

Sharing the Caring: Attitude–Behavior Discrepancies and Partnership Dynamics

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Abstract

Even though ideals in favor of gender equality in the private sphere are wide spread, discrepancies between ideals and actual behavior are common. Such discrepancies and potential dissatisfaction with gender unequal behavior within a couple are expected to influence partnership dynamics negatively. This study examines how discrepancies between the perceived ideal sharing of parental leave and the actual division of leave, as well as satisfaction with the division are associated with (a) relationship satisfaction, (b) continued childbearing, and (c) union dissolution, using Swedish panel data. The findings cannot confirm an effect of discrepancies on partnership dynamics. However, men who wish they had used a larger share of the parental leave have lower relationship satisfaction, lower continued childbearing, and higher probability of union dissolution. Women are seemingly not affected by their (dis)satisfaction with the division. The findings may reflect a changing father role related to the policy setting and norms in Sweden.

Keywords

child care, divorce/separation, relationship satisfaction, fertility, gender and family, household labor

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Introduction

Attitudes in favor of gender equality are becoming increasingly common throughout the Western world (see, e.g., Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; Scott, Alwin, & Braun, 1996). Still, gendered behaviors are in many areas slow to adapt to these shifting attitudes. Individuals often live their lives less egalitarian than their attitudes would predict, and many individuals experience discrepancies between their attitudes and behavior. Such discrepancies, with individuals holding egalitarian gender attitudes while living nonegalitarian lives, are prevalent, for instance, in how couples divide responsibilities for paid and unpaid work (Oláh & Gähler, 2014), as well as housework and child care (Goldscheider, Bernhardt, & Brandén, 2013; Kjeldstad & Lappegård, 2014).

Gender equality in the private sphere, for instance, in terms of the care of small children and housework, indeed has been put forward as a key issue remaining to be solved to increase satisfaction and stability in couple relationships (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015; Goldscheider, Bernhardt, & Lappegård, 2015). According to the violated expectations framework, discrepancies between expectations and subsequent behavior are likely to have large consequences for how well individuals cope with their experience (Kalmuss, Davidson, & Cushman, 1992). In line with this, the lack of gender equality in the private sphere has been argued to be of most importance for relationship quality in countries where attitudes are becoming increasingly egalitarian, but where men are yet to engage in the family to the same extent as women (the so-called transition phase, see Goldscheider et al., 2015). Still, remarkably few studies address this issue empirically (for two exceptions, see Goldscheider et al., 2013; Oláh & Gähler, 2014).

The present study examines how discrepancies between gender attitudes and the sharing of child care map onto partnership dynamics, applied to the parental leave of Swedish parents. The Swedish parental leave system allows women and men to share the 480 days of paid parental leave equally. However, even though 70% of all Swedes believe that parents should share parental leave equally between the mother and father and only 1% believe the mother should use all the leave (GESIS, 2014), mothers use 75% of the total leave (Swedish Social Insurance Agency, 2015). In line with these discrepancies, a substantial share of all mothers and fathers in retrospect report dissatisfaction with how long they were at home with their newborn child, and would “choose differently today” (National Social Insurance Board, 2003).

We focus on two main indicators of imbalance between attitudes and behavior: (a) discrepancies between ideals regarding how couples should share parental leave, and their actual division of leave and (b) the retrospect satisfaction with this division. We examine how these two determinants matter

for partnership dynamics across three dimensions; (a) relationship satisfaction, (b) continued childbearing, and (c) union dissolution. We view ideals regarding parental leave sharing as one indicator of gender attitudes and expect that individuals who experience a discrepancy between their ideals and their actual sharing behavior will experience lower relationship satisfaction, lower levels of continued childbearing and higher levels of union dissolution. We also expect similar outcomes for those who are dissatisfied with the division.

Some studies have examined the association between gender equality in the division of care or housework and continued partnership dynamics but this study goes further by investigating the potential importance of how this division is perceived. The findings will add to our understanding of mechanisms connecting expectations of gender equal policy use with continued partnership dynamics.

Background

Division of Child Care and Partnership Dynamics

It is often pointed out that fathers' involvement in child care is likely to matter for relationship quality, union stability, and continued childbearing (see, e.g., Goldscheider et al., 2015), but few studies analyze this association. Nevertheless, research on how men's parental leave use is associated with partnership dynamics generally points to positive effects on the relationship. Couples in which the man has used a moderate amount of parental leave proceed quicker to second and third births than couples where the man did not use any leave in Norway and Sweden (Duvander, Lappégård, & Andersson, 2010). Divorce risks are also lower among Swedish couples where the man used any parental leave compared to couples where the man did not stay at home with the child (Oláh, 2001). We find the same scarcity of studies investigating how the association between fathers' child care involvement and partnership dynamics can be explained, that is, what are the mechanisms behind the association. Fathers' parental leave is likely to reduce mothers' overall work load at home, which allows them to combine work and family responsibilities. Paternal involvement in child care is also likely to give a stronger sense of fairness among women, increasing their relationship satisfaction and life quality. This may decrease the risk of union dissolution and make these women more willing to have additional children with the same partner (Oláh, 2001).

It also seems that the sharing of parental leave results in more understanding for what household tasks and child care entail, and more partner

discussion on these issues, which leads to a more gender equal division also for child care and housework in general (Almqvist & Duvander, 2014). Fathers' child care involvement may also signal commitment to the union (Duvander & Andersson, 2006).

