

**Relative resources and marital instability:
A comparison of eight European countries**

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Abstract

We test the relative resources theory (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Lundberg & Pollak, 1996) by explaining marital satisfaction and thoughts about leaving a romantic relationship with relative earnings, education, and occupational status. We expect that the more resources women have compared to their spouse, the more dissatisfied both women and men would be with the relationship and the more likely they are to think about exit. Using the Generations and Gender Surveys (GGS) [2004-2013], we compare men and women that are in a ‘young’ couple - i.e. couples that were formed only after 1995 - for eight European countries. We also examine whether relationship instability and the effects of relative resources differ across contexts (the degree of gender egalitarianism on the macro level and SES on the meso level). We find that next to relative resources, also absolute resources matter. More absolute resources for the wife go together with more marital satisfaction (for both men and women) and less thoughts about divorce/separation (for women). Apparently, a certain amount of independence needs to be there in order to question the stability of the relationship, especially for women.

Introduction

To what extent are women's relative resources associated with relationship instability?

With the increased divorce rates in Europe the last decades, examination of the causes of divorce and separation have become more important. Whether one evaluates the divorce trend in a positive or negative way, researching this topic is important, both for policymakers and for scholars alike. Knowing the causes of divorce can help policymakers to shape their policies. What would be the social determinants of divorce and separation in nowadays European societies? What are the similarities and differences? We use two alternative measures of the instability of relationships: whether individuals think about breaking up and their marital satisfaction. These subjective measures are correlated with actual divorce (Booth, Johnson, White, & Edwards, 1985) and, more essentially, they are stages in the complex process of divorce (along with e.g. discussing doubts with partner and others, consulting attorneys, separation, filing for divorce, and the actual divorce). When investigating divorce causes it is of utmost importance to examine the onset of divorce. At which point does the relationship start to become unstable?

We expect that having more relative resources (of the wife compared to the husband) goes together with a greater likelihood of thoughts about divorce and more marital dissatisfaction. The reason for this is that the more resources one has compared to the other, the more power one has in the relationship and the better the fall-back position in case the union dissolves. Because in general wives' investments are less transferable outside the union and more relationship-specific, wives have fewer

alternatives outside the union, and therefore less power within the union (England & Kilbourne, 1990).¹

Using the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) [2004-2013], we examine the correlates of thoughts of divorce and marital satisfaction in eight European countries (N=14,605). We also investigate to what extent the relationships between relative resources and marital instability differ across contexts. We will look at both the macro-level (the degree of traditionalism in a country) and the meso-level (SES of the couple). Gender role norms may function as a lens through which couples perceive the fairness of their relationship: their division of housework (Greenstein, 1996) and the emotional support (emotional intimacy of talking about and listening to feelings) that is given and received (England & Kilbourne, 1990). In more traditional societies, the norm of an inequitable relationship between men and women may be more prevalent and in such societies women might be more satisfied with the status quo (and thus with the relationship). We hypothesize that relative resources more often translate into actual bargaining power - which is reflected in exit thoughts - in gender egalitarian contexts than in traditional ones. Therefore we examine two moderations of the relationship between relative resources on the one hand and on the other hand exit thoughts and marital satisfaction: (1) To what extent does the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) – an index measuring a country’s gender egalitarianism – moderate the associations between relative resources and marital instability? And (2) To what extent does Socio-Economic Status (as measured by earnings, education, and occupational status) moderate the association between relative resources and marital instability. Having more bargaining power in a relationship is not the same as using that power within a

¹ For the sake of simplicity, we generally refer to wives, husbands, and spouses not only in the case of marriage but also when referring to partners of cohabiting relationships. Our analyses include both types of partnerships, however. We will also use marital stability and relationship stability interchangeably.

relationship (England & Kilbourne, 1990). This means that when the role of the man is more difficult to change (which is the case in more traditional, patriarchal societies and couples) (Esping-Andersen and Billari, 2015), women use relative resources less often to try and change the household division of labour, whereas they are more likely to use them to (think about) exiting the relationship. Hence, we expect that more relative resources decrease relationship satisfaction, but do not increase exit thoughts in egalitarian societies, whereas in traditional societies relative resources amplify exit thoughts.

