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**The Gendered Division of Housework and Couples' Sexual Relationships:
A Re-Examination**

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary men and women increasingly express preferences for egalitarian unions. One recent high profile study (Kornrich, Brines, & Leupp, 2013) found that married couples with more equal divisions of labor had sex less frequently than couples with conventional divisions of domestic labor. Others (Gager & Yabiku, 2010) found that performing more domestic labor was associated with greater sexual frequency, regardless of gender. Both studies drew from the same data source, which was over two decades old. We utilize data from the 2006 Marital and Relationship Survey (MARS) to update this work. We find no significant differences in sexual frequency and satisfaction among conventional or egalitarian couples. Couples where the male partner does the majority of the housework, however, have less frequent and lower quality sexual relationships than their counterparts. Couples are content to modify conventional housework arrangements, but reversing them entirely has consequences for other aspects of their unions.

Today's adults came of age during a period of great upheaval in expected family and work roles for men and women. They are the "children of the gender revolution" (Gerson, 2010). Many seek to build families based on egalitarian roles, including an equitable sharing of domestic and financial burdens (Gerson, 2010; Thornton & Young-Demarco, 2001). Contemporary adults also desire high levels of intimacy within their partnerships (Cherlin, 2004; Gerson, 2010). They expect the "total package" – someone who will be helpmate, best friend, and lover. Transforming conventional gender roles can, however, be challenging. Furthermore, there may be consequences for seeking to overturn normative gender scripts. Egalitarian unions can be very difficult to maintain (e.g., Miller & Sassler, 2010; Risman, 1998; Schwartz, 1995), especially when there are few established models for couples to follow. Sharing domestic burdens may also lead to less intimacy between partners (Kornrich, Brines, & Leupp, 2013; Schwartz, 1995). In a recent paper published in *The American Sociological Review*, Kornrich et al. (2013) found that sexual frequency was highest in married households with conventionally gendered divisions of labor and declined as men and women increased their share of non-traditional housework tasks.

Much of what we know about gender, household tasks, and intimate relationships – including the paper by Kornrich and colleagues (2013) – is based on analyses which utilize National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) data that are over a quarter of a century old. The first wave of data for the NSFH was gathered in 1987-1988, and the same respondents were followed up in 1992-1994 (Sweet & Bumpass, 1996); this source provided detailed information about married couples' experiences in the last quarter of the 20th century. Although the revolution in men's and women's roles has stalled, changing only a little since the 1980s (e.g., today's women do slightly more paid work and men slightly more housework compared to

20 years ago) men's and women's attitudes about the gendered division of labor have become increasingly egalitarian (Gerson, 2010; Sayer, 2010; Thornton & Young-Demarco, 2001). Furthermore, family living arrangements have altered considerably. Marriage has become a more selective institution, more couples live together prior to marriage, and there are more cohabiting families with children than there were in the 1980s (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008; Lichter, Sassler, & Turner, 2014).

Given shifts in the demographic behaviors of contemporary couples and young adults' aspirations for family life that emphasizes egalitarianism, we might expect changes in the association between the division of domestic labor and couples' sexual relationships. In this paper, we explore how the division of household labor is associated with couples' sexual frequency and satisfaction. Data are from The Marital and Relationship Survey (MARS), a survey collected in 2006 from a sample of low- to moderate-income couples with a minor child living in the home. This survey provides information on several aspects of relationship quality, including intimacy, commitment, and conflict, as well as sexual frequency and satisfaction (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009; Sassler, Addo, & Lichter, 2012).

BACKGROUND

The Performance of Gender in Intimate Unions

An extensive body of research examines how gender is reinforced through interactions with others (Potuchek, 1997; Risman, 2004; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Studies have examined how couples do gender through union progression, expressions of sexuality and sexual pleasure, and decision making (cf. Blumberg & Coleman, 1989; England, 2010; Komter, 1989; Miller & Sassler, 2012; Sassler & Miller, 2011). Perhaps no area has been examined quite so much as the

division of household chores (e.g., Hochschild, 1989; Potuchek, 1997; for a review see Coltrane, 2000).

Men have increased their shares of routine housework over time, and women have reduced theirs, thereby narrowing the gender gap in household labor (Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie, & Robinson, 2012). Yet the majority of domestic responsibilities – particularly the most onerous and time consuming chores – are still relegated to women (Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie, & Robinson, 2012). Historically, women’s greater responsibilities within the home were linked to their lower earnings, fewer hours worked, or lower levels of educational attainment (cf. Carlson & Lynch, 2013; Coltrane, 2000). But, as women increasingly entered the paid labor force, attitudes towards domestic labor shifted (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). Both men and women now report in attitudinal surveys that men should participate in domestic labor, with the vast majority of both sexes rejecting the notion of separate spheres. Responses to questions from the General Social Survey document these shifts. Between 1975 and 2012, the proportion of women who disagreed with the statement “It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family” rose from 47% to 78%; among men, 71% disagreed with this statement as of 2012 (The Roper Center, 2014). The proportions of women and men expressing approval of married women “earning money in business or industry, even if she has a husband capable of supporting her” are even greater (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). Even though women persistently express stronger adherence to egalitarian beliefs, men do not lag that far behind.

Despite high levels of acceptance of women’s employment outside the home, the advantages accruing to paid work do not operate equally for women and men. Women continue to perform disproportionate shares of domestic labor (Bianchi et al., 2012). Furthermore, studies

repeatedly find that in households where the female partner earned more than the male, was more educated, or worked more hours per week, men did less routine housework than their partners (e.g., Miller & Sassler, 2012; Tichenor, 1999; though see Sullivan, 2011, for a dissenting view). Clearly, something about the expected roles of men and women, and not just the relative resources of each partner, contribute to the ways couples organized their household labor.