From the father's perspective, being involved in child rearing and being exposed to children may increase the man's child orientation and desire for more children. Fathers who spend a lot of time in child care may also develop a sense of fairness in terms of belonging to the family on equal terms as the mother, and an overall sense of access to the family sphere, which may increase his relationship satisfaction and hence decrease the risk of union dissolution. Being involved in child care may also function as an investment in the relationship that makes the barrier to leave the union greater.

It has also been suggested that the link between men's time on parental leave and couples' continued childbearing in part is a selection effect, meaning that the men who stay home with their children are the most family-oriented men, with intentions of having more children even if they had not had the possibility of parental leave (Duvander & Andersson, 2006). Likewise, it may be that the men who invest in parental leave are those in stable unions that would not have dissolved even if the men did not have this opportunity, or that fathers' parental leave may signal involvement in union-specific capital, which can be interpreted as an intention to stay in the specific union.

Attitude–Behavior Discrepancies and Partnership Dynamics

Not only is the actual division of child care likely to matter for partnership dynamics, but whether this division is in line with individuals' attitudes and expectations may be a key factor for understanding its potential consequences. The violated expectations framework states that an individual's expectations of how an event will play out is crucial for his or her later understanding of the event in question. Consequently, whether an experience is more or less in line with what the individual expected beforehand is bound to have consequences on how the experience is perceived by the individual. For instance, negative experiences that were anticipated beforehand are often easier to cope with, compared to if they were not foreseen. Thus, the same experience will affect individuals differently depending on whether the experience was anticipated by the individual (Kalmuss et al., 1992).

Often, the violated expectations framework is applied to the transition to parenthood in the U.S. context, in order to understand why some parents are better able to deal with this transition than others. It is argued that it is easier to adapt to the transition to parenthood if some hardships were anticipated beforehand, compared to if they were not (Kalmuss et al., 1992).

Kalmuss et al. (1992) found that when pregnant, women generally had higher expectations on the fathers' involvement in child care than what they actually experienced during the child's first year. This discrepancy had consequences on how well the mother adapted to parenthood, with a more difficult adaptation for women with discrepancies between expectations and experiences (Kalmuss et al., 1992). This is in line with the results in a study by Belsky (1985), where both women and men had higher expectations on the man's involvement in child care than what became the case after the child was born. Parents whose postnatal experiences turned out less positive or more negative than they expected, experienced a more negative change in marriage quality after childbirth. The pattern was particularly pronounced for women (Belsky, 1985). Ruble, Fleming, Hackel, and Stangor (1988) found that very few pregnant women expected that they would do more than their partner after the child was born. Postnatal experiences, however, very rarely corresponded with these expectations. Women who did more housework or child care than they expected, to a larger extent reported negative experiences of the man's child care involvement, and more often reported that the child had negative consequences on the relationship. However, it had no effect on how close the woman felt to her partner (Ruble et al., 1988). Biehle and Mickelson (2012) found violated expectations in child care to be a stronger predictor for depression and relationship dissatisfaction than the actual division of child care. This was particularly the case for women, whereas fathers' relationship satisfaction in general benefitted from doing less child care than expected. Playing with the child was an exception, in which fathers' who expected a more equal division than the actual experience expressed lower relationship satisfaction than fathers whose division was more in line with their expectations (Biehle & Mickelson, 2012).

In the present study, it should be noted that we do not study expectations of parental leave division per se, but the ideal way individuals consider parents should share parental leave. An individual's ideals, that is, what they consider to be the most desirable way of living or behaving, do not necessarily translate into expectations about their own life, particularly, if they already beforehand think that their ideals are difficult to live up to or believe that they face specific constraints that allow for making an exception from the ideal. Note however that in Sweden, the law and the general discourse is that parents' can choose how they want to divide the parental leave quite freely (with the exception of 3 months allocated to each of the parents; 2 months at the time of the study). Employers have no right to refuse an employee to stay home with his or her child, and individuals have the right to return to their job after finishing parental leave. Hence, ideals and

expectations with regard to parental leave division are most likely closely linked in the Swedish context.

Some studies have focused on attitudes or ideals rather than expectations, in terms of discrepancies between attitudes/ideals and behavior. Goldscheider et al. (2013) examined how a discrepancy between gender attitudes and behavior structured continued childbearing among Swedish young adults. Results indicated that individuals who believed that partners should share responsibilities for paid and unpaid work, but who did not share housework as equally as their attitudes would predict, experienced a slower transition to second births than individuals whose attitudes and behavior matched, and particularly so for women (Goldscheider et al., 2013). Oláh and Gähler (2014) used the same data set and found that individuals who had egalitarian attitudes but shared housework unequally experienced higher union dissolution risks than both consistently egalitarian and consistently traditional individuals, irrespective of gender. Even though these studies focus on more general gender attitudes than ideals regarding the sharing of parental leave, their results indicate that violated ideals may have the same effect on partnership dynamics as violated expectations have been shown to have.

The Swedish Context

Sweden stands out as one of the countries with the most gender egalitarian attitudes in the world, among both women and men (Fahlén, 2013). Swedes generally have a comparatively low adherence to the male breadwinner norm (Fahlén, 2013), and it is common for both women and men to believe that it is important to share child care as well as household tasks (Duvander, 2014; Brandén, 2014). Gender equality has also been high on the political agenda for decades and an earner–carer model has been carried out with few exceptions (Ferrarini & Duvander, 2010).