This paper advances upon previous work in two ways: First of all, this paper extends previous research in a cross-national way, moderating the associations between relative resources on the one hand and marital satisfaction and exit thoughts on the other by context (gender equality in a country and the SES of couples). Secondly, we will not only consider the relative level but also the absolute level of resources of the spouses. Not controlling for the absolute levels may cause bias in the effects of relative resources (van Berkel, 1998). For instance, it makes a difference if the woman is earning an income of her own (even though she is relying on the support of her spouse in relative terms) compared to a situation in which she earns nothing (Oppenheimer, 1997; Sørensen & McLanahan, 1987). In the first case, the woman's position after separation is still rather independent should a separation occur, whereas in the latter case she would have to rely on other sources of income such as the state, family, or the ex-spouse (Corcoran, 1979; Dewilde & Uunk, 2008; McKeever & Wolfinger, 2001; van Damme, 2010). The same reasoning holds for other types of resources such as education or occupational status. Moreover, it may require a certain amount of independence of the couple in order for bargaining to have an effect.

Previous findings on relationship stability and relative resources

We will make theoretical progress in this paper not only by replicating (mainly US) studies on relative resources and marital instability for eight European countries, but also by trying to give a valid explanation for cross-national and SES differences in the effect of relative resources. So far the relative resources theory has been tested quite frequently on outcomes such as: (1) the division of household labour, both in single country studies (Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000; Presser, 1994) and in cross-national comparisons (Batalova & Cohen, 2002; Bittman, England, Folbre, Sayer, & Matheson, 2003; Diefenbach, 2002; Fuwa, 2004; Knudsen & Waerness, 2008; Ruppanner, 2010b); (2) conflict over the division of housework (Benin & Agostinelli, 1988; Ruppanner, 2010a); (3) perceptions of fairness of the division of housework (Braun, Lewin-Epstein, Stier, & Baumgaertner, 2008; DeMaris & Longmore, 1996; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994; Nordenmark & Nyman, 2003; Ruppanner, 2008).

Research on exit thoughts out of a relationship and relative resources is scarcer, however, and mainly targeted on the US. We only know of four studies that examined the association between relative resources (earnings) and *thoughts about separation or divorce or thoughts that the marriage is in trouble*. Huber and Spitze (1980) studied exit thoughts of spouses in the US at the end of the seventies, but they did not find a significant relationship with wives' relative resources. A more recent study (Bertrand, Kamenica, & Pan, 2013) examined women's relative income and thoughts about the marriage being in trouble. This study shows that women who earn more than their husbands are more likely to think the marriage is in trouble, and their spouses think the same as well. What would be interesting to know is to what extent these findings can be replicated by looking at European countries, using also measures of education and

occupational status, and consider absolute resources as well. Rogers and Amato (2000) earlier on considered marital discord, of which one dimension covered divorce proneness with the ‘marriage is in trouble’ item. Wife’s percentage of income turned out to not have a significant effect on marital discord in general. Finally, Jansen et al. (1998) tried to explain a similar outcome for the Netherlands, together with other outcomes that might indicate an unstable relationship. They considered four groups of determinants: The intensity of search behaviour, the role division in the household, age homogamy, and socialization. But they did not test the relative resources theory.

When it comes to marital satisfaction, again most studies were done in the US. Rogers and Amato (2000) looked at the effect of wife’s percentage of income on marital happiness but found an insignificant effect. Bertrand et al. (2013) on the contrary found that more income for the wife compared to the husband relates to lower marital satisfaction for both spouses.

Context moderation of the influence of relative resources

So far, scholars have demonstrated that GEM can play a moderating role in the relationship between relative resources and the actual division of labor (Knudsen & Waerness, 2008; Ruppanner, 2010b). For instance, Knudsen and Waerness find that the positive relationship between relative resources and a more equitable division of labor is stronger in more gender egalitarian societies (with higher GEM scores). Ruppanner finds that the negative relationship between the husband’s breadwinner status and the proportion of housework he does is less strong in countries with a higher GEM score. Note that some research prior to these studies found no significant cross-level interaction effect between GEM and relative resources on the division of household labour (Fuwa, 2004). To our knowledge there is no evidence yet of a moderation of the

relationship between relative resources and marital instability by the degree of gender equality of the context (e.g. GEM score of a country or SES of a couple).