Housework and Sex in Intimate Unions

Various studies have posited that the division of household labor and sexual intimacy are closely intertwined, as they involve the enactment of gender norms, desire, and power (Blumberg & Coleman, 1989; Elliott & Umberson, 2008). Theories derived from the new home economics, for example, posit that role complementarity strengthens marriages, and the performance of conventional roles increases relationship satisfaction and, ostensibly, sexual frequency (Becker, 1981). This theoretical premise undergirded a recent, highly publicized study, which extended the notion of complementarity as an integral trigger for sexual scripts. Kornrich and colleagues argued that expressions of gender difference in the performance of household labor create sexual desire. In their words, “traditionally masculine and feminine behaviors consciously or unconsciously serve as turn-ons for individuals” (Kornrich et al., 2013, p. 31) and enacted the sexual scripts necessary to produce arousal (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). They therefore hypothesized that couples with more egalitarian divisions of household labor would have less active sex lives. In fact, they found that sexual frequency was highest in households with traditionally gendered divisions of labor; in households where men did a greater proportion of female-typed routine tasks, reports of sexual frequency were significantly lower, as was wives’ sexual satisfaction. Their results are consistent with Schwartz’ (1995) qualitative study, which found that peer marriages often posed problems for sexual intimacy.

Such findings differ in important ways, however, from both theory and research positing that egalitarianism and men's performance of domestic labor are positively related to sexual frequency and satisfaction. Sex has value not only as a gender performance, but also as a means of demonstrating love and affection. As such, couples' have more and higher quality sex when they are satisfied with their relationships (Call, Sprecher, & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 2007; Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Although influenced by many factors, several studies demonstrate that relationship quality and stability is highest when couples are happy with their division of labor and find it equitable and fair (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003; Frisco & Williams, 2003; Wilkie, Ferree, & Ratcliff, 1998). Regarding the division of domestic labor, the evidence shows that when men do a greater share of housework, wives' perceptions of relationship fairness and marital satisfaction are greater (Amato et al., 2003). Moreover, couples in egalitarian unions report high levels of emotional closeness (Schwartz, 1995) and communication (Risman, 1998) - qualities that Schwartz (2007) notes contribute significantly to relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and physical intimacy. This suggests that compared to conventional housework arrangements, egalitarianism should result in greater sexual intimacy.

Several qualitative studies have reported that women reward their partners sexually for increased housework performance (Hochschild 1989; Elliot & Umberson, 2008). Quantitative work has also found that increases in men's housework performance are associated with greater sexual frequency. Using the very same data as Kornrich et al. (i.e., NSFH), Gager and Yabiku (2010) found that the more time wives and husbands spend on household labor, the greater their reports of sexual frequency. They interpreted their findings to show the proclivity with which some couples embrace a "work hard, play hard" attitude; as life gets busier and time gets tighter,

they suggested, a select group of high energy spouses are better able to balance multiple time commitments, while at the same time making sex a priority for their relationship.

Why, then, are findings regarding the association between the division of domestic labor and sexual frequency and satisfaction inconsistent? For one, studies vary with respect to differentiating between female housework (often designated as routine or core domestic labor) and male housework (non-routine or non-core). Moreover, some have focused solely on the amount of housework partners complete, while others have also considered relative shares between partners. No research, however, has considered the possibility that the observed effect of men's shares of domestic labor on sexual frequency and satisfaction could be non-linear.

Despite abundant evidence that men's and women's roles are increasingly converging, there is little indication that either men or women are embracing a script where men are the primary homemaker – an arrangement we label “counter-conventional”. Rarely do men take on the majority of the housework, but when they do, performing the lion's share of household labor is generally not viewed as “making up for” a partner's higher income (Hochschild, 1989; Miller & Sassler, 2012); the economy of gratitude operates differently for men and women. Indeed, such arrangements are often problematized by couples, generally viewed as the result of constraints rather than choice (Damaske, 2011; Tichenor, 2005). In their famous theoretical essay on the balance of power within the family, Blumberg and Coleman (1989) argued that couples whose economic roles were in transition would experience more power struggles, which would negatively affect their sex lives. They hypothesized that as men became economically dependent on their wives they would “. . . adopt the dependent wife's traditional leverage of rationing sex or making excuses [to avoid it] (1989, p. 242).” If this also applies to transitions in domestic roles, counter-conventional couples may have sex less frequently, since women have

been found to have less frequent and intense sexual desire than men (Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001; Elliott & Umberson, 2008) and providing or withholding sex by (domestic) men will be of lower bargaining power. This new twist on exchange in the realm of sexual intercourse may lead to more frequent disagreements about sex and, therefore, less satisfying sexual relationships.

A distinction between egalitarian arrangements and counter-conventional divisions is important, since past assessments of the relationship between the division of housework and sex have theorized a linear relationship, where increases in men's housework performance have a monotonic influence on sexual frequency and satisfaction. It is therefore necessary to assess whether variations in sexual frequency and satisfaction emerge not just among conventional and egalitarian households, but among those that are counter-conventional. We offer the following hypotheses, based on our alternative theoretical framework:

H1: Compared to egalitarian couples, we expect lower levels of sexual frequency and sexual satisfaction among couples that report conventional arrangements – where the women does the majority of housework -- and counter-conventional arrangements -- where the man does the largest share of the domestic labor.

H2: We expect that the relationship between the division of routine housework and sexual frequency and sexual satisfaction will be mediated by reports of relationship quality and satisfaction with the division of labor.

H3: The association between the division of routine housework and sexual satisfaction is hypothesized to vary by gender.

H3a: The negative effects of counter-conventional arrangements on sexual frequency and satisfaction should be stronger for men than women.

H3b: For women, we expect egalitarian arrangements will lead to more satisfying sexual relationships than when couples enact conventional arrangements.

