17
SE	.13	.17
<b>Diagnostics for instruments</b>		
Anderson canonical correlation likelihood ratio	37.31***	24.32***
Cragg-Donald Wald F statistic	19.01	11.99
Hansen-Sargan test	$\chi^2(1) = 1.69$	$\chi^2(1) = 0.06$

Note: All models include statistical controls. OLS = ordinary least squares; 2SLS = two-stage least square.

\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

2SLS regression, nonetheless, indicate that instrumented communication quality for women's male partners is associated with a nonsignificant, .03 point decrease in men's shares of housework. Postestimation diagnostics indicate that the instruments satisfy all of the criteria for IVs. The significant ( $p < .001$ ) Anderson canonical correlations likelihood ratio test indicates that the instruments are sufficiently correlated with partner's communication quality. The Cragg-Donald Wald F statistic of 19.01 indicates that the instruments are strong predictors of communication quality. Using the Staiger-Stock (Staiger and Stock 1997) rule of thumb, a Cragg-Donald Wald F statistic less than 10 would indicate a weak instrument. Finally, the nonsignificant Sargan statistic demonstrates that the instruments are not associated with the equation disturbance. Diagnostics for 2SLS analyses indicate excellent instrumentation.

Men's reports show that coefficients for female partner's communication quality are changed little between OLS ( $b = -.13$ ) and 2SLS ( $b = -.17$ ) models, indicating that female partner's communication quality is exogenous to a male partner's share of routine housework. Despite a slightly

larger coefficient, the association is not significant in the 2SLS model due to inflated standard errors—a known limitation of IV models (DiPerete and Gangl 2004).

### *Division of Housework, Communication, and Relationship Satisfaction*

In Table 5 we examine the associations of the division of routine housework with women's relationship satisfaction and each partner's perceived equity as well as how male partner's communication quality may mediate these associations. All models include statistical controls. We use categorical measures for the division of housework to differentiate between conventional, egalitarian, and counter-conventional divisions of labor. Results using a linear measure of division of housework are similar and are found in Tables A1 to A2 in the online supplemental Appendix A.

In partial support of hypothesis 1, male partner's communication quality is positively associated with women's relationship satisfaction ( $p < .001$ ). A 1 standard deviation increase in male communication quality is associated with a

**Table 5.** Relationship Satisfaction among Women.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Partner's communication quality							
B	.64***			.66***	.64***	.64***	.62***
SE	.04			.04	.04	.04	.04
Actor's communication quality							
B	.05				.05		.05
SE	.04				.04		.04
Male partner's share of housework (reference = shared equally)							
She does most housework							
B		-.24*	-.07	-.07	-.09	-.03	-.04
SE		.11	.11	.09	.09	.09	.09
He does most housework							
B		.01	.24	-.10	-.09	-.01	-.00
SE		.22	.22	.17	.17	.17	.17
Partner's perceived equity							
B			.22*			.18*	.18*
SE			.09			.07	.07
Actor's perceived equity							
B			.47***			.10	.09
SE			.09			.08	.08

Note: All models include statistical controls.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

0.64 standard deviation increase in women's relationship satisfaction. A woman's own communication quality is unassociated with her relationship satisfaction. Supporting hypothesis 2, model 2 shows that shouldering the housework is associated with less relationship satisfaction among women ( $b = -.24$ ;  $p < .05$ ) compared to sharing it equally with their partners. Consistent with hypothesis 3, we find that the association between the division of housework and women's relationship quality is mediated by both men's and women's perceived equity. A woman's own sense of fairness ( $b = .47$ ;  $p < .001$ ) is more strongly associated with her relationship satisfaction than is her partner's sense of fairness ( $b = .22$ ;  $p < .05$ ). When perceived fairness is included in the model, differences in relationship satisfaction between women who share housework and those who do the majority of it are reduced by 71 percent and to statistical nonsignificance.

