

The Interplay of Equity and Gender Ideology in Perceived Housework Fairness. Evidence from an Experimental Vignette Design

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n° 01-2015

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Il working paper riflette il testo originale presentato dagli autori nel seminario del 01/07/2015 organizzato dall'Osservatorio MU.S.I.C. (discussant Roberto Albano - Università di Torino, Chiara Bertone - Università del Piemonte Orientale, Raffaella Ferrero Camoletto - Università di Torino)

Per la grafica della copertina si ringrazia Federica Turco

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies on the perceived fairness of the division of housework have suffered from limitations resulting from the use of observational data, namely reverse causation and the difficulty of disentangling the effects of strongly interconnected factors. This article overcomes these limitations by using an innovative method in this research field: a survey-based vignette design combining the benefits of experiments with a higher capability of generalization. From our findings based on Italian primary data, we argue that both equity and gender ideology theories concur to explain housework fairness. Consistently with equity theory, under certain conditions it is considered fair to exchange paid and unpaid time, regardless of their economic value. Moreover, a request to renegotiate housework is more legitimate if it redresses a prior inequity and, for women, irrespective of the asker's gender. Gender ideology affects partners' equity considerations, weighting their contribution to paid and unpaid work differently.

Keywords: Housework, Experimental methods, Equity theory, Gender ideology, Fairness.

One of the reasons explaining the persistent gender gap in housework division is that an objective inequality is not necessarily perceived to be unfair, and hence a necessary ingredient for change is lacking. Nevertheless, research on the determinants of housework fairness has often provided inconclusive evidence because of methodological problems relating to the use of standard survey data, namely reverse causation and the difficulty of disentangling the effects of strongly interconnected factors. Moreover, scholars testing equity theory and gender ideology theory – two theoretical explanations frequently applied in previous studies – have generally considered these perspectives to be in opposition, even if some theoretical arguments suggest that equity and gender ideology actually emphasize different elements of the fairness evaluation process. This study aims to overcome these limitations by applying a research design that considers these theories jointly, rather than in opposition, and by adopting an experimental method, i.e., the vignettes, which also permits a good generalization of findings. Thus, we show how equity and gender ideology theory can be empirically integrated to explain housework fairness. The methodology proposed here is an innovation for the study of housework fairness and, even though we put it into practice in an Italian context, it can also be fruitfully replicated in other countries.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Two theoretical frameworks – equity theory and gender ideology theory – have been most commonly used in empirical research on the perceived fairness of the division of housework. According to equity theory (see, e.g., Walster et al., 1978), social relationships are considered to be fair whenever each individual's outcomes (i.e., rewards) are proportional to his/her inputs (i.e., contributions).

Couple relationships involve the exchange of a wide range of tangible and intangible inputs and outcomes. Focusing on the tangible ones, an example of an exchange affecting housework fairness is that between income and time devoted to domestic chores. Individuals who contribute less to the household income should perceive less unfairness in the division of unpaid work even if they do most of the tasks. According to Lennon and Rosenfield (1994), the underlying mechanism is the lowering of expectations that the partner who has fewer resources to put into the relationship has about what can be obtained in exchange. Another example of exchange is that between time devoted to paid and unpaid work: a lopsided division of housework can be considered to be fair if the

partner doing less at home compensates for it with longer working hours (DeMaris and Longmore, 1996). Nevertheless, this mechanism works only if both partners are involved in and agree to the decision about the division of tasks and responsibilities within the couple.¹

In sum, equity theorists hold that paid work, unpaid work and income are valuable inputs that can be exchanged within the couple in order to obtain an equitable deal. It is important to stress that, because of the gender neutrality of this theory, what matters is the proportionality between inputs and outcomes, regardless of the kind of inputs each partner puts into the exchange.

Gender ideology theory emphasizes the role of norms, values and identities in shaping individual expectations. Gender ideology can be defined as the set of beliefs and attitudes about the appropriate roles of men and women in society and the way a person places himself/herself and relevant others with regard to work and family roles, normally linked to the gender social structure. Couple relationships provide arenas in which this ideology is played out, serving to provide an opportunity for the partners to behave in ways that validate their identities as masculine and feminine, that is, to display the visible aspects of their gender ideologies (Greenstein, 1996b). Berk (1985) maintained that housework is one of the cornerstones of the different roles and responsibilities of men and women, because it has traditionally been considered typical female work; consequently, it is one of the main contexts in which gender membership can be symbolically created by performing (or refusing to perform) various domestic tasks (see also, e.g., Jackson and Scott, 2002). Unlike equity theory, gender ideology theory does not necessarily consider housework as an activity to be avoided or exchanged with some other input: on the contrary, it can also be a way of expressing love and care, particularly for women.

According to gender theorists, women who embrace a traditional gender ideology are more prone to consider the management of housework as an integral part of the proper female identity. Consequently, a disadvantageous housework division is not necessarily seen as unfair. On the contrary, women with an egalitarian gender ideology do not consider running a household and raising children as the only pillar of their identity; rather, they expect a substantial male contribution to the chores for identity reasons, and they are not willing to consider an unequal division of tasks to be fair.

¹ In this respect, see also the role of procedural justice in the conceptual framework developed by Major (1987) and Thompson (1991).

In the empirical research testing equity and gender ideology theories, these perspectives have been regarded as competing rather than complementary (see, e.g., Lennon and Rosenfield, 1994; Layte, 1998; DeMaris and Longmore, 1996), because of the former's gender blindness and focus on utilitarian behavior, which neglects the role of norms and values. However, there are theoretical arguments for thinking otherwise. Moving from the theoretical work developed by Major (1987), Thompson (1991) suggested that housework fairness be considered more than exchange and equity, since justice is inherently gendered.² Inspired by Thompson's reasoning, we argue that equity theory emphasizes different elements of the fairness evaluation process than gender ideology theory. The latter focuses on how beliefs and attitudes toward gender affect the judgment of inequality in the division of housework and the meaning of paid and unpaid work itself, but it does not categorically rule out that actors may also take into account equity considerations, which could simply be weighted differently. For example, even if a woman judges her housework contribution according to traditionally gendered standards, this does not mean that she has to ignore her partner's contribution, unless one assumes "culturally doped" actors. She might simply overweight her partner's inputs to unpaid work and underweight her own, compared to what an egalitarian-minded woman would do. If this is correct, empirical predictions derived from equity theory are not necessarily competing with gender ideology, but are complementary. Moreover, gender ideology can function as a sort of "guide" helping partners to define an exchange rate for their exchanges of time and money, which is necessary to evaluate fairness in terms of the equity principle, given the different nature of the inputs.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

In the last 25 years, a number of studies, mostly conducted in the United States, have tested the predictions of the equity and gender ideology theories about housework fairness, but the findings were inconclusive.³ The analysis strategy of a first group of studies (Baxter and Western, 1998; Sanchez and Kane, 1996; Sanchez, 1994; Nordenmark and Nyman, 2003; Lennon and Rosenfield, 1994; Benin and Agostinelli,

² Thompson implicitly suggested the integration between equity and gender ideology because her proposal included some factors (i.e., outcome values, comparison referents and justifications) that take into account, among other things, equity and gender considerations.