The relative resources theory and hypotheses on relationship instability

The sociological (Blood & Wolfe, 1960) and economic perspective (Lundberg & Pollak, 1996; Manser & Brown, 1980; McElroy & Horney, 1981) of bargaining theories both predict similar outcomes concerning the consequences of having more resources within the household. Those with the most resources are assumed to be better able to negotiate out of unpleasant tasks, such as domestic work (note that these theories assume that preference/taste for domestic work is low). More specifically, more resources provide a spouse marital power, and this power gives the spouse more ability to exchange for what (s)he prefers. Power is also influenced by a spouses' fall-back position,² i.e. a hypothetical position below which each spouse would not want to go (e.g. a certain amount of earnings, standard of living) because his/her position would deteriorate too much compared to the actual position the spouse currently has while being in the union. Hence, it is the position a spouse would fall back on in case the union dissolves. The more resources a spouse has, the better the fall-back position and the more influence the spouse has in decision-making. Those who are more dependent on the other in the relationship are less able to bargain for a better situation. Because in general wives' investments are less transferable outside the union and more relationship-specific (i.e. most child care and domestic work are especially valuable

² Referred to as 'threat point' in the economic literature.

within a marriage or cohabiting relationship), wives have fewer alternatives out of the union, and therefore less power within the union (England & Kilbourne, 1990). Indeed Lennon and Rosenfield (1994) showed that women who have more resources and have a better position to fall back on outside of the relationship more often view a given division of labour as unfair. This might affect their relationship satisfaction overall. In addition, having more power in the relationship may be reflected in the fact that women with more resources can permit themselves to (think about) leaving the relationship.

Expectations concerning thoughts about breaking up

Women who have more resources can permit themselves to think about leaving the relationship in case bargaining does not give them the preferred outcome. When she has more and more resources compared to her spouse, her alternatives outside the union are higher and therefore her fall-back position is higher. Thinking about leaving the union would therefore more often be an option.

For men, we also expect a relationship between her resources and his thoughts of separation. In couples in which she has more resources than he, the traditional division of labour is violated, which might lead to more conflict, and this in turn makes him think more about leaving the relationship. This is referred to as a cross-partner effect: her relative resources are affecting his exit thoughts (be it via conflict in the relationship).

In addition, absolute levels of resources may matter. Having more resources may mean more 'barriers' to divorce or separate (Boertien & Härkönen, 2014). Couples with more resources usually have also made more investments in the relationship, like a shared house and shared wealth, which makes it more costly to break up. Hence, more resources (in absolute terms) would go together with less thoughts of breaking up. Also,

absolute education has already been found to affect couple's marital stability and the effect of relative education on it (Schwartz & Han, 2014). For instance, higher educated homogamous couples may be more stable than lower educated because they have more resources (and thus they experience less often hardship and stress because of financial difficulties).

On the other hand, one might expect that a couple's absolute resources level is an indication of more independence in general. Having a higher income of their own would increase the fall-back position for women, by giving them more economic independence in case of a break-up. Oppenheimer (1997) already pointed out the importance of including absolute income in models explaining the relationship between relative income and union formation and dissolution. Criticizing Becker's specialization model, she stressed that looking at relative resources is not enough and doesn't provide any information about the actual independence of women in a relationship.

Expectations concerning marital satisfaction

With respect to marital satisfaction, a reference group process may take place (Merton & Sztompka, 1996). Men and women would compare themselves to others when evaluating their situation (and their relationship in particular). Whom these 'others' are determines the level of satisfaction they perceive. Applied to the case of fairness in the intra-household division of labour for instance, women – and women with traditional gender role values in particular – would compare themselves more often to other women. They would not expect a more equal division of labour because their situation is not different from that of the majority of women. Put differently, they do not feel deprived when comparing their situation with those of so many others with an inequitable division of labour (Greenstein, 2009; Major, 1993). More resources raises

individuals' expectations as they start comparing themselves to others who are in similar situations as they are. Hence, their comparison referents change. Because these referents are in more favourable positions, they often have a more fair division of household labour, which might cause women to start wanting a more fair division of household labour as well (Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994). This would then lead to less satisfaction with the relationship.

For men, it might be that there is a relationship between women's relative resources and his marital dissatisfaction via her dissatisfaction. If she is unhappy about the relationship, she might express this, thereby influencing his feelings of satisfaction: a spill-over effect (Pouwels, 2011). Of course, lacking couple data, we cannot test this spill-over effect, but we can observe the outcome of such a spill-over effect. Next to such an indirect effect via the satisfaction of the wife, we may also observe a cross-partner effect: her relative resources are directly influencing his satisfaction. This could especially occur in more gender egalitarian contexts (higher GEM or SES) where the husband would be happier if there is more equity within the relationship (see below).