Ever since 1974, the Swedish earnings-related parental insurance benefit has been gender neutral, and parents are entitled to share the leave more or less as they prefer. The length of the parental leave has gradually been expanded over the years. Since 2002, it comprises 16 months of which 13 months are paid at up to 80% of previous gross earnings and 3 months are at a low flat rate. In order to increase fathers' uptake of parental leave, 1 month of the earnings-related leave was reserved for each parent in 1995 and in 2002 this was increased to 2 months (Duvander & Ferrarini, 2013). In 2016 one more month was reserved. Similarly, to the reserved months, other reforms, such as a gender equality bonus, increased maximum level of the benefits and the parents' possibility to use leave at the same time, have aimed at a more gender equal sharing of the leave. The leave can be used in different

ways, be combined with unpaid leave and used until the child is 8 years old (12 years old for children born from 2014), but the lion's part is used before the child starts preschool. Some remaining days are often used to reduce work hours, extend holidays, or bridge days when preschool is temporarily closed. The parent's employment and wage level is protected during leave and parents have extended rights to use leave at times that suits them.

The flexibility in how to use leave benefits and how to share it is also enhanced with extensive rights to preschool. All children residing in Sweden are entitled to attend preschool from age 1 at a heavily subsidized price. Opening hours are generous to fit parents' work hours and the pedagogical quality is considered high (Korpi, 2007). Among children aged 1 year, about half are enrolled and among 2-year-olds, as many as 90% (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2015).

As already mentioned, the prevalent ideal of gender equal sharing of parental leave is not matched by how couples in Sweden actually divide the leave. Today, almost 13% of all parents share the leave benefit days somewhere between 40% and 60% of the days (Swedish Social Insurance Agency, 2013). A recent study estimated mothers' average leave length to 13.5 months and fathers' to 3.5 months (Duvander & Viklund, 2014).

When parents are asked about the reasons for their division of parental leave, the major reasons they state as to why they shared as they did are economic constraints, the father's job situation and the mother's wish to be home (National Social Insurance Board, 2003). These are also the main reasons as to why many parents do not share parental leave in accordance to their ideals. Thus, despite the notion of freedom of choice in parental leave decisions, parents whose ambition is to share parental leave equally often face normative or practical obstacles to fulfill this supposedly free will; from employers, economic constraints, or even the other parent (National Social Insurance Board, 2003). Parents who in retrospect are dissatisfied with the division of the leave almost always wished they had shared the leave more equally (National Social Insurance Board, 2003).

Hypotheses

The main aim of this study is to examine how gender equality in child care relates to continued partnership dynamics. Specifically, we examine how discrepancies between ideals regarding the sharing of parental leave and actual sharing behavior as well as retrospective satisfaction with the division are associated with relationship satisfaction, union dissolution, and continued childbearing. Studying these kinds of discrepancies become particularly important in a context where egalitarian values are widely embraced by most

young individuals, but where behavior is often yet to adapt to these shifting ideals.

If couples do not live in accordance with their ideals on gender equal sharing of parental leave, this is likely to have consequences both on relationship satisfaction and future family-demographic behavior. Not only do we expect that the degree of gender equality in the division of leave per se matters for future partnership dynamics but we expect that two individuals who had the exact same experience in terms of the actual parental leave division will be differently affected by it, depending on whether the experience was in line with their ideals or expectations, and depending on whether the division in retrospect was perceived as a satisfactory division. If an individual believes it is important to share parental leave equally, but does not share his or her own parental leave equally, we expect it to create tension and dissatisfaction in the relationship with the partner, and perhaps, in the long term, lead to union dissolution and an unwillingness to have more joint children. We expect that dissatisfaction with the division of leave leads to the same consequences; individuals who in retrospect wish they had shared their leave differently will have lower relationship satisfaction, lower continued childbearing, and higher breakup rates. An opposing hypothesis, however, could be that men who wish that they would have stayed home with their child for longer are more prone to have another child, in order to stay home for longer with the second child.

Hypothesis 1: Women and men who shared parental leave equally experience higher levels of relationship satisfaction, higher levels of continued childbearing and lower levels of union dissolution.

Hypothesis 2: Women and men whose parental leave division corresponded with their ideals on how parents ideally should share parental leave experience higher levels of relationship satisfaction, higher levels of continued childbearing, and lower levels of union dissolution, as compared to women and men whose parental leave division did not match their ideals.

Hypothesis 3a: Women and men who in retrospect report satisfaction with their division of parental leave experience higher levels of relationship satisfaction, higher levels of continued childbearing, and lower levels of union dissolution, as compared to women and men who are not satisfied with their division of parental leave.

Hypothesis 3b: Men who in retrospect report satisfaction with their division of parental leave experience lower levels of continued childbearing, as compared to men who are not satisfied with their division of parental leave.

Data and Analytical Strategy

For our analyses, we use the Swedish Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS, www.suda.su.se/yaps). YAPS is a three-wave panel data set with surveys conducted in 1999, 2003, and 2009. It contains a stratified sample of Swedish-born individuals from cohorts born in 1968, 1972, 1976, and 1980, with (a) two Swedish-born parents, (b) at least one Turkish parent, or (c) at least one Polish parent.

Data from the panels collected in 2003 and 2009 are used in this study. We measure individuals' ideals regarding the sharing of parental leave in 2003. From the survey wave of 2009, we collect all respondents who by then reported that they had at least one child (a) born between 2003 and 2009 and (b) for whom the parental leave had ended at the time of the 2009 survey. This child is from here on called the index child. If more than one child fit these criteria, the child born closest to 2003 is defined as the index child.