³ These studies usually focused on housework, excluding childcare (for an exception, see Baxter, 2000). A few studies (see, e.g., Greenstein, 2009) have adopted a comparative approach to shed light on the macro-level factors affecting housework fairness.

1988; Baxter, 2000; Young et al., 2013; DeMaris and Longmore, 1996) simply consisted in testing the main effects on the perception of fairness of the different factors suggested by equity and gender ideology theories: time devoted to housework and paid employment, income and gender attitudes. One of the first studies (DeMaris and Longmore, 1996) to test all these factors on both men and women found that fairness perception increased when the husband's relative contribution to housework and paid work increased, in line with equity theory; however, income did not affect housework fairness. Moreover, egalitarian husbands tended to see the division of housework as more unfair to their wives than did traditional husbands, and egalitarian wives saw the division as more unfair to themselves, consistently with gender ideology theory. These findings were largely confirmed by other studies as regards the effects of housework time and income, but the evidence for the effect of paid work time and gender ideology was mixed (for conflicting findings see, e.g., Lennon & Rosenfeld 1994 and Sanchez 1994 as regards the former; Baxter & Western 1998 and Baxter 2000 as regards the latter).

Several scholars (Lavee and Katz, 2002; Greenstein, 1996a; Layte, 1998; Blair and Johnson, 1992; Piña and Bengston, 1993; Braun et al., 2008; Greenstein, 2009) adopted a different analysis strategy, arguing that time devoted to paid work, income and gender attitudes shape the perception of fairness in interaction with the actual inequality of housework division. These authors' analyses considered both the main effects and the interactions between various equity and gender ideology factors and the actual division of housework. According to Braun and colleagues (2008), just analyzing the main effects would lead to biased and inconclusive results, because "different groups of women react differently to inequality of the household division of labor" (p. 1152). Even this analysis strategy, however, resulted in mixed evidence (for instance, Greenstein 1996a and Blair & Johnsons 1992 reached different conclusions about the role of gender ideology).

MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY

Considering both the main effects of paid work, income and gender ideology and their interactions with housework division was the first important step towards achieving a fuller understanding of housework fairness. Nonetheless, it did not solve two important methodological problems resulting from the use of observational data, both cross sectional and longitudinal, that probably contribute to explaining the inconsistency of the research carried out so far. The first problem is a general issue concerning reverse causation in the

relationship between attitudes and behaviors. All previous studies assume that the division of housework affects the perception of fairness; however, it cannot be ruled out that perceived (un)fairness in turn influences the housework time. Consequently, a portion of the latter's effect on the former might be endogenous. Second, analyses based on survey data generally cannot disentangle the effects of factors that are strongly interconnected in real life (i.e., paid work, unpaid work, and income). It is difficult to infer their effects on fairness, even with multivariate techniques, because they are part of complex causal chains and are the outcomes of decisions that actors make jointly (i.e., the allocation of time to different activities). In cross-sectional and longitudinal observational designs, only the causal effect of one factor can be, at best, estimated, because the others are used as control variables, and reverse causation cannot always be ruled out. In a longitudinal observational design, it is possible to detect the effects of life course *events* (e.g., parenthood and relationship transitions) that produce changes in the partners' resources provision which in turn affect perceived fairness. Also in this case, however, it is difficult to estimate which particular change is responsible for change in fairness perception because life course events affect all the factors (paid work, unpaid work, income) at the same time. Bearing these problems in mind, our study improves on the research carried out so far in three main respects. First, we introduce a methodological innovation with the adoption of the vignette technique in a survey-based experimental design, which in our opinion is the best strategy (see next section) for addressing the earlier studies' methodological limitations. Vignettes in experimental designs have seldom been used in family research; to the best of our knowledge, only one study (Antonides and Kroft, 2005), based on a basic application of vignettes, addressed the topic tackled here, but did not test equity or gender ideology hypotheses and relied on a small convenience sample. Second, with our research design, the factors derived from equity and gender ideology theories can be dealt with jointly. This makes it possible to overcome a frequent flaw of research practice with observational data. In many studies, key indicators from different theories are included in the same statistical model in order to test which one has the strongest predictive power. This choice reveals that theoretical frameworks are seen as being in perpetual conflict, as if they were engaged in a "race" (King, 1986: 669). We devise, instead, a kind of analysis where the factors suggested by different theories do not compete with each other, but simply tackle different elements of the same process.

Third, previous empirical research considered situations in which the different factors suggested by equity and gender ideology theories remain constant within subjects.⁴ Here, however, we also consider a scenario in which one partner in the couple requests that housework be renegotiated due to a change in paid work time (see next section). This makes it possible to carry out an additional empirical test of the theoretical perspectives used here, which gives further solidity to our analysis.

The hypotheses to be tested in this study are presented in the next section, as they can be more readily understood after the vignettes have been described.

METHOD

Our study combined a standard phone survey method with an online questionnaire containing vignettes or scenarios administered to the same respondents who were interviewed by phone. Vignettes are verbal descriptions of fictitious (but realistic) situations to be evaluated by subjects, often, but not necessarily, within an experimental research design (Mutz, 2011: , ch. 4; Wallander, 2009; Ganong and Coleman, 2006; Finch, 1987). In this kind of design, vignettes contain one or more variable elements called *factors* (i.e., variables deemed to affect an individual's judgment about the vignette) that are randomly assigned to respondents. Random assignment makes it possible to assess the causal effect of the factors on people's judgments. A strength of this method is that, unlike laboratory experiments, vignettes can be implemented in a survey in order to generalize the findings to a wider population.

Applying this method to housework fairness is a convenient way to address the methodological problems affecting previous research on this topic. Thanks to the experimental manipulation of stimuli made possible by the vignettes, the causal direction between behaviors (division of housework) and attitudes (perception of fairness) is completely unequivocal, since the former are experimentally manipulated (though only within a fictitious representation, see the concluding section). Moreover, the manipulation and randomization of factors that are usually strongly interconnected (division of housework, time devoted to paid work, income) makes these factors fully independent of each other and enables their causal effects to be estimated simultaneously.

⁴ The few longitudinal studies carried out so far (see, e.g., Perales et al., 2015) focused on the effects of parenthood and relationship transitions on housework fairness.

Sample and research design

Our sample was randomly drawn from the landline telephone directories of four provinces of Piemonte, a region in northwestern Italy. We selected dual-earner married or cohabitating couples with at least one child under 13 years old. The particular circumstances of this target group, characterized by multiple sources of time pressure (from work and family responsibilities), made the choice of this sample highly relevant because it is among these households that the issue of the perceived fairness of the division of housework becomes particularly salient. Generally speaking, the most interesting research questions about housework division mainly regard dual-earner couples, in which the inconsistency between the labour market transformations of recent decades and domestic behaviour are well represented. Male breadwinner and female breadwinner couples are either less interesting or too rare.