Whether or not more absolute resources go together with more or less marital satisfaction is unclear. We do not have any expectations about this.

Gender egalitarianism and the influence of relative resources

Can we expect to find different effect sizes of relative resources between countries and SES groups? In line with what England and Kilbourne (1990) already argued some decades ago (there are two main things women would like to change in their marriages: the degree of men's emotional intimacy and the degree of men's participation in housework), Esping-Andersen and Billari (2015) emphasized that certain macro-trends seem very hard to change: The traditional male breadwinner family would continue to

stay for a long time and men would resist to take up ‘women’s work because it would be stigmatizing (Brines, 1994). This would especially apply to inegalitarian contexts. The more inegalitarian norms are present, the more stubborn gender role patterns would be and the less women might be able to use their marital power and bargain a more equal housework division. We therefore expect to find that the effect of women’s relative resources on thoughts about breaking up will be *stronger* in inegalitarian societies than in egalitarian ones, simply because women cannot change the current division of labour by negotiation as men’s behaviour is still inegalitarian. As long as not a certain critical mass within society takes over more gender egalitarian values (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015), relative resources do not translate into marital power and exit would be the only option for women if they would like to change an unequal marital situation. We could thus say that for both egalitarian countries and higher SES (more egalitarian groups within society), the influence of relative resources on exit thoughts is less strong among both men and women than in inegalitarian contexts.

For marital happiness, we use a different reasoning and expect that the influence of her relative resources on her dissatisfaction with her share of domestic work and on her marital dissatisfaction is *weaker* in inegalitarian societies and groups. The more egalitarian the context is, the more both men and women would be happier with their relationships if there is more equity within the relationship. Hence, relative resources are expected to affect marital satisfaction more strongly in egalitarian contexts (those societies with high GEM; those couples with high SES) than in inegalitarian contexts.

Data, method, and operationalization

Data

To investigate to what extent relative resources are associated with relationship instability in different contexts, we use the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS). The first wave of this survey is held in 19 countries. The sample size is 83,409 when selecting the eight countries that had responses on the two dependent variables and relative resources. These countries are Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Georgia, Lithuania, Romania, and Russia. The unit of analysis is the individual within a couple (the respondent is living with a spouse/partner in the same household) (37% of the persons are not in a couple and therefore dropped, which reduces the sample to 52,254). Note that we thus don't have couple data, but only observe one of the two spouses/partners.

Measures

We analyse two outcomes: 1) whether the respondent has thoughts about separation is based on the question 'Over the past 12 months, have you thought about breaking up your relationship?', 'yes' or 'no'; 2) the amount of satisfaction with the relationship, using the following question: 'How satisfied are you with your relationship?' and has answering categories ranging from 0 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied);

Independent variables are three types of wives' resources compared to the spouse: earnings, education, and occupational status. Wives' relative earnings are measured by the earnings of the wife divided by the earnings of the husband. Wives' relative education is measured as the highest reached educational level in 7 ISCED categories of the wife minus that of the husband. For relative occupational status ISCO

codes were converted into ISEI scores and the ISEI of the woman minus that of the man reflects women's relative occupational resources. Occupation was asked for the job in which the spouse spent most of his/her working hours. To be included in the analyses, both spouses needed to be working at the time of interview or have a job before they became inactive or unemployed. We also take the average earnings, average level of education, and average occupational level of the couple into account because the level of resources might bias the effects of relative resources (see introduction).

Further we will take into account several variables that have been demonstrated to be alternative explanations for relative resources or have been proven to be affecting divorce itself: (1) Intensity of search behaviour (age at marriage and premarital cohabitation); (2) role division in the household (husband's share in housework -of routine household tasks (preparing meals, doing the dishes, shopping, and vacuum cleaning)-; husband's share in emotion work -received minus given spouse support (talked to anyone about personal experiences and feelings) for women, given minus received support for men-. (3) We also want to capture some of the socialization processes of the respondent. We do this with two measures: a) the educational level of the mother when the respondent was aged 15. This is a proxy for a more equal division of labour within the household during childhood. Such respondents may thus have more egalitarian norms when it comes to housework and thoughts about divorce. Next to the presence of the feeling of independence, these respondents probably also got to learn to bargain more often as we expect the effect of bargaining to be more present when independence is reassured. b) an index measuring commitment values of the respondent using four items: 1. Marriage is an outdated institution; 2. It is all right for an unmarried couple to live together even if they have no interest in marriage; 3. Marriage is a lifetime relationship and should never be ended; 4. It is all right for a couple with an

unhappy marriage to get a divorce even if they have children. Answering categories were strongly agree, agree, agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree. Item 3 is recoded in order to have higher scores corresponding with high marriage commitment.³