Union Status, Housework, and Sex

An additional factor that has confounded our understanding of the relationship between the division of housework and couples' sexual relationships is union status and history. To date all studies that have examined the relationship between housework and sex have limited their analysis to married couples and have not considered the role of nonmarital cohabitation in shaping this association. This has occurred despite higher levels of sexual frequency and egalitarianism among those who have cohabited compared to those who marry directly (Call et al., 1995). Attention to union status and history is especially important given that structural and cultural shifts in family building behaviors have made marriage an increasingly selective institution; the highly educated are both more likely to be married, and express more egalitarian gender role attitudes (Cotter, Hermsen, & Vanneman, 2011). Contemporary marriage patterns also differ in important ways from the processes enacted twenty-five years ago; compared to when the NSFH was collected 25 years ago, the majority of marriages are now preceded by cohabitation (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008). That period of shared living therefore serves as a training ground for where couples work out how domestic labor gets divided. Although cohabiting couples express more egalitarian views than those who married directly (Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, and Waite, 1995), cohabiting women still do more housework than cohabiting men (Shelton & John, 1993; South & Spitze, 1994). Qualitative research, however, documents a considerable amount of jockeying over the performance of domestic labor among cohabitators (Miller & Sassler, 2010). Given the links between the division of housework, relationship satisfaction and couples' sexual relationships, cohabitators' levels of sexual frequency and

satisfaction likely vary from their married peers. We therefore propose to test the following hypotheses:

H4: We expect the relationship between the division of routine housework and sexual frequency and satisfaction will vary by union status and cohabitation history.

H4a: When couples engage in conventional housework arrangements, those who married directly are expected to have greater sexual frequency and sexual satisfaction than respondents who cohabited prior to marriage or who are currently cohabiting.

H4b: We expect a positive association between sexual frequency and satisfaction and the division of domestic labor among those who cohabited prior to marriage or those who are currently cohabiting at the time of their interviews when their divisions of domestic labor are egalitarian, relative to conventional or counter-conventional.

The Current Study

Here, we examine whether egalitarian divisions of domestic work are associated with lower levels of sexual frequency and reduced sexual satisfaction among contemporary couples. Of course, many factors are associated with couples' sexual relationships. Key among these are the presence and age of children (Call et al., 1995), religious affiliation and attendance (Call et al., 1995), and educational attainment (Kornrich et al. 2013). More recently, scholars have begun paying attention to the relationship between sexual frequency and health (Call et al., 1995; Gager & Yabiku, 2010; Kornrich et al., 2013). Nonetheless, a focus on the relational effects of the division of labor on couples' sexual relationships and other indicators of relationship health is paramount, given that today's young adults desire more equal unions (Gerson, 2010).

Egalitarian expectations may not be enough to completely transform the previously reported patterns of association between the division of domestic labor and sexual frequency.

Other factors – such as women’s labor force participation and the rise of the dual-earner family, later marriage, increased educational attainment of those married, as well as greater experience with nonmarital cohabitation – may help tilt the balance towards greater rewards for more equally shared housework and away from conventional exchanges. In other words, today’s married couples who share household chores relatively equally may have greater sexual activity than those who contested unequal divisions of domestic work twenty-five years ago. This might be, at least in part, due to shifts in cultural scripts regarding masculinity and femininity, which may subsequently have altered sexual scripts.

We utilize data gathered mid-way through the first decade of the 21st century, which was drawn from a sample of low- to moderate-income couples with minor children. Our analysis moves beyond purely additive or linear measurements of men’s and women’s domestic labor contributions. We divide our couples into three types: conventional couples, where the woman does the majority (65% or more) of the housework; egalitarian couples, where the male partner performs between 35% and 65% of the domestic labor; and counter-conventional households, where men perform the majority (65% or more) of the housework. Previous research has found these typologies to be more salient among contemporary couples, and to best demarcate different ways in which couples “do gender” or transform it (Miller & Sassler, 2010, 2012). Our sample also contains a substantial share of couples that lived with their partners prior to marriage or who are currently cohabiting, which reflects the experience of modern couples.

METHOD

Data

For this study we utilize data from the Marital and Relationship Survey (MARS). The MARS is an internet-based survey conducted in 2006 by *Knowledge Networks* using probability

sampling. Unlike other web-based surveys that recruit current internet users willing to participate in on-line surveys, *KN* provides on-going household panelists with an Internet appliance, Internet access, Web TV, and a cash payment for completing surveys. Panelists then receive unique log-in information for accessing surveys online and to ensure confidentiality. Surveys are sent emails three to four times a month inviting them to participate in research; they are also rotated in and out of the survey to assure up-to-date nationally representative samples. In this way, the survey did not exclude members of disadvantaged backgrounds, who are the least likely to have access to the internet (Fairlie, 2004).

The MARS sample was restricted to couples with co-resident minor children, household incomes of less than \$50,000, and female partner was under age 45. The survey was conducted in March and April of 2006, and took approximately 35 to 40 minutes to complete. Both married and cohabiting respondents were sampled and information was collected independently from both partners. The response rate for the MARS was 80.3% (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009). A total of 1,095 individuals in 605 couples were interviewed. Because we are interested in controlling for several couple-level variables, such as the female partners' share of income, partner's work hours, and couples' total incomes, we limit our sample to those 487 couples where both partners completed the survey.

Measures

Dependent Variables

Sexual frequency per month is based on response to the question, "About how many times did you and your [spouse / partner] have sex last month?" In some cases ($n = 10$), respondents reported having sex more than 50 times per month or a little less than twice a day, on average. We exclude these improbable outliers from our analysis.

We also constructed two measures of sexual satisfaction. *Satisfaction with sexual frequency* is based on responses to the question, “How satisfied are you with the number of times you and your [spouse / partner] have sex?” We assigned a value of 1 to those who noted they were very satisfied with the frequency of sex in their relationship; all other responses (somewhat satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied) are given a value of 0. Our *quality of sexual relationship scale* is the sum of respondents’ answers to four survey items. Three items tap respondents’ levels of agreement to the following statements: (a) I feel our sex life really adds a lot to our relationship; (b) we have problems in our relationship because one of us has become less interested in sex; and (c) I am satisfied with our sexual relationship. Possible responses to these three items include: 0 = strongly disagree, 1 = disagree, 2 = agree, and 3 = strongly agree. The fourth item is the respondents’ answer to the question: (d) how often do you and your partner have arguments about sex? Possible responses to this item include: 0 = never, 1 = a few times a year, 2 = a few times a month, and 3 = a few times a week or more. The scale ranges from 0 to 12. Items (b) and (d) were recoded so that higher scores indicate higher levels of satisfaction with one’s sexual relationship. The Cronbach’s alpha (α) for the summed scale was .78 (women $\alpha = .80$; men $\alpha = .76$) demonstrating high internal consistency.