The female employment rate in Piemonte, though higher than the national average, is not very different from the north and central areas of the country (Eurostat, 2014: ; see Labor Force Survey regional series). Moreover, as we have calculated from the latest Italian time use data (2008-09), the division of housework among dual-earner couples in Piemonte, as measured by the ratio of women's to men's time devoted to domestic chores, is almost identical (2.7) to that of other north-central regions (2.8 on average) and different only from that of the traditional southern regions (3.9). Accordingly, although our sample is confined to four northern provinces, it can be considered fairly representative of Italian households in similar family conditions living in most parts of the country. We will discuss implications in the concluding section.

828 married and unmarried couples (1656 individuals, response rate 42%) were interviewed by phone between October 2010 and February 2011 using a structured questionnaire about the division of domestic and care tasks, perceived fairness, gender roles, and paid work. During Spring 2013, individuals were contacted again to collect their email address. We were able to reach 1365 individuals from the initial sample (82%), to whom the online questionnaire with the vignettes was sent. 770 individuals (56% of the email list or 47% of the initial sample) responded to the questionnaire. As can be expected, the considerable drop in the number of cases did not occur entirely at random. Indeed, actual respondents were positively selected by education, as is often the case with all survey modes. For other important characteristics such as gender, housework division

and gender attitudes, the differences between the initial and final sample were negligible (descriptive statistics of both samples are given in Table 1).⁵

[Table 1 about here]

Unlike the so-called *factorial surveys* (Wallander, 2009), where subjects are given multiple versions of the same vignette, respondents in our study evaluated only a particular version of each vignette (between-subject design). The main advantage of this design, given the large number of cases, is that the effects of various factors can be tested without the sensitization and carryover effects resulting from multiple evaluations of the same vignette (Greenwald, 1976).

Variables, vignettes, and hypotheses

In this article, we focus on the vignette evidence and use survey data only to characterize respondents in terms of gender, education, gender attitudes and division of domestic labor. The latter two variables are crucial for identifying individuals with egalitarian / traditional gender ideologies. Gender ideology is usually captured from respondents' answers to attitudinal questions. Accordingly, we created a scale using the respondents' level of agreement (5-point Likert scale) with seven items.⁶ Respondents were then sorted into three groups using tertiles of the scale variable, named egalitarian, transitional and traditional, although these labels must be understood as relative to a sample of dual-earner couples (i.e., less traditional than average). Nevertheless, the reliability value of our gender attitude scale ($\alpha = 0.62$) is under the conventional threshold. So, we complement it by including in the analysis a measure of a behavioral consequence of gender ideology, that is, the proportional contribution to domestic labor (Davis and Greenstein, 2009). We asked respondents to report the frequency of the various domestic activities in their

⁵ Within the final sample, 74% of respondents form household couples with other respondents and hence are not statistically independent units. For this reason, we made robustness checks of all our findings by randomly sampling one respondent per couple. We found no substantial differences (results not shown).

⁶ The items are: "A woman needs children in order to feel fulfilled", "It is not good for the couple if the woman earns more than the man", "In case of marital disruption it is better for children to live with the mother rather than with the father", "A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his/her mother has a full-time job", "When parents need care, it is more natural for daughters to perform this task than sons", "A man needs children in order to feel fulfilled", "A woman should be willing to devote less time to paid work for the sake of the family".

household and then their proportion of participation in each activity.⁷ We assigned conventional numerical values to the frequency and proportion of participation answers in order to obtain an index expressing the percentage of housework done by the wife. Once again, we sorted our respondents into three groups (egalitarian, collaborative and traditional).⁸

The online questionnaire contained two vignettes focused specifically on our topic. The first dealt with the fairness of a given family arrangement in terms of paid and unpaid work. The following is the English translation of the text (factors and associated levels in brackets):

The Rossi family consists of a husband and wife who both work. (*They have no children / They have a 2-year-old child*). The wife contributes to family income by approximately (*two-thirds / one half / one-third*) and devotes to her job (*10 fewer hours per week than her husband / 10 hours more per week than her husband / the same number of hours as her husband*).⁹ At home, chores are divided between the spouses as follows: the wife does about (*20% / 50% / 80%*) of the housework and the rest is done by the husband. Taking all these elements into account, how do you personally judge the division of housework in this family?

Respondents had to judge the fairness of the housework division represented in the vignette on a 0-100 scale (0=completely unfair to the husband; 50=fair to both; 100=completely unfair to the wife). This vignette manipulated the three factors pointed out by equity theory, relating to the exchange of time (paid and unpaid work) and money inputs in the household. The fourth factor (children in the home) was introduced as a control condition that might alter the judgment, given that the presence of young children fosters a traditional division of both housework and childcare (see, e.g., Schober, 2013). The vignette enabled us to test three hypotheses derived from equity and gender ideology theories:

H1a: According to equity theory, inequality in housework, irrespective of the gender of the disadvantaged spouse, is judged to be fair if it is compensated with an opposite inequality in paid work time contribution.

⁷ Childcare activities were excluded because their meanings are rather different from those of the household chores (Coltrane, 2000).

⁸ The attitudinal and the behavioral measures of gender ideology are not strongly correlated because of the low reliability of the former and the fact that behaviors do not necessarily reflect attitudes.

⁹ We represented wife's paid work time contribution with relative hours instead of a ratio (as for income) in order to minimize the risk of respondents being confused by different numbers.

H1b: According to equity theory, inequality in housework, irrespective of the gender of the disadvantaged spouse, is judged to be fair if it is compensated with an opposite inequality in income contribution.

H2: According to gender ideology theory, a division of housework unfavorable to the wife is judged more unfair by egalitarian individuals than by traditional-minded ones. Conversely, a division of housework unfavorable to the husband is judged more unfair by traditional-minded individuals than by egalitarian ones.

The second vignette concerned the justifiability of a request to renegotiate housework division, due to an unemployment episode that creates an involuntary imbalance between the wife's (Luisa) and husband's (Federico) contribution to paid work time (and consequently to income, even if the subject receives an unemployment allowance). This imbalance occurs within a domestic arrangement that, depending on the manipulation's outcome, can be egalitarian or unequal to his or her advantage. The English translation of the text follows (notice that once the character's gender, i.e., *Luisa / Federico*, is manipulated the first time, then the subsequent text is consequently fixed):

Luisa and Federico form a family and (*do not have children / have a child / have two children*). Both are full-time employed. At home, Luisa does (*most / about half / a small part*) of the chores and the rest is done by Federico. At one point, (*Luisa / Federico*) is laid off, so (*she / he*) has much more free time than before. (*Federico / Luisa*) then asks (*Luisa / Federico*) – given that (*she / he*) now has more available time – to take on the housework that (*he / she*) previously did. Taking all these elements into account, how justified or unjustified is (*Federico's / Luisa's*) request in your opinion?