From the 2009 survey, we know how the parents divided the parental leave days for the index child. This means that we are able to measure ideals regarding the sharing of parental leave in 2003, prior to the birth of the index child. Our final sample contains 554 respondents.

We link population register data, including all births and divorces (as well as split up of parents' coresidence) up until 2014 to the survey data, using unique individual identifiers of the respondents and examine three outcomes; (a) relationship satisfaction in 2009, (b) the likelihood to have another child with the same partner before December 2014, and (c) the likelihood to end the union before December 2014. We study how these three outcomes are associated with ideals regarding parental leave sharing (in 2003), the actual sharing of the parental leave of the index child, discrepancies between the ideals and behavior, as well as satisfaction with the division of the latest completed parental leave.

Ideals regarding the sharing of parental leave are measured by the question "How much do you agree with the following statement: Parents should share parental leave about equally," from the 2003 wave. The scale ranges from 1 (*do not agree at all*) to 5 (*agree completely*). The variable is included as a continuous variable in the analyses.

The sharing of parental leave is based on how many weeks or months the respondent reports that they and their partner stayed home with the index child. We measure it as the father's percentage of the total leave uptake, and distinguish between <10% (minimal use), 10% to 20% (less than average use), 20% to 40% (between average and equal use), and 40% or more (equal use).

Mismatch is measured as a discrepancy between ideals regarding parental leave sharing and actual sharing behavior. Due to the limited number of cases

in the data, we cannot examine a large set of combinations of ideals and actual behavior. We therefore focus on mismatch in terms of behaving in a less egalitarian way than ones ideals would predict. We include two interaction terms, one indicating *medium mismatch* (agreed or strongly agreed that parents should share parental leave equally, but the father used 20% to 40% of the total parental leave) and one indicating *large mismatch* (agreed or strongly agreed that parents should share parental leave equally, but the father used less than 20% of the parental leave).

Satisfaction with the division of parental leave is based on a question asked in 2009, regarding the child with the latest completed parental leave. Note that this is not always the index child—for respondents who had more than one child between 2003 and 2009, this is the younger sibling of the index child. In 70% of all cases the index child is the child with the latest completed parental leave, and all results remain robust when we only analyze these 383 cases. The question reads “When you think back on the total time you where home [with the child], would you say that you are satisfied with how you divided the parental leave between you [and your partner]?” The response alternatives are (a) No, I should have stayed home longer, and the other parent shorter, (b) No, I should have stayed home shorter, and the other parent longer, and (c) Yes.

In all models, we control for relationship satisfaction in 2003 (the same question as in the outcome variable, adding a category for being single in 2003), year of birth of the index child (2003-2007), total number of children at the time of birth of index child (1-3), being university educated in 2003, year of birth of the respondent (1968, 1972, 1976, or 1980), and the sex of the respondent.

Relationship satisfaction is measured by the question “Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your relationship to your partner,” ranging from 1 (*very dissatisfied*) to 5 (*very satisfied*), from the 2009 wave. The question is asked early in the questionnaire, much earlier than questions about parental leave, which makes it unlikely that the answer to this question is affected by the respondent’s answers to the questions related to parental leave use and satisfaction with parental leave use.

Continued childbearing is measured by register data covering births (year and month) up until December 2014. Only childbearing before any union dissolution is included, to only capture continued childbearing with the same partner.

Union dissolution is measured by partner biographies provided by the respondents up until spring 2009, including year and month of when the relationship ended. For the period 2009 until December 2014, we pair register data with the survey, and measure union dissolution by whether the

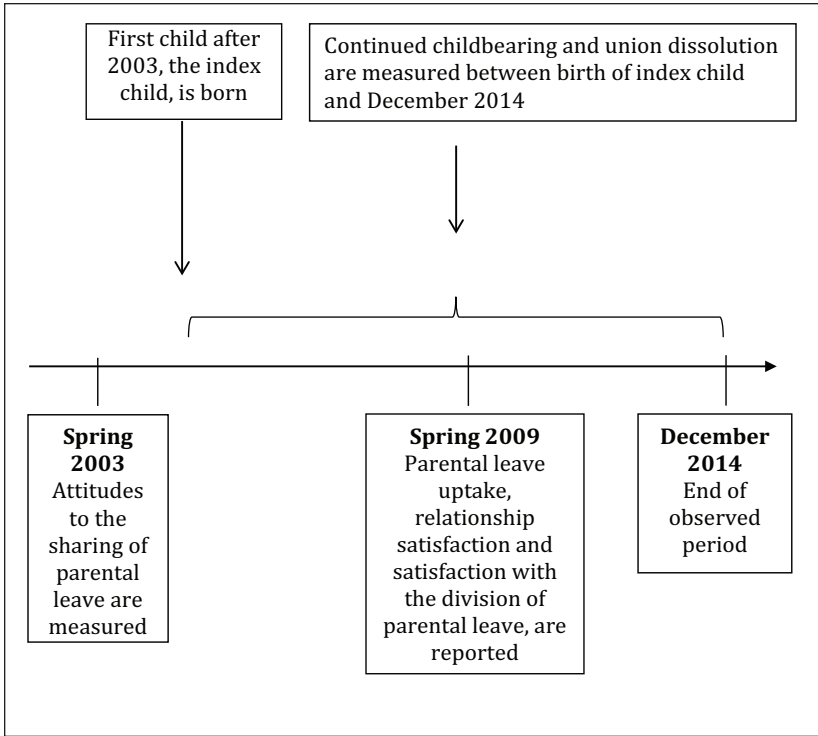


Figure 1. Illustration of the analytical strategy.

respondent has divorced or if the two partners no longer live in the same property. Figure 1 illustrates our analytical strategy.