Analyses of sexual frequency are conducted using negative binomial regression, given the positively skewed distribution of the count of sexual encounters per month and the over-dispersion of the distribution (i.e., variance is much greater than mean). Analyses of satisfaction with sexual frequency were conducted using binomial logistic regression, while analysis of the quality of sexual relationship is conducted using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. All three analyses used clustered standard errors to account for non-independence of reports, since respondents are nested within couples.

Independent Variables

The independent measures employed in this study mirror as closely as possible those from the Kornich et al. (2013) study for sake of replication. Our primary independent variable is the division of routine housework. We limit our analysis to the division of routine housework since questions regarding non-routine housework were non-exhaustive and limited to home repairs and bill paying.

Respondents were asked to report their divisions on the following routine housework items: preparing and cooking meals, washing dishes, cleaning around the house, shopping for groceries, and doing laundry. These items are universally considered core or routine housework tasks that are the traditional responsibility of women (Coltrane, 2000). Responses to these questions ranged from 0 (I do it all) to 2 (we share it equally) to 4 (my partner does it all). We recoded each measure into 0 (she does it all), 2 (we share it equally), and 4 (he does it all). We then summed these 5 items and averaged the total to create a summary measure, ranging from 0 to 4, indicating the *Male partners' share of routine housework*. Higher scores on this measure indicate a less conventional arrangement, where the male partner does greater amounts of routine housework. To assess differences between conventional (female partner is responsible for the routine housework), egalitarian (couple shares the routine housework equally) and counter-conventional (male partner is responsible for routine housework) couples, we created 3 dummy variables. Each dummy stands for approximately one-third of the distribution of housework shares. Individuals are given a value of 1 on *she does majority of the routine housework* if the score on the division of routine housework measure was less than 1.4 or the equivalent of the male partner doing 35% or less of the housework. Respondents were coded as 1 on *routine housework shared equally* if the score on the division of routine housework was between 1.4 and

2.6 or roughly between 35% and 65% of the routine housework. Finally, respondents were given a value of 1 on *he does majority of the routine housework* if scores on the division of routine housework were equal to or greater than 2.6, which is roughly the equivalent of the male partner completing 65% or more of the housework.

In addition to estimations of the division of routine housework tasks, we also assess the total of *his and her hours of housework per weekday*. These items did not differentiate between core/routine and non-core/non-routine housework tasks. Research suggests that absolute increases in both types of housework affect sexual frequency similarly (Kornrich et al. 2013).

Several variables may intervene between the division of routine housework and couples' sexual relationships. These include relationship quality and satisfaction with the division of labor. *Relationship satisfaction* is a continuous variable ranging from 0 to 10, with higher scores indicating a more satisfaction with one's romantic relationship. *Satisfaction with the division of labor* is an ordinal measure ranging from 0 (*very dissatisfied*) to 3 (*very satisfied*). In supplemental analyses we also tested the mediating effect of gender ideology. Egalitarian gender ideology was not associated with any aspects of couples' sexual relationships.

Controls

A number of variables were used as controls. *Gender* was dichotomously coded (1=Female; 0=Male). Whether the couple was *currently cohabitating*, had *married directly* (reference), or *cohabited prior to marriage* was also dummy coded. Respondent's *age*, *his hours spent in paid labor*, and *her hours spent in paid labor* are continuous variables. For our analysis, the presence (i.e., number of) of children in the household was broken down into three categories; *number of children less than age two in household*, *number of children ages two to five in household*, and *number of children ages six to 12 in household*. Respondent's *education*

was measured categorically as *less than high school*, *high school* (reference), *some college*, and *Bachelor's degree or higher*. *Self-rated health* is an ordinal variable, ranging from 0 to 4 with higher scores indicating better health. Religion consisted of categories for *Protestant* (reference), *Catholic*, *Other*, and *No Religion*. Any category in religion that comprised less than 10% of the sample was collapsed into "other." These included Jewish, Muslim, and Other. *Religious attendance* assesses the frequency of religious attendance, where higher values marked more frequent attendance. Values on this variable include: 5 (more than once a week), 4 (once a week), 3 (2 or 3 times a month), 2 (about once a month), 1 (several times a year or less), and 0 (never). *Time spent alone together* is a Likert item ranging from 1 to 6, with the corresponding values: 1 (almost never), 2 (once or twice a month), 3 (almost every week), 4 (once a week), 5 (more than once a week), and 6 (almost every day). *Couples' total income* is the number of dollars (in thousands) of both partners contribution to couples' income. *Female partner's share of couple's income* is the female partner's income divided by the couples' total income and ranges from 0 to 1. Missing values on our income measures result in a loss $n = 124$ cases (13% of sample). We found missing values on more than 5% of cases for sexual frequency ($n = 53$) as well. We adjust by imputing missing values on these variables using the "impute" procedure in STATA 12 which predicted values using OLS regression. Results from single imputations were no different than estimations using multiple imputations ($m=5$ or $m=10$). Missing values on the remainder of variables result in a final sample size of $n = 931$ for sexual frequency, $n = 917$ for satisfaction with sexual frequency, and $n = 920$ for quality of sexual relationship scale.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all variables in our models. On average, respondents have some post-secondary schooling, earn a total couple income of \$41,000, and are

age 36. Note that our sample is considerably younger, and earns substantially less money than Kornrich and colleagues' (2013) sample from Wave 2 of the NSFH. Almost half of the respondents had cohabited prior to marriage, and 11% were cohabiting at the time of their interviews. The MARS respondents are also more likely to be living with children between the ages of 2 and 13. With regards to other attributes, men in the MARS sample are employed in the paid labor force somewhat more hours than husbands from the NSFH, whereas the MARS women work in the paid labor force fewer hours than do the NSFH wives from Wave 2.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

MARS respondents report having sex just under 7 times a month, on average. This is greater than reports from the NSFH Wave 2, where the mean for women was 5.6 and for men 5.2. In general, respondents are positive about their sexual relationships, although only a quarter of men were very satisfied with the frequency of sexual intercourse, compared to 32% of women, indicating that men desire more sex. Both men and women scored approximately 7.7 out of 12 on the quality of sexual relationship scale.