Respondents expressed their opinion on a 1 to 10 scale where 1 = totally unjustified and 10 = totally justified. In practice, this vignette makes it possible to study the perceived legitimacy, and implicitly fairness, of changes in housework that can bring the situation closer to or farther from the equity point, depending on the previous division of housework and the new occupational status of one of the partners. For example, if the prior domestic arrangement was unequal to his advantage, his request for renegotiation following her unemployment, should be less justified than if the prior domestic arrangement was egalitarian or unequal to her advantage. The manipulation of the gender of the spouse who becomes unemployed served to control for the existence of a gendered standard of evaluation, as can be hypothesized following the gender ideology perspective. The

children factor was introduced for the same reason as in the first vignette. This vignette enables us to test the following hypotheses:

H3: According to equity theory, a request to renegotiate housework is considered to be more legitimate if it serves to redress a prior inequity, irrespective of the gender of the spouse who asks to renegotiate.

H4: According to gender ideology theory, the wife's requests to renegotiate housework are at least as justified as the husband's for egalitarian individuals, and less justified for traditional ones. By contrast, traditional individuals view the husband's request to renegotiate housework as more justified than do egalitarian ones.

Given that subjects' ratings of the vignettes were expressed through numerical scales (0-100 or 1-10), we analyzed data by means of multiple-factor ANOVAs. As outlined in the empirical evidence section, selected interaction effects among the vignette factors were included in the analysis. Randomizing factors makes controlling for respondents' characteristics theoretically and practically useless. Some of these characteristics (gender, education, attitudinal and behavioral gender ideology) are included as covariates interacting with selected vignette factors in order to test specific hypotheses deriving from gender ideology theory, or to ascertain possible sources of heterogeneity in average experimental effects.

RESULTS

Vignette 1: Fairness evaluation of housework division

Table 2 shows the ANOVA for the vignette concerning the fairness evaluation of the division of housework. The following findings are not split by respondent's gender, because this covariate had no main effect and did not interact with any of the vignette's factors (results not shown).

[Table 2 about here]

In line with the predictions of equity theory, significant effects of the wife's % of housework and wife's hours of paid work were found (Model 1). Moreover, there was a significant interaction between the time inputs, meaning that the effect of housework division on

fairness judgment is contingent upon the wife's involvement in paid work. These findings support Hypothesis 1a insofar as fairness can be achieved, not only through a perfectly equal distribution of domestic work, but also through an exchange between the latter and paid work (Graph 1).

[Graph 1 about here]

Indeed, when the wife works 10 hours more than her husband and does just 20% of the housework, the division is considered approximately fair (avg. score = 55, being 50 the equity point). Interestingly, the exactly opposite situation (i.e., the wife working outside home 10 fewer hours than her husband and doing 80% of housework) was not found fair by interviewees, but rather unfair to the wife (avg. score = 34). This asymmetry, which is the consequence of the interaction between paid and unpaid work, may represent respondents' unwillingness to reinforce the wife's traditional home-making role, a model that they perhaps do not want to support explicitly, although they still largely conform to it, given that women in our sample spend much less time in paid work than men (results not shown). The ANOVA table (Model 1) also shows that the effect of the wife's contribution to family income had a significant but very small main effect at conventional levels ($p=0.042$), whereas its interaction with housework was not significant at all. Therefore, Hypothesis 1b cannot be strongly supported: although income contribution seems to have a slight effect on judgments in the expected direction (when the wife's contribution changes from one third to two thirds, the average fairness score increases from 45 to 47, data not shown), its relevance is too weak to permit a real exchange with the partner's housework to achieve equity. Put differently, money (hopefully!) cannot buy fairness, at least in the family.

Finally, by introducing the effect of the gender ideology covariates and its interaction with the vignette's division of housework (Table 2, Model 2 and 3), we found partial support for Hypothesis 2. The attitudinal measure of gender ideology had a significant main effect, but no interaction effect. Graph 2 shows that individuals with an egalitarian attitude judge domestic inequalities that are unfavorable to the wife more negatively than traditional-minded ones (the difference is statistically significant, test not shown), whereas the latter, contrary to our hypothesis, do not judge domestic inequalities that are unfavorable to the husband to be more unfair than egalitarian individuals. The behavioral measure of gender ideology yielded a significant interaction effect, suggesting that domestic inequalities are viewed more negatively – in either direction, toward the wife or the husband – by

individuals with egalitarian behaviors, regardless of the spouse who has been disadvantaged (Graph 3). Here again, traditional-minded individuals do not view domestic inequalities that are unfavorable to the husband as being more unfair.

[Graph 2 & 3 about here]

We also checked for differential effects of vignette factors across education sub-groups, but this individual covariate did not interact with any of the factors (results not shown).

Vignette 2: Renegotiating housework division

Table 3 shows the ANOVA for the vignette concerning the request to renegotiate housework division after the partner's job loss. The findings show that the share of housework prior to being laid off and the gender of the spouse who becomes unemployed have significant main effects (Model 1). The main effect of gender holds on average, but is strongly driven by men's answers in our sample. This is proved by the significant interaction between respondent's gender and the vignette's gender (Table 3, Model 2).

[Table 3 about here]

Graph 4 illustrates substantive findings, split by respondent's gender. Men tend to systematically justify the wife's request more than the husband's, perhaps because they are afraid of appearing as male chauvinists, given the rising importance of equal opportunities in Western countries. Nevertheless, the possibility that men are truly more sympathetic with the female condition cannot be ruled out. By contrast, fairness scores among women do not differ significantly by the vignette's gender, in line with equity theory (we performed statistical tests and separate analyses by respondents' gender not shown here). Another relevant result is that all means are above 6 on a 1-10 scale, meaning that the request to renegotiate is considered legitimate enough on average, whatever the situation. The unemployment episode creates an imbalance in the paid work contribution that, in line with equity theory, can be legitimately compensated by an opposite imbalance in housework, whatever the starting point. It can also be seen that, in accordance with our Hypothesis 3, the request is more justified if it serves to redress a prior inequity. In both women's and men's answers, the fairness score is higher when the subject who asks to

renegotiate did most of the chores than when he/she did about half of the chores or less. In the first case, the prior division of housework was inequitable as it was not counterbalanced by a symmetrical inequality in paid work (both spouses were full-time employed).

[Graph 4 about here]

Lastly, we found significant interaction effects between the vignette's gender and respondent's gender ideology variables that partially meet our Hypothesis 4 (see Table 3, Model 3 and 4). Here again, however, answers differ between male and female respondents (see Graphs 5 and 6). Among men, a systematic over-justification of the wife's request is found again, although it is weaker among traditional-minded husbands. In line with our expectations, traditional women consider the husband's request slightly more justified than the wife's, whereas for egalitarian ones the contrary is true (we performed statistical tests – not shown here – revealing significant differences between egalitarian and traditional women in both measures of gender ideology).