Results

Descriptive Results

Table 1 includes descriptive results of the main independent and dependent variables in our analysis. The first notable pattern is that there is a norm that parental leave should be divided equally. In total, 50% of all women and men agree or agree completely that parents should share parental leave equally, while only 17% of the women and 22% of the men disagree. There are no clear gender differences in these patterns. (In the regression analyses, the 19 respondents who answered “do not know” are added to the neutral respondents (those who answered “3”). Data from the International Social Survey

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Main Independent and Dependent Variables.

	Men	Women
	N (%)	N (%)
<i>Main independent variables</i>		
Agreement with statement "Parents should share parental leave equally"		
Do not agree at all (1)	14 (7)	24 (7)
2	30 (15)	34 (10)
3	57 (28)	99 (28)
4	41 (20)	78 (22)
Agree completely (5)	59 (29)	99 (28)
Do not know	5 (2)	14 (4)
Man's share of last finished parental leave		
<10%	61 (30)	104 (30)
10-20%	39 (19)	90 (26)
20-40%	54 (27)	87 (25)
>40%	42 (20)	51 (15)
Missing	10 (5)	16 (5)
Mismatch between attitudes and behavior		
No or minor mismatch	144 (70)	219 (63)
Medium mismatch	34 (16)	81 (23)
Large mismatch	28 (14)	48 (14)
Satisfaction with division of latest completed parental leave		
Satisfied	146 (71)	282 (81)
Wanted to stay home longer	47 (23)	6 (2)
Wanted to stay home shorter	3 (1)	53 (15)
Missing	10 (5)	7 (2)
<i>Main dependent variables</i>		
Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with . . . your relationship to your partner?		
Very dissatisfied (1)	3 (1)	0 (0)
2	6 (3)	10 (3)
3	16 (8)	31 (9)
4	61 (30)	93 (27)
Very satisfied (5)	108 (52)	187 (54)
Missing	2 (1)	6 (2)
Union dissolved before end of 2009	10 (5)	21 (6)
Have more children after birth of index child		
No	123 (40)	149 (43)
Yes	83 (60)	199 (67)
Union dissolution after birth of index child		
No	170 (83)	283 (81)
Yes	36 (17)	65 (19)
N	206 (100)	348 (100)

Program showed even higher levels of support for shared parental leave (70%; GESIS, 2014). The discrepancy is likely due to our sample only consisting of soon-to-be-parents (the comparable figure for the full YAPS-sample is 60% agree or agree completely), and the fact that the question is slightly differently formulated.

The fact that half of our respondents have ideals in favor of sharing parental leave equally is not reflected in an equally large proportion that shares the leave in such a way. A third of all women and men report that the man was home with the child for less than 10% of the time, and only 20% of the men and 15% of the women report a parental leave pattern that can be considered somewhat equal (the man used at least 40% of the total parental leave).

The variable indicating a *large mismatch* (agreed or strongly agreed that parents should share parental leave equally, but the father used less than 20% of parental leave) and *medium mismatch* (agreed or strongly agreed that parents should share parental leave equally, but the father used 20% to 40% of parental leave) indicates rather high discrepancies between attitudes and behavior. Around 16% of all men and 23% of all women experience a large mismatch and 14% of all women and men experience a medium mismatch.

When asked if they were satisfied with the division of parental leave, 23% of all men wished they had stayed home longer, whereas 15% of all women wished they had stayed home for a shorter period of time. More women than men are satisfied with their parental leave length, 81% of the women as compared to 71% of the men. In the regression analyses, all who are dissatisfied with the division of parental leave are pooled into one category, as we do separate analyses by gender, and the number of women who wish they stayed home for longer/the number of men who wish they stayed home a shorter period, is extremely small.

Examining the three outcomes of interest, we see that most of the couples are quite satisfied with the relationship with the other parent in 2009. Around 80% of all women and men are satisfied or very satisfied with the relationship and only 3% to 4% of the respondents are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Around 5% to 6% of all respondents have ended the relationship with the other parent of the index child before the 2009 data collection, or during that year. In the regression analyses, those who have ended the union prior to the end of 2009 are added to the respondents who reported that they are “very dissatisfied.” This is done in order to be able to do ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis on this outcome. The eight respondents with missing information are set to the middle value of 3. Almost two thirds of the respondents had another child with the other parent of the index child before December 2014, and 17% to 18% experience union dissolution before the end of 2014.

Multivariate Regressions

In the following section, we examine in what way (a) ideals regarding a gender egalitarian sharing of parental leave, (b) the actual sharing of parental leave, (c) discrepancies between ideals and behavior, and (d) satisfaction with the division of the latest completed parental leave, are associated with the three outcomes; relationship satisfaction (Table 2), continued childbearing (Table 3), and union dissolution (Table 4). Analyses are performed with women and men pooled, and separately by sex. All models control for marital satisfaction in 2003 (to adjust for the overall marital quality before the birth of the child, including a dummy for being single in 2003), university education, year of birth, year of birth of index child, number of children, and sex of respondent (for the pooled models).