As far as how couples arrange their divisions of domestic labor, our results indicate that the majority of couples are rather conventional. Most respondents, approximately 63%, report that the female partner does a majority of the routine housework. Three out of ten couples, on the other hand, state that housework is shared more equally. Only 5% of couples report that the male partner did the majority of routine housework, highlighting the relative rarity of counter-conventional housework arrangements. Partners often do not concur about their divisions of labor, however. Men more often state that routine housework is shared equally than do women, and women are more likely than men to report doing the majority of housework. We found no evidence that conflicting reports within couples were related to our dependent variables. Gender

differences in the performance of domestic labor is evident in the individual reports of how much housework is performed, as men report doing an average of 2.2 hours of housework per weekday, while women report an average of 3.8 hours.

Table 2 presents results from bivariate analysis of the relationship between the division of routine housework and couples' sexual intimacy. Analysis of variance and Chi-square tests indicate that sexual frequency and satisfaction is highest in egalitarian couples where housework is shared equally. Couples who share housework equally have sex 7.7 times per month on average, this is one time more per month than those with conventional arrangements and over 2.5 times more than those where men does the majority of routine housework. Satisfaction with sexual frequency and the quality of couples' sexual relationships varies little between conventional and egalitarian couples, however, those in counter-conventional arrangements are less satisfied with the amount of sex they have and report lower quality sex lives.

Table 3 presents results from our analysis of the division of routine housework and respondents' sexual frequency and satisfaction. Full results can be found in Appendix A in the online supplement. We find no evidence that men's share of routine housework is related to either the quantity or quality of sex (Panel 1, Table 3). This result contradicts the findings of Kornrich and colleagues (2013). Instead, our results are more in line with those of Gager and Yabiku (2010), in that both men's and women's hours of housework are positively associated with sexual frequency, though we find no gender difference in the magnitude of effects. We also find that increases in women's hours of housework are positively related to satisfaction with the frequency of sex. This, however, may be evidence of the negative effect of counter-conventional arrangements on couples' sexual relationships.

TABLE 2 and 3 ABOUT HERE

In Panel 2 we separate the division of routine household labor into three categories: she does the majority of routine housework, routine housework is equally shared (reference), and he does the majority of routine housework. The explained variance is improved in these models, relative to those presented in Panel 1. In fact, the manner in which housework was divided affected all three of our dependent variables. The outcomes from our negative binomial regression analyses indicate that compared to arrangements where routine housework is shared equally, when the male partner does the majority of the domestic labor sexual frequency is significantly lower ($b = -.302$; $p < .05$). Although the coefficient is in the expected direction, there is no significant difference in the sexual frequency of couples who share housework equally and those with conventional household arrangements.

In addition to differences in sexual frequency, the results also indicate differences in satisfaction with the frequency of sex. Compared to those with a more egalitarian division of domestic labor, those with counter-conventional arrangements are significantly less satisfied with the amount of sex they have with their partners ($b = -1.218$; $p < .05$). In addition to having less sex and being less satisfied with the amount they are having, counter-conventional couples also report that their sexual relationships are of lower quality than couples where domestic labor is more equitably shared ($b = -.994$; $p < .05$). Those who have a conventional arrangement exhibit no differences compared to egalitarian couples in terms of the quality of their sexual relationships or their satisfaction with sexual frequency, though the coefficients are in the expected direction.

To explain the effect of the division of housework on sexual frequency and sexual quality we examined two possible mediators: relationship satisfaction and satisfaction with the division of labor. Results (not shown) indicate that satisfaction with the division of labor was highest

among individuals who shared the routine housework equally with their partners. Relationship satisfaction was not associated with the division of routine housework. Tests of mediation (Table 4) indicate that higher levels of relationship quality and satisfaction with the division of labor were associated with more sex, more satisfaction with sexual frequency, and greater sexual relationship quality.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

We found evidence that satisfaction with the division of labor is a mechanism linking shares of housework to sexual frequency, satisfaction, and quality. When satisfaction with the division of labor was included in the model, the difference in sexual frequency between counter-conventional and egalitarian couples decreased from $-.302$ to $-.264$. Accounting for satisfaction with the division of labor reduced differences in satisfaction with sexual frequency between those with counter-conventional arrangements and those with an egalitarian arrangement by 10% from -1.218 to -1.091 . Regarding the quality of one's sexual relationship, satisfaction with the division of labor reduced differences between counter-conventional couples and egalitarian couples by 25% from $-.994$ to $-.743$ and to non-significance.

Although relationship satisfaction is not directly associated with the division of routine housework, we found that it mediates a great deal of the effect of satisfaction with the division of labor on sexual relationships, accounting for some of the effect of the division of routine housework on sexual frequency, satisfaction with sexual frequency, and the quality of one's sexual relationship. When relationship satisfaction was accounted for, the difference between counter-conventional arrangements and egalitarian arrangements in sexual frequency was reduced by an additional 10.0%, from $-.264$ to $-.237$ and to non-significance. Moreover, the effect of satisfaction with the division of labor was reduced by 60% and to non-significance.

Regarding satisfaction with sexual frequency, relationship satisfaction accounted for nearly one-third of the effect of satisfaction with the division of labor and further reduced the difference between those with a counter-conventional housework arrangement and those with an egalitarian arrangement from -1.091 to -.967. The largest change across models was found in sexual relationship quality. When relationship satisfaction was accounted for the effect of satisfaction with the division of labor was reduced by 74% and the difference between counter-conventional and egalitarian arrangements decreased to -.634.