[Graph 5 & 6 about here]

As in the first vignette, no significant interaction between any of the factors and respondent's education was found (results not shown).

DISCUSSION

Previous research testing equity and gender ideology theories often considered these perspectives as opposed. However, the factors suggested by these theories seem to complement rather than exclude each other. This study showed how they can be concretely integrated in empirical research. The first vignette shows that, as suggested by the equity theory, paid and unpaid work can be traded in order to reach an equitable deal, at least under certain conditions. Nevertheless, gender ideology plays a role in this process, above and beyond the compensations that can be offered within the exchange. As suggested by Greenstein (1996a), gender ideology works as a lens through which inequalities in the input/output exchange are viewed, and thereby turned (or not) into inequities: egalitarian individuals are more severe than traditional-minded ones in the

evaluation of inequalities disfavoring women. At the micro level, this result mirrors what has been found at the macro level: there is less tolerance for gender inequalities in domestic work in more egalitarian countries (Greenstein, 2009).

Additional findings from the second vignette support the contention of an integration between equity and gender ideology theories. On the one hand, a request to renegotiate housework due to an unemployment episode for one partner is always considered to be legitimate, whatever the previous division of paid and unpaid work. This follows the predictions of equity theory: an unemployed person can redress inequity with a partner engaged in market activities by carrying out most or all domestic activities. Also in line with equity theory, the request to renegotiate is seen as more legitimate if it compensates for a previous imbalance in the division of responsibilities. Moreover, the same legitimacy is attributed, at least by women, both to the husband's and to the wife's request. Nevertheless, the level of legitimacy depends on gender ideology: egalitarian women legitimate the wife's request more than the husband's, whereas the opposite is found among traditional ones.

By contrast, some findings do not support equity and gender ideology theories. First, the exchange that individuals seem to consider fair has a symbolic rather than economic foundation, as might be expected in marital relationships, following the logic of what Haas and Deseran (1981) called "symbolic exchange" and Hochschild (1989) "economy of gratitude." This can be seen from the fact that income enters in the evaluation of fairness of a given domestic arrangement only to a very limited extent. Moreover, the effect of paid work time on fairness is independent of its monetary value, as income is exogenous here and included in the ANOVA. Thus, time inputs (paid and unpaid work) can be considered as bargaining chips, regardless of economic considerations. Another result to be stressed is that men systematically over-justify the wife's request to renegotiate housework, though women do not. This is not in line with equity theory, given its gender neutrality, and strictly speaking it clashes with gender ideology theory as well: even traditional men see the wife's request as more legitimate than the husband's, although the opposite was expected. This result can be interpreted in two different ways, so the issue remains open for further research. The first interpretation suggests the possibility that men, even the traditional ones, are slowly becoming aware of the importance of equality in housework division and are more sympathetic to the female condition. This interpretation would follow the theory of lagged adaptation put forward by Gershuny and colleagues (1994), according to which adjustments of responsibility for paid and unpaid work do not occur in the short run, but

rather through an extended process of household negotiation over a long period. In Italy, we know that the male contribution to housework and especially to childcare is slowly changing (see, e.g., Ruspini, 2011). Moreover, it must be considered that our sample is more educated than average, and a recent study by Sullivan and colleagues (2014) found that the positive effect over time of high education on the father's contribution to domestic work and childcare is particularly strong in very low fertility countries, such as Italy. It is possible that our respondents, even traditional ones, show some sympathy for the female condition, at least when required to evaluate an abstract vignette, disregarding their own situation (on this point, see below). Of course, things change when the respondents look at their own behavior, because attitudes and behaviors do not always go hand in hand. The second plausible explanation for this unforeseen result could be a serious social desirability bias due to the growing social support for equal opportunities in Western countries: as men benefit from gender inequalities, even the more traditional ones need to show some support for gender equality in order not to appear backward.

On closer consideration, the relevance of the equity principle, at least partly supported by both vignettes' results, can be a double-edged sword for gender equality because it can legitimize household arrangements in which the wife is mainly devoted to the chores and the husband to paid work. Thus, housework division could be considered fair in the short run, but in the long run women's career opportunities would be undermined and their accumulation of non marital-specific skills would be lowered. This is perhaps the reason for the rejection of the arrangement in the first vignette, where the wife is assigned most of the housework but less paid work.

The effects of the institutional and cultural context in which this study is carried out need also attention. Italy is an interesting case because allows for a conservative test of the equity and gender ideology factors affecting fairness. Italy has a welfare system characterized in many respects by the so-called "familialism by default" (Saraceno, 2010), and its gender culture is still quite traditional (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi, 2005). These features are likely to produce greater tolerance for housework inequalities, thereby reducing the effects of fairness determinants, as suggested by comparative research on this topic (Greenstein, 2009) as well as by findings regarding the determinants of housework division (Knudsen and Wærness, 2008). For this reason, it is expected that what we found in Italy can be observed in similar traditional countries and, to an even greater extent, in more gender-equal ones.

Some limitations affecting this study need to be discussed and, in some cases, carefully considered in future research. First, the choice of using a sample of dual-earner couples with children might appear problematic from the point of view of estimating causal effects using observational data. However, our findings derive from an experimental design, where the random assignment of focal independent variables enables us to make correct causal inferences. Therefore, the sample selection is much less problematic in this case, since it only prevents generalization to the whole Italian population, which is not our aim for the reasons explained in the methodological section. Second, our sample cannot be considered representative of the southern areas of the country. The lack of representativeness of these more conservative areas probably causes a slight overestimation of the effects of the fairness determinants analyzed here: the traditionalism characterizing southern Italy is likely to lower the sense of unfairness for housework inequalities, thereby also reducing the effects of equity and gender ideology factors.

Other limitations are related to the vignette method. Respondent's evaluation of the fictitious situations might not correspond to their judgments of personal situations. With the exception of the characteristics that vary as mentioned above, the subjects presented in the vignette are all the same, and their circumstances are inevitably abstract to a certain extent. Respondents may thus be induced to apply the equality rule to the vignette's context more frequently than they would do with their own personal situation. However, even if the nexus between vignettes and real-life situations remains not fully specified, there is evidence of a relation between the former and the latter (see, e.g., Horne, 2003; Ganong and Coleman, 2005; Ganong and Coleman, 2006). This problem has been already acknowledged by Bernstein and Crosby (1980), but in their view the advantages of the vignette method are well superior to its disadvantages. Another limitation regards the vignettes' capacity to attenuate social desirability biases that affect standard survey questions. Despite claims in the literature (Wallander, 2009), our experience raises the suspicion that this capacity cannot be taken for granted: the evaluation of a vignette could be affected to a certain extent by the normative context in which it takes place. This fact should be carefully considered by future research, both in designing vignettes and in interpreting findings.