Given evidence from 2SLS analysis that male partner's communication quality is endogenous to the division of housework, the results from models 4 through 6 indicate that male partner's communication mediates the associations between the division of housework, perceived equity, and women's relationship quality. These findings provide strong support for hypotheses 4a and 4b. The inclusion of male partner's communication quality in model 4 reduces the coefficients for the division of housework substantially (71 percent) compared to model 2. As shown in model 6, male partner's communication quality also accounts for much of the association between women's perceived equity and their relationship satisfaction, reducing the coefficient for

perceived equity from  $b = .47$  in model 3 to  $b = .10$  in model 6 and to statistical nonsignificance. Male partner communication quality also accounts for some of the association (~18 percent) between his perceived equity and women's relationship satisfaction, suggesting that although their perceived equity is associated with men's communication quality, communication quality is not the primary pathway through which men's perceived equity is associated with the female partner's relationship satisfaction.

Table 6 shows the results of analyses assessing the relationships of the division of housework, female partner's communication quality, and perceived equity with men's relationship satisfaction. As with women, results support hypotheses 1 and 2. Communication quality of both men and women is positively associated with men's relationship satisfaction, although the effect size of female partner's communication quality is twice as large. For both sexes then, results show that partner's communication quality matters for one's satisfaction more than one's own communication quality. Consistent with hypothesis 2, being largely responsible for routine housework is associated with lower relationship satisfaction for men compared to sharing responsibilities equally with their partners.

Given that female partner's communication quality is exogenous to the division of housework, results from models 3 through 6 provide support for hypotheses 6a and 6b. Both associations between the division of housework and perceived equity with men's relationship satisfaction is explained by female partner's communication quality. Differences in relationship satisfaction between men sharing housework and

**Table 6.** Relationship Satisfaction among Men.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Partner's communication quality							
B	.41***			.50***	.41***	.49***	.40***
SE	.05			.04	.05	.04	.05
Actor's communication quality							
B	.19***				.19***		.19***
SE	.05				.05		.05
Male partner's share of housework (reference = shared equally)							
She does most housework							
B		.06	.12	-.01	.01	.02	.02
SE		.10	.10	.09	.09	.09	.09
He does most housework							
B		-.38*	-.29	-.19	-.23	-.14	-.19
SE		.19	.19	.17	.17	.17	.17
Partner's perceived equity							
B			.26**			.05	-.03
SE			.09			.08	.08
Actor's perceived equity							
B			.14			.13	.12
SE			.09			.08	.08

Note: All models include statistical controls.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

those doing the majority of housework are reduced by 50 percent and to nonsignificance when female partner's communication quality is entered in model 4. The association between female partner's feelings of equity and men's relationship satisfaction is reduced by more than 80 percent in model 6. Taken together, these findings suggest that the association of the division of routine housework and perceived equity with men's relationship satisfaction is spurious.

Although men's communication quality is associated with men's relationship satisfaction, results show that neither the division of housework nor perceived equity explain this association. We therefore find no evidence to support hypothesis 7.

## Discussion

How couples arrange their housework and how they feel about those arrangements are related to feelings of satisfaction. Partners find divisions of unpaid housework to be most fair and are mutually most satisfied with their relationships when they are equal (Amato et al. 2003; Frisco and Williams 2003; Wilkie et al. 1998). Why this is the case has not been well explained. One integral factor linking the division of housework to perceived equity and relationship satisfaction that had not been explored fully, prior to this study, was partner communication.

Although communication matters for housework and relationship satisfaction, how it matters was less than clear. This study aimed to explicate the role of partners' communication quality to improve our theoretical understanding of

the role of housework in shaping couples' well-being and the processes through which couples shape their housework arrangements. We tested two theories—equity theory and gender power—and found evidence to support both. Partners' communication is a primary factor linking the division of housework to relationship satisfaction, but the way partners' communication matters depends on the partner's gender.

Given competing hypotheses regarding causal ordering, and cross-sectional data, IV analyses were used to establish the direction of association between communication and the division of housework. Consistent with a gender power perspective, our results indicated that female partner's communication quality is exogenous to the division of housework. In contrast, male partner's communication quality was endogenous, consistent with equity theory and previous findings on the division of childcare by Schober (2012). For women, this means that male partner's communication mediated the association between the division of labor, feelings of equity, and women's relationship satisfaction. For men, the results suggest that the association between the division of housework and men's relationship satisfaction is spurious and owed to the quality of the female partner's communication.