In addition to exploring possible mediators, we also examined whether the effects of the division of routine housework were conditioned by cohabiting status and history. We found some evidence of significant differences across these domains. Although we found no initial difference in sexual frequency and satisfaction with sexual frequency between those with conventional and egalitarian housework arrangements, interaction tests in Table 5 indicate that differences across these groups vary by cohabitation history. Having a conventional division of housework results in significantly less sex and less satisfaction with amount of sex for those who cohabit prior to marriage compared to individuals who marry directly. We found no evidence that the effect of the division of housework on sexual relationship quality varies by cohabitation history.

TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

In addition to differences across cohabitation history, we found evidence of gender differences in the effect of the division of housework on sexual frequency and satisfaction (Table 6). The negative effect of counter-conventional housework arrangements on sexual frequency is strongest among women. Women who report that their spouses do most of the housework have sex .464 fewer times a month than men in similar arrangements. Results suggest gender differences between those in egalitarian and conventional arrangements in the odds of

satisfaction with sexual frequency. For men, we observe no differences between those with egalitarian or conventional housework arrangements in satisfaction with sexual frequency. For women, on the other hand, conventional arrangements result in lower odds of satisfaction compared to having egalitarian arrangements. Women in conventional arrangements have .63 times the odds of being satisfied with the amount of sex they have compared to those in egalitarian relationships. There is also some evidence that a counter-conventional arrangement results in lower sexual relationship quality among men to a larger degree than women. For men, counter-conventional arrangements lower the quality of their sexual relationships by 1.435 points. For women, there is virtually no difference between those in counter-conventional arrangements and those in an egalitarian one ($y = -1.435 + 1.147 + .257 = -.031$)

TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

DISCUSSION

This paper set out to reassess the association between the division of household labor and couples' reports of sexual frequency and satisfaction, given shifts in family building behavior, increases in women's participation in the paid labor force, and the liberalization of gender attitudes over the past few decades. Our analysis builds on past research that utilized the NSFH (Gager & Yabiku, 2010; Kornrich et al., 2013) by using data from a more recently collected sample of low- to moderate-income couples residing with minor children that was gathered in 2006 -- the Marital and Relationship Survey (MARS) (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009). Our findings highlight that the shift towards more egalitarian sharing of housework has not radically undermined one important dimension of marriage and couple relationships -- sexual intimacy. Egalitarian couples where both male and female partners contribute to the important work of maintaining the home fare well, relative to their more conventional counterparts. Our analyses

differ from other recent studies that called into question whether husbands who did more housework benefitted from greater sexual frequency (e.g., Kornrich et al., 2013) in that we use more recent data, provide a more nuanced view on how domestic labor can be divided, and hypothesize a non-linear relationship between men's performance of domestic labor and sexual frequency.

Our most notable finding is that couples with more egalitarian divisions of housework do somewhat better with regards to sexual frequency, satisfaction with sexual frequency, and reports of the quality of their sexual relationships than conventional couples, though these differences are generally small and conditional. Among couples where male partners performed the majority of routine housework, however, we found that individuals reported less sex, less satisfaction with the amount of sex, and lower quality sexual relationships. Such arrangements, however, are rare – occurring in less than 5% of couples. Nonetheless, our findings about counter-conventional couples lend some credence to claims that the performance of gender scripts plays an important role in sexual desire.

We found that the division of domestic labor operates to affect couples' sexual relationships through mechanisms like relationship satisfaction and happiness with the division of labor. Yet only a modest portion of the variance in sexual outcomes was attributable to these variables. It is possible, nonetheless, that declines in sexual frequency, satisfaction, and quality may result from other factors related to sexual scripts and exchange processes, such as lower sexual drive among men who may feel emasculated by their roles as homemakers or women who find their homemaking partners to be less sexually attractive. Further, as men rarely expect to perform the majority of the housework, finding themselves doing so may lead to increased resentment, the withholding of sex, and less frequent and less satisfying sexual relationships.

Although evidence suggests that egalitarian couples may have somewhat better sexual relationships than conventional couples, and that individuals in counter-conventional couples have the poorest sexual relationships, these differences vary somewhat by gender and cohabitation status and history. Our findings indicate that women in conventional unions report less satisfaction with the amount of sex they are having than women in egalitarian relationships; there was no such difference among men. Additionally, the negative effect of counter-conventional arrangements on reports of sexual frequency was strongest for women. Last, we found that the negative effect of counter-conventional arrangements on the quality of one's sexual relationship was much stronger for men than women. It appears that men may react most strongly to the effect of counter-conventional arrangements, leading to greater perceptions of sexual problems and perhaps even to inflation of reports of sexual frequency as a form of gender deviance neutralization (Greenstein, 2000). Given that respondents were nested within couples this could explain discrepancies in men's and women's reports.

Our assessment of cohabitation history differences suggests that a conventional sharing of housework leads to a poorer sex life compared to an egalitarian arrangement for those who had cohabited prior to marriage but not for individuals who married directly without having first cohabited. Given that cohabitation is now the normative pathway to marriage, those who marry directly may be selective of particularly conservative individuals (Fitzgerald & Glass, 2014). This may explain why sexual frequency and satisfaction with frequency are positively associated with the performance of gender-conforming behaviors among those who enter directly into marriage and negatively so among those who first cohabit. Cohabitors tend to be drawn from individuals who express stronger adherence to gender egalitarianism, as well as those less interested in replicating conventional gender norms. Those who cohabit prior to marriage, then,

may anticipate that egalitarian behaviors will persist even after tying the knot, and therefore be less satisfied with the traditional roles of “husband” and “wife.” That is, it may be particularly dissatisfying to find that their behaviors become conventional after marrying (Gupta, 1999).

Like most, our study is not without limitations. First, our measures of the division of housework were non-numeric and limited to routine housework items. This limits our ability to draw direct comparisons between our findings and those of past studies. A second limitation is that the MARS is not nationally representative, and our findings may not be applicable to older, childless, and more affluent Americans. Our study does, however, provide a window into cohort and social class variation in the consequences of the division of housework. A final limitation is that our study considers the division of housework among heterosexual couples only.