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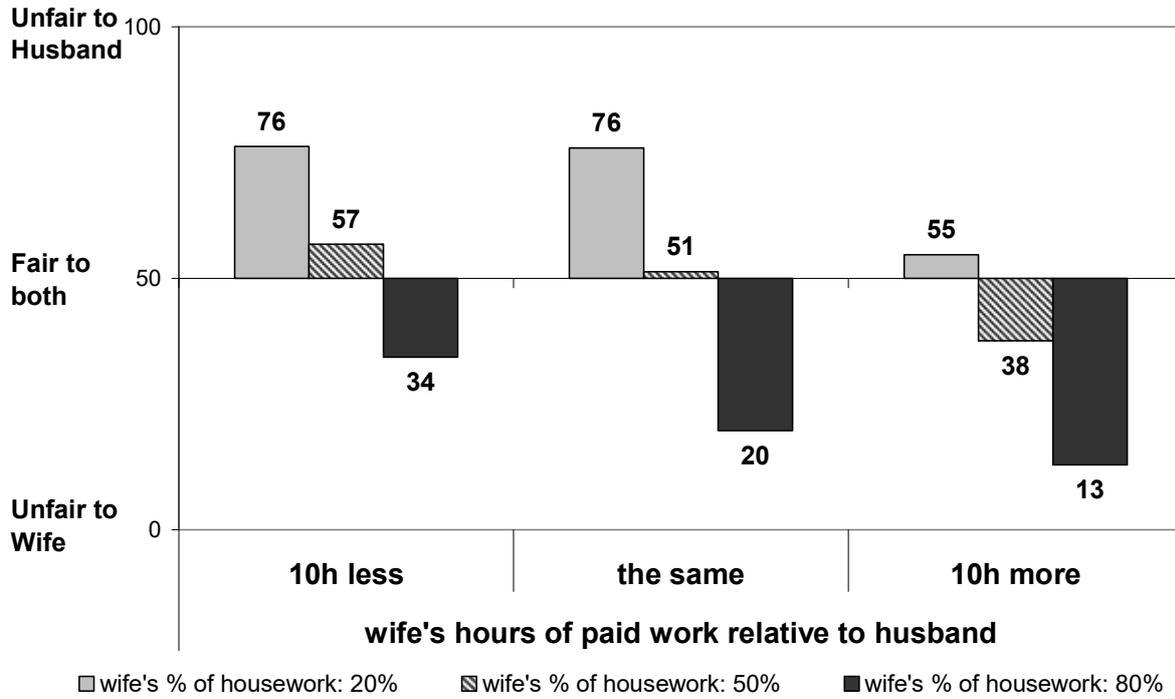
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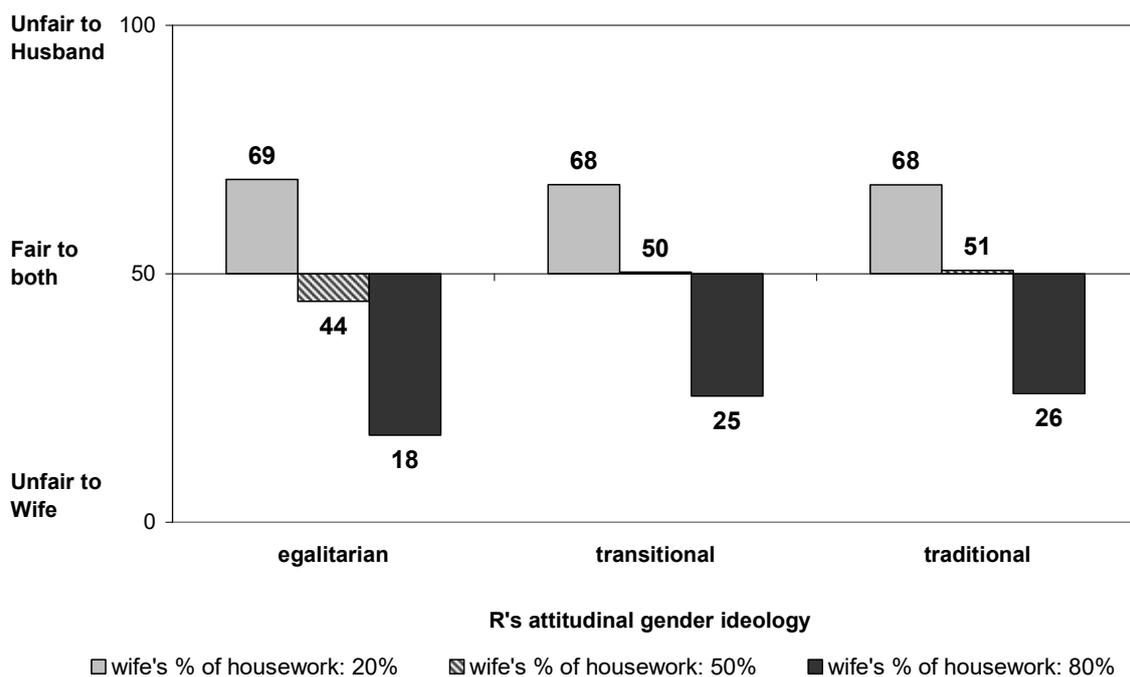
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TABLES AND GRAPHS

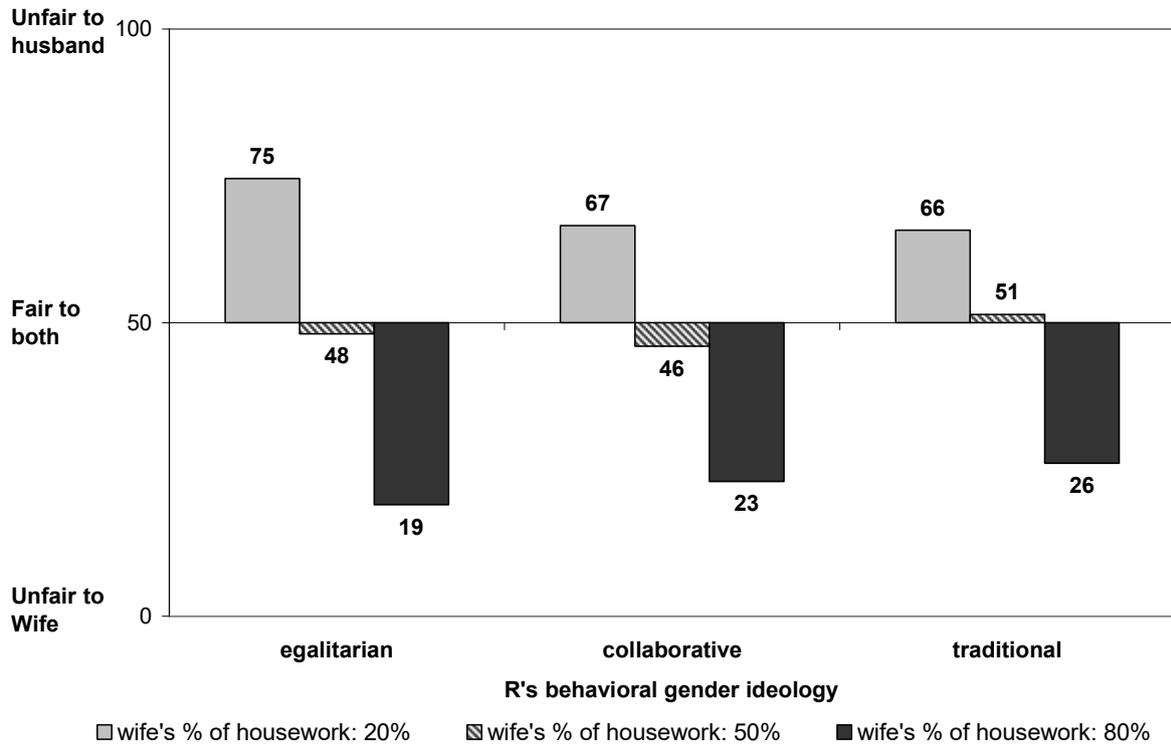
Graph 1. Average Fairness Scores by Wife's Contributions to Paid and Unpaid Work