Table 2 includes OLS regressions on how relationship satisfaction is shaped by attitudes and behavior related to parental leave. In Models 1 through 4, we include each of our main independent variables separately, and in Model 5, they are all included simultaneously. From Models 1 and 2, we find that neither ideals nor the man's share of parental leave, appear to matter significantly for relationship satisfaction. In Model 3, we include a variable that measures mismatch between ideals and behavior. Individuals who believe parents should share parental leave equally, but where the man uses less than 20% of the total leave report lower levels of relationship satisfaction than other individuals ($p < .1$). Notably, no significant effect from mismatch remains in Model 5, when this variable is included together with ideals regarding the sharing of parental leave and fathers' actual share of parental leave.

What appears to be of most importance for determining relationship satisfaction is how satisfied parents in retrospect are with the division of parental leave, at least for men (Models 4 and 5). Fathers who in retrospect wish they had divided the parental leave differently (they almost exclusively would have liked to stay home for longer) report a .5 lower relationship satisfaction score, on a scale ranging between 1 and 5. This difference must be considered of large magnitude, particularly due to the small variation in the variable measuring relationship satisfaction. Note also that we control for relationship satisfaction in 2003, so the estimate should be interpreted as the effect being dissatisfied has on the *change* in relationship satisfaction between 2003 and 2009. The results remain robust when excluding respondents who have ended the union prior to 2009. This ensures that the lower relationship satisfaction among those who were dissatisfied with the division of parental leave is not due to them having already ended their relationship, which for instance could lead to a father regretting not having spent more time with his child. It also ensures that people

Table 2. OLS Regressions on Relationship Satisfaction.

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4			Model 5		
	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women
Parents should share parental leave equally	-0.04	-0.02	-0.05	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-0.04	0.04	-0.08
Man's share of total parental leave	—	—	—	ref.	ref.	ref.	—	—	—	—	—	—	ref.	ref.	ref.
<10%	—	—	—	0.12	0.13	0.12	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.10	0.10	0.11
10% to 20%	—	—	—	0.19	0.25	0.14	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.10	0.17	0.07
20% to 40%	—	—	—	0.12	0.22	0.03	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.08	0.03	0.09
>40%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mismatch	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
No or minor mismatch	—	—	—	—	—	—	ref.	ref.	ref.	—	—	—	ref.	ref.	ref.
Medium mismatch	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.05	0.10	0.03	—	—	—	0.08	-0.07	0.16
Large mismatch	—	—	—	—	—	—	-0.20 [†]	-0.28	-0.13	—	—	—	-0.09	-0.25	0.04
Satisfaction with division of latest completed parental leave	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Satisfied	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Not satisfied	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-0.29 ^{**}	-0.49 ^{***}	-0.16	-0.26 [*]	-0.48 ^{***}	-0.13
N	554	206	348	554	206	348	554	206	348	554	206	348	554	206	348

Note. All models control for marital satisfaction in 2003 (including a dummy for being single in 2003), university education, year of birth, year of birth of index child, number of children, and sex (for the pooled models).

[†]p < .1. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 3. Logistic Regressions on Continued Childbearing.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5					
	All	Women	All	Men	All	Men	All	Women	All	Men	Women			
Parents should share parental leave equally	0.89	1.14	0.82	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.90	1.23	0.82		
Man's share of total parental leave	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	1	1		
<10%	—	—	—	0.92	0.87	0.93	—	—	—	0.88	0.87	1.01		
10% to 20%	—	—	—	2.05*	3.15*	1.80	—	—	—	1.91	4.70*	1.44		
20% to 40%	—	—	—	0.92	1.49	0.81	—	—	—	0.90	1.21	0.90		
>40%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—		
Mismatch	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—		
No or minor mismatch	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	1	1	1		
Medium mismatch	—	—	—	—	—	1.58	2.00	1.57	—	1.03	0.49	1.59		
Large mismatch	—	—	—	—	—	0.62	0.88	0.49†	—	0.82	1.01	0.67		
Satisfaction with division of latest completed parental leave	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—		
Satisfied	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	1		
Not satisfied	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.56†	0.24**	1.14	0.59†	0.21**	1.25
N	554	206	348	554	206	348	554	206	348	554	206	348		

Note. All models control for marital satisfaction in 2003 (including a dummy for being single in 2003), university education, year of birth, year of birth of index child, number of children, and sex (for the pooled models).

†p < .1. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 4. Logistic Regressions on Union Dissolution.

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4			Model 5		
	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women
Parents should share parental leave equally	1.14	1.11	1.21	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.10	0.99	1.20
Man's share of total parental leave	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<10%	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1
10% to 20%	—	—	—	1.21	2.47	0.77	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.29	3.25†	0.74
20% to 40%	—	—	—	0.79	1.98	0.53	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.02	2.87	0.57
>40%	—	—	—	1.19	1.93	0.98	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.33	3.45	0.90
Mismatch	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
No or minor mismatch	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	—	1	1	1
Medium mismatch	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.82	1.01	0.83	—	—	—	0.83	1.08	0.91
Large mismatch	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.47	1.26	1.60	—	—	—	1.29	2.22	1.17
Satisfaction with division of latest completed parental leave	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Satisfied	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1
Not satisfied	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.79*	3.55**	1.26
N	554	206	348	554	206	348	554	206	348	554	196	348	554	196	348

Note. All models control for marital satisfaction in 2003 (including a dummy for being single in 2003), university education, year of birth, year of birth of index child, number of children, and sex (for the pooled models).

†p < .1. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

do not become dissatisfied with the sharing because they have ended their relationship (i.e., experience very poor relationship satisfaction).