Over the past several decades, preferences for gendered divisions of labor within intimate unions have changed (Gerson, 2010; Thornton & Young-Demarco, 2001). Contemporary couples desire to share paid work and domestic responsibilities with their partners in ways that differ from those they observed in their families of origin (Gerson, 2010). Sexual frequency does not differ significantly between gender egalitarian and gender conventional couples, perhaps because both are currently thought of as societally acceptable alternatives for a relatively satisfactory division of labor. Moreover, as egalitarian ideals have diffused, cultural sexual scripts may have expanded to incorporate gender equality as a desirable possibility. Kornrich and collaborators (2013, p. 38) noted, “Sexuality is governed by elements of femininity and masculinity through appropriately gendered performances of household labor that coincide with sexual scripts organizing heterosexual desire.” Our results suggest the possibility that sexual scripts have been modified enough that both conventional and egalitarian ways of demonstrating masculinity and femininity are, for lack of a better term, “sexy.”

Egalitarian couples may find that their current arrangements are what their generation had hoped for, yet better than they realistically expected to achieve. Such couples who have met this goal may report more sexual satisfaction because they are happier with other aspects of their relationships as well. Last, couples in egalitarian unions tend to report high levels of emotional closeness (Schwartz, 1995) and such relationships require good communication to maintain (Risman 1998). These strong communication skills contribute in positive ways to relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and physical intimacy (Schwartz, 2007). For today's young adults, egalitarian divisions of routine labor appear to have no deleterious effects (and, in fact, some positive effects) on their sexual relations compared to couples who enact conventional patterns. Nonetheless, couples do not yet appear ready to completely reverse convention.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Men (n = 487)			Women (n = 487)		
	M	SD	Range	M	SD	Range
Individual Measures						
<i>Sex Measures</i>						
Sexual frequency per month	6.565	6.544	0-50	6.899	6.875	0-50
Very satisfied with sexual frequency	.251			.319		
Quality of sexual relationship scale	7.660	2.777	0-12	7.658	2.921	0-12
<i>Housework Measures</i>						
He does most of the routine housework	.063			.045		
She does most of the routine housework	.560			.692		
Routine housework shared equally	.377			.262		
Hours of housework per weekday	2.191	3.158	0-24	3.811	3.384	0-24
<i>Individual-level Controls</i>						
Hours spent in paid labor per week	36.926	21.229	0-135	15.308	18.500	0-75
Protestant	.370			.395		
Catholic	.182			.205		
Other religion	.216			.236		
No religion	.232			.164		
Religious attendance	4.082	1.905	0-5	3.809	1.970	0-5
Age	37.93	7.524	19-59	34.68	6.199	19-44
Self-reported health	2.516	.985	0-4	2.462	.963	0-4
How often spend time together alone	2.985	1.756	1-6	2.916	1.775	1-6
Number of children less than age 2 in household	.105	.314	0-2	.107	.316	0-2
Number of children age 2 to 5 in household	.572	.729	0-3	.569	.728	0-3
Number of children age 6 to 12 in household	.857	.944	0-5	.860	.946	0-5
Less than High School	.097			.092		
High School	.347			.324		
Some College	.370			.400		
Bachelor's Degree or more	.186			.183		
<i>Individual-level Mediators</i>						
Relationship satisfaction	8.444	1.700	0-10	8.194	1.952	0-10
Satisfaction with division of labor	3.363	.780	0-3	2.940	.946	0-3
Couple-level Measures						
<i>Couple-level Controls</i>						
Currently cohabiting	.108					
Cohabited prior to marriage	.488					
Married directly	.403					
Couples' total income	41,400.48		22,957.16			0-153,000.00
Her share of income	.291		.269			

Table 2 : ANOVA/ χ^2 of Sexual Intimacy by Division of Housework

Sex Measures	Division of Routine Housework			Sig.
	She Does Majority	Shared Equally	He Does Majority	
	<i>Means/proportions</i>			
Sexual Frequency per month	6.77	7.74	5.05	p < .05
Very Satisfied with Sexual Frequency	.29	.30	.16	p < .10
Quality of Sexual Relationship Scale	7.67	7.78	6.73	p < .05

Table 3: Negative Binomial, Logistic, and OLS Regression of Division of Routine Housework on Sexual Frequency and Sexual Satisfaction

	Sexual frequency per month B (se)	Very satisfied with sexual frequency (1 = yes) B (se)	Quality of sexual relationship scale B (se)
Panel 1: Ordinal Measure of Housework			
Male Partners' Share of Routine Housework ^a	-.053 (.047)	-.086 (.118)	-.004 (.142)
Her Hours of Housework per Weekday	.022† (.013)	.111*** (.030)	.038 (.038)
His Hours of Housework per Weekday	.022* (.010)	.031 (.023)	.037 (.036)
Intercept	2.471*** (.329)	-2.126*** (.800)	5.748*** (1.027)
R ²			.158
Pseudo R ²		.091	
Likelihood Ratio χ^2 (df)	131.45 (21)***		
Panel 2: Dummy Variables for Division of Housework			
Division of Routine Housework (ref = Shared Equally)			
She Does Majority of Routine Housework	-.019 (.078)	-.103 (.201)	-.245 (.241)
He Does Majority of Routine Housework	-.302* (.145)	-1.218* (.579)	-.994* (.476)
Her Hours of Housework per Weekday	.024† (.013)	.113*** (.028)	.039 (.037)
His Hours of Housework per Weekday	.019† (.010)	.028 (.024)	.035 (.036)
Intercept	2.384*** (.306)	-2.203** (.774)	5.968*** (.950)
R ²			.164
Pseudo R ²		.097	
Likelihood Ratio χ^2 (df)	139.06 (22)***		

Note: ***p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05; † p < .10; all models include controls for: gender, respondents' age, marital status, his and her hours in paid work per week, total couple income, her share of income, his and her hours of weekly housework, respondents' religion, frequency of religious attendance, respondents' health, amount of time couple spend alone together, number of children under age 2, number of children ages 2 to 5, number of children ages 6 to 12, and respondents' education. ^a *Male Partners' Share of routine housework* measured as mean of respondents response to the question of who does the majority of 5 frequent housework tasks – planning and preparing meals; cleaning up after meals; household cleaning; shopping for groceries, and laundry. Responses to each item ranged from 1 = she does it all to 3 = shared equally to 5 = he does it all.