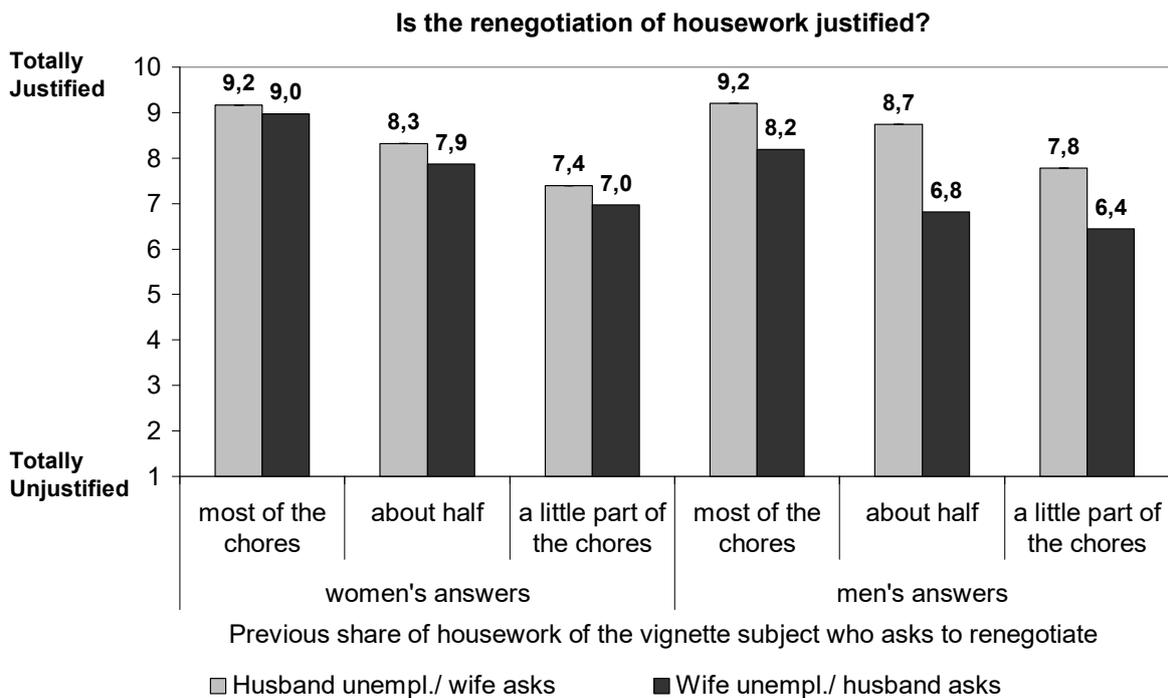
Graph 2. Average Fairness Scores by Respondents' Attitudinal Gender Ideology and Vignette's Division of Housework



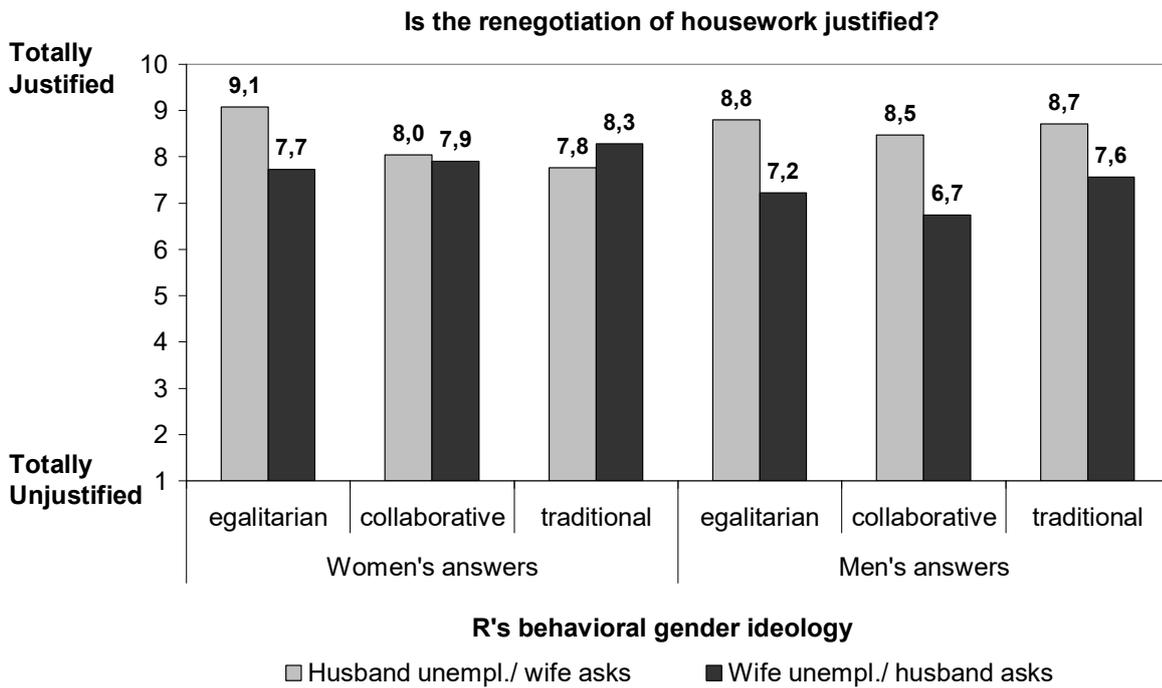
Graph 3. Average Fairness Scores by Respondents' Behavioral Gender Ideology and Vignette's Division of Housework



Graph 4. Average Justifiability Scores by Respondents' Gender, Vignette's Gender and Share of Housework



Graph 5. Average Justifiability Scores by Respondents' Behavioral Gender Ideology, Respondents' Gender, and Vignette's Gender



Graph 6. Average Justifiability Scores by Respondents' Attitudinal Gender Ideology, Respondents' Gender, and Vignette's Gender