Around 80% of the respondents report a relationship satisfaction of either 4 or 5 (*satisfied* or *very satisfied*), so most of the variation is between these two values. To make sure our results are not driven solely by variation between 4 and 5, we have reestimated the model with dichotomous outcomes, distinguishing between those answering 1, 2 and 3 on their relationship satisfaction from those reporting being satisfied (4 or 5). Results are available on request (from the corresponding author), and show very similar results for this model specification. The only difference is that in this robustness check, we also find a significantly higher likelihood to be satisfied with the current relationship if the man used 20% to 40% of the total parental leave, as compared to if he used less than 10% (in line with the results, we later find for continued childbearing, presented below).

In Table 3, we turn to the family-demographic outcomes that parental leave attitudes and behavior may have, starting with continued childbearing. In line with the results presented in Table 2, initially all variables are included in the model one at the time (Models 1-4), whereas in Model 5, they are all included jointly. From Model 1, we find that ideals regarding the sharing of parental leave have no significant impact on the likelihood to have another child during the studied period. The association between the father's share of the parental leave and continued childbearing (Model 2), shows higher continued childbearing if the father has stayed home for 20% to 40% of the total time, compared to if he has stayed home less than 10%. The pattern could be described as a reversed U-shape, and there is no significant difference depending on whether the man has stayed home for a very short period and very long period. One reason could be the few cases in our data, but the results are also in line with previous findings, by Duvander and Andersson (2006), who argue that the fathers who take very long leave is an extremely heterogeneous group, for example, regarding labor market attachment.

In Model 3, we include the measure of mismatch between ideals and behavior. Similar to the results in Table 2, we find a significant negative association between mismatch and continued childbearing in Model 3 (for women, $p < .1$), but after including all variables simultaneously, in Model 5, this association is lost. In Model 4, we examine the importance of being satisfied with the division of the latest completed parental leave for continued childbearing. In line with results presented in Table 2, individuals who are dissatisfied with the division of parental leave are less likely to have more children with the same partner, at least so for men. The magnitude of the difference is large. Average marginal effects of the association between how satisfied an individual is with the division of the latest completed parental leave and the probability of continued childbearing shows that whereas men

who are satisfied with their parental leave division have a .63 probability of having another child (with the same partner) up until 2014, men who are dissatisfied only have a .44 probability of having another child.

One possible explanation could be that these dissatisfied men to a larger extent already had ended the union with the mother of the child prior to 2009 when the satisfaction is reported, that they hence cannot have more children with the same partner, and that they in retrospect wish they had stayed home longer in order to have a closer relationship with the child. This is, however, not the case. The results remain robust also when we only include respondents who are still in a relationship with the other parent in 2009. These results also remain unchanged in Model 5.

In Table 4, we examine whether the patterns found in Tables 2 and 3 also translate into higher levels of union dissolution among dissatisfied respondents or respondents with certain attitudes/parental leave behavior. From Models 1 and 2, we find no significant association between ideals regarding the sharing of parental leave (Model 1), or actual sharing (Model 2), and union dissolution. Because of the small number of dissolved unions, it is however difficult to interpret whether this is due to a null association or due to limited statistical power. The estimates are however, as expected, in the opposite direction compared to those found for childbearing in Table 3; showing a U-shaped pattern for the actual uptake. Mismatch between ideals and behavior has no significant association with union dissolution (Model 3).

Interestingly, despite the small number of cases, there is a strong and significant association between being dissatisfied with the parental leave division and union dissolution for men (Models 4 and 5). Particularly, men who are dissatisfied with the division of the latest completed parental leave experience union dissolution to a much larger extent than those who were satisfied with the division. Translated into marginal effects, satisfied men have a .13 probability of breaking up, compared to a .33 probability for men who were dissatisfied with the division. Hence, the probability of union dissolution more than doubles for men who are dissatisfied with their latest division of parental leave, even after adjusting for their overall relationship quality in 2003. Note that also these results are robust to only including individuals who were still in a relationship with the other parent in 2009, which means that men do not become dissatisfied with the sharing because they have ended their relationship prior to reporting this dissatisfaction.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Swedes in general hold egalitarian attitudes to the sharing of parental leave. Among the respondents, born between 1968 and 1980, 50% believe parents should share parental leave equally and very few completely disagree. These

ideals are, however, indeed more egalitarian than the lives the respondents actually live. Perhaps the most striking illustration of this is that in our sample, one out of five individuals agreed or strongly agreed that parents should share parental leave equally, but still had a division of leave where the man used less than 20% of the total time. In line with this, one out of five respondents in retrospect regret how they divided the parental leave with their partner, with men wishing they had stayed home longer, and women wishing they had stayed home a shorter period of time.

The core question for the study was whether these kinds of discrepancies, and dissatisfaction with the division of parental leave, have negative consequences for relationship satisfaction and continued family-demographic behavior. To do this, we first investigated the association between actual sharing behavior and continued family dynamics.

Analyses of the association between sharing of leave and continued family dynamics revealed a strong and independent effect from fathers' parental leave uptake on men's continued childbearing, even after adjusting for ideals regarding the sharing of parental leave. Previous studies have not been able to discern whether the often found higher childbearing among couples who share parental leave equally actually is an effect of parental leave, or merely a selection of family-oriented or egalitarian individuals into an egalitarian division of parental leave. Our findings indicate that the selection process is not driving these patterns. More studies of this potential causality are obviously needed, but we want to point out the strength of this study that ideals are measured before behavior. The ideals are thus not formed by the actual use of parental leave in this case (even though development in ideals or attitudes and behavior most likely are reciprocal, see, e.g., Moors, 2003).