Table 4: Mediating Effects of Satisfaction with Division of Labor and Relationship Quality for Association of Division of Routine Housework with Sexual Frequency and Satisfaction

	Frequency of sex (# of times last month)			Very satisfied with sexual frequency (1 = yes)			Quality of sexual relationship scale		
	Model 1 B (se)	Model 2 B (se)	Model 3 B (se)	Model 1 B (se)	Model 2 B (se)	Model 3 B (se)	Model 1 B (se)	Model 2 B (se)	Model 3 B (se)
Division of Routine Housework (ref = Shared Equally)									
She Does Majority of Routine Housework	-.019 (.078)	-.002 (.077)	-.006 (.077)	-.103 (.201)	-.027 (.203)	.003 (.205)	-.245 (.241)	-.158 (.233)	-.082 (.198)
He Does Majority of Routine Housework	-.302* (.145)	-.264† (.142)	-.237 (.145)	-1.218* (.579)	-1.091† (.588)	-.967† (.561)	-.994* (.476)	-.743 (.456)	-.634 (.449)
Satisfaction with Division of Labor		.076* (.032)	.033 (.040)		.510*** (.117)	.349** (.118)		.664*** (.105)	.174† (.094)
Relationship Satisfaction			.070* (.033)			.300*** (.077)			.770*** (.056)
Intercept	2.384*** (.306)	2.552*** (.319)	2.109*** (.400)	-2.203** (.774)	-3.239*** (.793)	-5.165*** (1.007)	5.968*** (.950)	3.813 (.975)	-.950 (.989)
R ²							.164	.201	.379
Pseudo R ²				.097	.112	.142			
Likelihood Ratio χ^2 (df)	139.06(22)***	146.21(23)***	149.05(24)***						

Note: ***p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05; † p < .10; all models include controls for: gender, respondents' age, marital status, his and her hours in paid work per week, total couple income, her share of income, his and her hours of weekly housework, respondents' religion, respondents' frequency of religious attendance, respondents' health, amount of time couple spend alone together, number of children under age 2, number of children between age 2 and 5, number of children between age 6 and 12, and respondents' education.

Table 5: Negative Binomial, Logistic, and OLS Regression of Division of Routine Housework on Sexual Frequency and Sexual Satisfaction Interaction by Cohabitation History

	Sexual frequency per month	Very satisfied with sexual frequency (1 = yes)	Quality of sexual relationship scale
	B (se)	OR (se)	B (se)
Division of Routine Housework (ref = Shared Equally)			
She Does Majority of Routine Housework	.150 (.110)	1.340 (.441)	-.388 (.364)
He Does Majority of Routine Housework	-.109 (.232)	.169 (.183)	-.571 (.374)
Cohabitation History (ref = Married Directly)			
Cohabited Prior to Marriage	.198 (.140)	1.388 (.446)	-.570 (.374)
Currently Cohabiting	.424* (.204)	.983 (.432)	-.429 (.509)
Interaction Terms			
She Does Majority of Routine Housework* Cohabited Prior to Marriage	-.312* (.151)	.428* (.169)	.449 (.466)
He Does Majority of Routine Housework* Cohabited Prior to Marriage	-.277 (.335)	1.928 (2.735)	-.100 (1.118)
She Does Majority of Routine Housework*Currently Cohabiting	-.031 (.281)	1.276 (.777)	-.660 (.776)
He Does Majority of Routine Housework*Currently Cohabiting	-.271 (.344)	3.388 (5.113)	-1.762 (1.179)
Intercept	2.288** (.298)	.087*** (.071)	5.733*** (1.016)
R ²			.169
Pseudo R ²		.105	
Likelihood Ratio χ^2 (df)/	149.58 (26)***		

Note: ***p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05; † p < .10; all models include controls for: gender, respondents' age, marital status, his and her hours in paid work per week, total couple income, her share of income, his and her hours of weekly housework, respondents' religion, respondents' frequency of religious attendance, respondents' health, amount of time couple spend alone together, number of children under age 2, number of children between age 2 and 5, number of children between age 6 and 12, and respondents' education.

Table 6: Negative Binomial, Logistic, and OLS Regression of Division of Routine Housework on Sexual Frequency and Sexual Satisfaction Interaction by Gender

	Sexual frequency per month	Very satisfied with sexual frequency (1 = yes)	Quality of sexual relationship scale
	B (se)	OR (se)	B (se)
Division of Routine Housework (ref = Shared Equally)			
She Does Majority of Routine Housework	-.020 (.090)	1.227 (.313)	-.076 (.259)
He Does Majority of Routine Housework	-.130 (.186)	.329 (.251)	-1.435** (.476)
Female (1= yes)	.003 (.077)	2.152** (.594)	.257 (.260)
Interaction Terms			
She Does Majority of Routine Housework*Female	-.003 (.094)	.541† (.173)	-.340 (.307)
He Does Majority of Routine Housework*Female	-.464† (.244)	.790 (.677)	1.147† (.621)
Intercept	2.382*** (.307)	.086** (.070)	5.581*** (1.006)
R ²			.167
Pseudo R ²		.100	
Likelihood Ratio χ^2 (df)	146.07(23)***		

Note: ***p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05; † p < .10; all models include controls for: gender, respondents' age, marital status, his and her hours in paid work per week, total couple income, her share of income, his and her hours of weekly housework, respondents' religion, respondents' frequency of religious attendance, respondents' health, amount of time couple spend alone together, number of children under age 2, number of children between age 2 and 5, number of children between age 6 and 12, and respondents' education.