One of the primary findings of this study is that female but not male communication quality shapes couples' housework arrangements. Given that a conventional division of housework is the hegemonic norm (Blaisure and Allen 1995), this makes sense since it is women, not men, who bear a greater burden of initiating and crafting nontraditional divisions of labor at home. Women's communication, however,

seems to matter largely in distinguishing whether men do most of the housework. Women's communication quality didn't vary between conventional and egalitarian arrangements. It is interesting to note that men appear to do most of the housework only when their female partners communicate poorly (less positive and effective, more negative). Although communication tactics like avoidance, withdrawal, and negative affect may be necessary for getting men to take responsibility for housework, something they may be reluctant to do, it appears to carry costs as men in counterconventional arrangements express significantly lower relationship satisfaction compared to men in conventional or egalitarian arrangements. Although counterconventional arrangements remain rare, research shows that the number of stay-at-home dads and male homemakers has increased substantially in recent years (Carlson et al. 2018; Livingston 2014). Reversing gendered family roles may be a sign of progress, but research shows that men in these situations are often at home due to unemployment or health concerns and not out of ideology (Livingston 2014). As such, men may need a great deal of reinforcement to take on the home responsibilities that their earnings and time availability suggest should be theirs. That these situations appear thrust upon couples rather than specifically chosen helps explain why couples' relationship quality seems to suffer in these arrangements (Carlson et al. 2016; Carlson et al. 2018; Schieman et al. 2018).

The findings regarding women's communication stand in contrast to qualitative work on gender power, communication, and the division of housework, especially those that suggest that good communication is associated with more egalitarian divisions of labor. Yet although Komter (1989) indicated that direct communication from women was necessary to make changes in the division of labor toward more equality, she also noted that women were often unsuccessful even when they exhibited high-quality communication. On average, our results indicate that high-quality communication from female partners is not sufficient to achieve egalitarian divisions of labor.

Qualitative work also suggests that good communication from men is necessary for egalitarianism. Our results support the observation that high-quality communication among men is associated with a greater likelihood of egalitarian arrangements compared to conventional divisions of housework. However, in line with equity theory, we find that the quality of men's communication appears to stem from housework arrangements rather than determine them. Moreover, our findings indicate that men's communication quality is a primary mediating mechanism linking the division of housework to women's relationship satisfaction. This is important as the vast majority of research on the division of labor has focused on women's own characteristics and perspectives and the way they alone shape women's reaction to the division of labor.

Although equity theory implies that men's communication would be an outcome of men's sense of fairness, we find

that communication accounts for only a small proportion of the association between men's sense of fairness and women's relationship satisfaction. Instead, men's communication quality appears to explain nearly all of the association between women's perceived equity and relationship satisfaction. Why this is the case isn't entirely clear. On one hand, men's communication quality may affect how women perceive the division of labor, making the association between women's perceived equity and relationship satisfaction spurious. Male partners who tout their less-than-equal shares of housework as being more than "most men" could lead their female partners to judge their relationships as more fair (cf. Tichenor 1999). On the other hand, women's perceived equity could influence men's communication. Men may be attuned to indicators of women's sense of fairness, which may shape men's communication and thus subsequently affect women's relationship satisfaction.

Whatever the causal pathway, this study demonstrates that men's communication is implicated in women's sense of equity. Again, these findings depart somewhat from those of other studies that suggest that the association between one's communication and one's equity is limited largely to women (Canary and Stafford 1992; Ledbetter et al. 2013; Stafford and Canary 2006). One reason for these discrepancies is that past studies examined this association separately for men and women, whereas this study accounted for the interdependence of observations between partners using APIM and thus the high degree of correlation among partner's feelings of communication and perceived equity. The strong correlations observed between partner's satisfaction, feelings of equity, and communication demonstrate that future research looking at the consequences of the division of labor should consider the interdependence of both partners' characteristics.