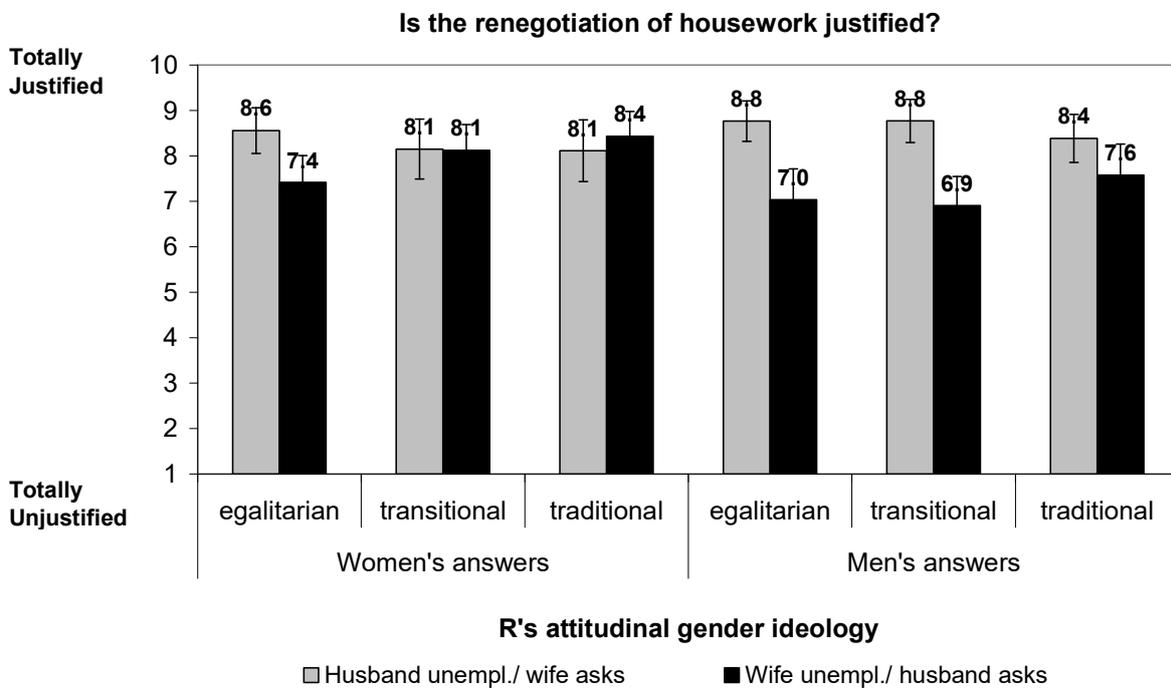


Table 1. *Sample Descriptives of Final (N = 770) and Initial (N = 1656) Samples*

Variable	Final sample			Initial sample	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Male	0.48	0.50	0 - 1	0.50	0.25
Female	0.52	0.50	0 - 1	0.50	0.25
Age	41.90	5.38	19 - 63	41.83	5.54
Less than secondary educ.	0.18	0.38	0 - 1	0.24	0.43
Upper secondary educ.	0.45	0.50	0 - 1	0.46	0.50
University educ.	0.37	0.48	0 - 1	0.30	0.46
Monthly net income	1746.37	892.83	500 - 5000	1697.41	879.37
Weekly work hours	38.67	11.78	6 - 98	39.24	11.97
Traditional gender attitudes scale	2.52	0.77	1 - 5	2.58	0.79
Wife's % of housework	68.50	16.32	0 - 100	69.68	15.92

Table 2. Analysis of Variance of Vignette 1 (N = 769): Fairness Evaluation of the Division of Housework

Source	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
	df	MS	F	p	df	MS	F	p	df	MS	F	p
Model	15	22459.58	59.70	0.000	17	20192.76	54.77	0.000	17	20106.71	54.25	0.000
Wife's % of housework	2	137082.84	364.38	0.000	2	138540.07	375.74	0.000	2	134547.85	362.99	0.000
Wife's relative hours of paid work	2	30203.69	80.28	0.000	2	30147.03	81.76	0.000	2	30142.86	81.32	0.000
Wife's contribution to family income	2	1200.45	3.19	0.042	2	1186.04	3.22	0.041	2	910.08	2.46	0.087
Children at home	1	849.02	2.26	0.134	1	841.75	2.28	0.131	1	889.32	2.40	0.122
Wife's % of housework*wife's relative hours of paid work	4	1250.77	3.32	0.010	4	1158.50	3.14	0.014	4	1123.59	3.03	0.017
Wife's % of housework*wife's contribution to family income	4	24.27	0.06	0.992								
R's behavioral gender ideology					2	853.13	2.31	0.100				
R's behavioral gender ideology*share of housework					4	1155.56	3.13	0.014				
R's attitudinal gender ideology									2	1714.23	4.62	0.010
R's attitudinal gender ideology*share of housework									4	390.51	1.05	0.379
Residual	753	376.21			751	368.71			751	370.66		
Total	768	807.53			768	807.53			768	807.53		

<i>Adj R²</i>	0.53	0.54	0.54
<i>Root MSE</i>	19.40	19.20	19.20

Table 3. Analysis of Variance of Vignette 2 (N = 770): Renegotiating the Division of Housework

Source	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3				Model 4			
	df	MS	F	p	df	MS	F	p	df	MS	F	p	df	MS	F	p
Model	5	111.87	21.0	0.00	7	89.41	17.0	0.00	11	61.88	11.8	0.00	11	61.26	11.74	0.000
Gender (who becomes unemployed: husband/wife)	1	138.17	25.9	0.00	1	146.84	27.9	0.00	1	144.76	27.8	0.00	1	132.32	25.36	0.000
Previous share of housework	2	193.27	36.2	0.00	2	188.80	35.9	0.00	2	182.83	35.1	0.00	2	185.87	35.63	0.000
Children at home	2	10.70	2.01	0.13	2	10.86	2.07	0.12	2	11.21	2.15	0.11	2	10.71	2.05	0.129
R's gender					1	13.63	2.60	0.10	1	12.27	2.36	0.12	1	14.39	2.76	0.097
R's gender*gender (who becomes unemployed)					1	52.49	9.99	0.00	1	52.66	10.1	0.00	1	53.23	10.20	0.002
R' behavioral gender ideology									2	9.77	1.88	0.15				
R's behavioral gender ideology*gender (who becomes unemployed)									2	18.04	3.46	0.03				
R's attitudinal gender ideology													2	1.51	0.29	0.749
R's attitudinal gender ideology*gender (who becomes unemployed)													2	22.15	4.25	0.015

Residual	76 4	5.33	76 2	5.25	75 8	5.21	75 8	5.22
Total	76 9	6.02	76 9	6.02	76 9	6.02	76 9	6.02
<i>Adj R²</i>		0.12		0.13		0.13		0.13
<i>Root MSE</i>		2.31		2.29		2.28		2.28