In a second step, we turn to the impact from discrepancies between behavior and ideals as well as dissatisfaction with the division of leave. In contrast to what was hypothesized, there is no clear evidence that discrepancies between ideals regarding the sharing of parental leave and the sharing of leave would be associated with any of the studied outcomes. The coefficients are generally in line with what was expected, but not significant. It is, however, not possible to discern whether this is due to the small number of cases in the data, or whether these kinds of discrepancies actually do not matter.

Our findings demonstrate that what clearly matters for future partnership dynamics is how satisfied individuals, at least men, are in retrospect with the division of the parental leave. Being dissatisfied with how the parental leave was divided with the partner is for men associated with markedly decreased relationship satisfaction, substantially lower continued childbearing, and much higher union dissolution risks. The results remain stable to several

robustness checks. For women, the findings are weaker and not statistically significant, perhaps due to the small number of cases.

One possible explanation to why satisfaction with the division of parental leave matters more than discrepancies with ideals may be that satisfaction is a measure that comes closer to the experience of the individual. Ideals and attitudes are more abstract phenomena, not necessarily translatable into expectations about the individual's own life, while the satisfaction may capture ideas or expectations about the individual situation. The low importance of discrepancies contradicts other Swedish studies (Goldscheider et al., 2013; Oláh & Gähler, 2014), which focus on discrepancies between gender attitudes and the division of unpaid housework and child care. One reason for this could lie in the reason for the discrepancies. When partners do not share housework or unpaid child care in line with expectations, this is clearly the consequence of one of the partners neglecting his or her responsibilities in the home, that is, a question of internal couple dynamics. For parental leave, there are however often external factors at play creating these discrepancies, such as employers or the financial situation for the couple. Hence, the discrepancy may not necessarily reflect badly on the relationship to the same extent as, for instance, a discrepancy between gender egalitarian ideals and actual sharing of housework would do, which could weaken the link between these kinds of discrepancies and continued couple dynamics.

The finding that men but not women seem to be affected is not entirely in line with the Swedish studies on the effects of a less gender equal division of housework than one's attitudes would predict. Such a division either has larger negative effects on continued childbearing for women than for men (Goldscheider et al., 2013) or equally negative effects on union stability for women and men (Oláh & Gähler, 2014). This difference may be due to the fact that housework is generally perceived as less positive than child care (Sullivan, 1996) and lacks important emotional rewards connected to child care. Women who feel that they do too much housework may perceive this as purely negative and become dissatisfied with their partner and relationship, while doing more than their fair share of child care may not be as negative. The paid parental leave is furthermore different from both housework and other kinds of child care because it is paid and not combined with paid work. Being on paid parental leave for longer than one's ideal situation may hence not be associated with the same levels of stress and work–family conflict as performing more housework or child care while at the same time engaging in paid work.

The findings could also reflect gender differences in why women and men are dissatisfied with their division of parental leave. For women who are dissatisfied with an unequal division, it generally means that they spent more

time with the child and less time in paid work than they had wished, while for men, it means the opposite. Not having “your fair share” of time with the child could possibly have more direct consequences on family life.

In addition, the fact that men but not women seem to be affected contradicts findings from the United States where women’s relationship satisfaction was more negatively affected than men’s by a less gender equal sharing of child care than expected (e.g., Belsky, 1985; Biehle & Mickelson, 2012). Biehle and Mickelson (2012), however, found an exception where men were more negatively affected by violated expectations than women if they had less time than expected for playing with the child. Parental leave involves both play and other dimensions of child care, and not least the development of a relationship with the child. When given the chance, fathers probably expect and value also other parts of interaction with the child than just playing. With the long parental leave available in Sweden, Swedish fathers actually have the opportunity to take part of all aspects of parenthood, which will shape their expectations. Fathers in Sweden are generally aware of their right to leave and their expectations on the leave and child care involvement are high. The high expectation in Sweden may lead to that the dissatisfaction is especially important for men in this country. They may be particularly prone to put a high value on close contact and time with their children and feel deprived and dissatisfied if not getting their share.

In line with this, Kornrich and Eger (2014) suggest that gender egalitarian countries foster a situation where division of housework is more salient and the norm of what is fair is more important. Therefore, a sense of fairness may be more important in such countries. Perhaps men’s sense of dissatisfaction, and the consequences of this sense, is part of the transition to a more gender equal society, and something to be expected in other countries introducing family policies that enhance gender equality. The sense of dissatisfaction may in the long run lead to a situation where a more equal sharing is taken for granted. These results call for attention to the development of parents’ access to policies but also that their expectations and ability to use the policies are important.

One limitation with this study is that even though the data are longitudinal in most respects, satisfaction with the division of leave is measured at the same time as relationship satisfaction is measured as an outcome. Hence, the direction of causality between satisfaction with the division of parental leave and the three outcomes cannot be addressed explicitly, and even if all robustness checks support our suggested direction of causality, any final causal claims must remain tentative. Most likely, the true direction of causality involves interplay between the two, where an individual’s satisfaction with

the division affects his or her relationship satisfaction, but where there is also some element of negative bias in the reports of individuals experiencing poor relationship satisfaction.

In conclusion, our results highlight that the unequal sharing of leave does not necessarily stem from traditional gender attitudes, and that regretting this unequal sharing may have important consequences on future family demographic behavior. Knowing more about why parents in retrospect regret how they shared the parental leave is important in order to understand how to facilitate a sharing that parents will be satisfied with. This, in turn is likely to affect continued childbearing as well as the stability of unions.

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