Because perceived equity is, by definition, an outcome of the division of labor, we are confident in our assessment of causal ordering among men for whom female partners' communication quality is exogenous to the division of labor. Among women, however, we cannot say definitively whether the male partner's communication predicts the woman's sense of fairness or vice versa. Disentangling the causal associations between communication, perceived equity, and relationship satisfaction is unfortunately beyond the scope of this article. Although theory and research suggest that relationship satisfaction is an outcome of communication and the division of labor, some studies suggest these associations may be reciprocal or reversely causal (e.g., Johnson et al. 2006). We were unfortunately limited in our ability to test these causal relationships by the cross-sectional nature of MARS and a lack of suitable IVs. It is entirely plausible that an equal division of housework leads to more satisfaction with one's relationship, which leads to better communication and subsequently to more perceived equity. This is a question we hope future research will address.

Although this study makes numerous contributions to our understanding of the links between the division of

housework, communication, and relationship satisfaction in couples, there are a few additional limitations. First, the MARS sample consists of middle- to low-income heterosexual parents, so the findings may not be generalizable to wealthier, same-sex, and childless couples. Nevertheless, limited resources to outsource housework make communication between lower-income partners more salient than for upper-income partners who make up only a small proportion of couples. Second, MARS contains many indicators of communication quality, and while the scale demonstrates high reliability, the list is not entirely comprehensive. How the addition of other indicators may affect results is not clear. Third, the study is limited by the individual assessments of the division of labor and partners' communication in MARS. It is unfortunate that we were not able to compare personal assessments of one's own communication skills with partner's assessments. These limitations may have some effect on the validity of these measures. Finally, because the data are cross-sectional, we are unable to capture partners' (dis)satisfaction and communication skills as they negotiate and renegotiate their divisions of labor.

Egalitarian divisions of housework are best for couples' well-being. When one person is primarily responsible for housework—women in conventional arrangements or men in counterconventional arrangements—that person's relationship satisfaction most often suffers. Only in egalitarian arrangements are partners mutually benefited. We find domestic arrangements are associated with partners' communication quality, and this communication explains why egalitarianism is associated with more relationship satisfaction compared to one partner's having responsibility for housework. For contemporary couples who value self-disclosure and trust (Giddens 1992), communication skills appear to be an essential part of crafting a fulfilling relationship. Strong communication skills help couples improve the long-term, global health of the relationship in a positive and constructive fashion that leads to mutual satisfaction. For women, good, high-quality communication appears to shape not only the division of labor in her partnership but also her partner's relationship satisfaction. For men, more equal sharing of labor appears to lead to better communication with partners, enhancing their partners' well-being.


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### ORCID iD

Daniel L. Carlson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9415-0656>

### Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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## Author Biographies

**Daniel L. Carlson** is an associate professor of family, health, and policy in the Department of Family and Consumer Studies at the University of Utah. He is a family demographer with expertise in gender, life course, and health whose research focuses on the consequences of the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) for health disparities and social inequalities. To date, his general interest in the consequences of changing family patterns for health disparities and social inequalities has resulted in two integrated streams of research. The first stream of research involves understanding how families have changed during the SDT in the United States and what consequences this has had for children's and couples' well-being. The second research stream explores how the SDT has exacerbated racial/ethnic and socioeconomic differences in family formation and how this is related to health disparities and inequalities across groups.

**Amanda J. Miller** is an associate professor of sociology and director of faculty development at the University of Indianapolis. Her work focuses on the intersections of family, gender, and social class through examining couples' divisions of household labor, relationship progression, and fertility decisions. Furthermore, she examines best practices for supporting underrepresented students inside and outside of the college classroom. Most recently, she and Sharon Sassler published the William J. Goode Award-winning book *Cohabitation Nation: Gender, Class, and the Remaking of Relationships*.

**Stephanie Rudd** is an assistant professor of social work at the University of Indianapolis. Her work focuses on equity, oppression, incivility, and dismantling racism in social work education. Prior to her role as assistant professor, she worked as a social worker in different capacities for nearly 20 years with clients with serious mental illnesses. Her teaching focuses on mental health and addictions, and therefore she regularly presents on motivational interviewing and mindfulness. She also remains in the clinical field as a clinical consultant and licensure supervisor.