Furthermore we controlled for the number of paid working hours, whether the couple outsources domestic work, the age of the youngest child, and a curvilinear effect of union duration (in months).

The gender empowerment measure (GEM) indicates a country's gender egalitarianism. It is an index constructed by the United Nations from four indicators examining the ability to which women can actively participate in economic and political life and take part in decision-making: (1) the percentage of seats held in parliament by women; (2) the percentage of women being administrators and managers; (3) the percentage of professional and technical workers that are women; (4) the share of earned income by women. Higher scores indicate a more gender egalitarian society (see Table 1). Note that next to the GEM on the macro-level we do not include gender values on the micro-level since this would 'over control' our models, meaning that we won't find a pure effect of relative resources.⁴

[Table 1]

A couple's Socio-Economic Status is constructed by three indicators: earnings, education, and occupational status. Following PISA where SES measures are frequently used, we standardized the three indicators, performed a PCA on these standardized

³ Following Jansen et al. (1998), we also wanted to consider premarital births and age homogamy (age difference of the spouses), but the information of GGS was too scarce (93% and 82% missing of 'young' couples).

⁴ We also considered that including possible mediating variables might be over controlling the model. We refer to variables such as the division of housework and emotion work, as well as socialization proxies like the education of the mother and commitment values. As a sensitivity check we ran models excluding these four variables and found no deviation from the results presented in tables 4 and 5.

variables, and predicted the component scores of the one component solution to be the scores on the newly created SES index of the three standardized indicators.

Analytical approach

Leaving socialization during childhood aside, it seems plausible to assume that spouses' division of labour in household tasks and emotion work as well as the resources division initially are influenced by the context in which they start to form a union. This is the period in which the majority of couples divide their domestic and paid work and possible negotiation processes on the basis of relative resources will start. We therefore use union (we refer to both marriage and cohabitation) formation years rather than the year of interview as the relevant societal context.

We perform separate analyses for men and women (both men and women have been surveyed, but these are *not* couples)⁵, doing an OLS regression with dependent variable 'marital satisfaction' and a logistic regression with dependent variable 'thoughts about separation'. A difficulty is that the two outcomes are associated, but causality between them is hard to assess. As a sensitivity check, we therefore ran seemingly unrelated regression models.⁶ Moreover, we take benefit of the fact that we have multi-level data, running multi-level models which allow us to estimate cross-level interaction effects of GEM with relative resources as well as separate the variation of the dependent variable between country-level and individual-level.

⁵ Note that there can be gender bias in men's and women's reporting of the same variable (Doorten, 2008). We look at both men's and women's reporting of women's perspective on relative resources.

⁶ A disadvantage of this approach is that we cannot perform accurate tests of the cross-level interaction effects of GEM with each of the relative resources. We do account for within-countryyear correlation by correcting the standard errors using the cluster option in STATA, but this only changes the macro-level effects of GEM correctly, not the cross-level effects (for those mostly too large standard errors are estimated). Main effects of GEM are lower when using SUR than when using a Multilevel approach. The interaction effects are more or less similar. These outcomes are available upon request.

Because the GEM is only available from 1995 onwards, we drop all relationships that started before that year. This leaves us with a sample size of 14,605 cases. Even though there are few missings on each variable separately, altogether the sample size is reduced to 10,516 with listwise deletion of all missing cases, except for emotion work. There were so many missings on emotion work that it would have halved the sample size. We therefore used multiple imputation (by using 5 imputations, MI STATA procedure) to fill in the missing values under the assumption that the missingness was not related to the value on each of the missing variables (MAR).⁷ These results are very similar to the results without missing values imputed and are available upon request.

Results

Descriptive Results

On average, most people are very satisfied with their relationship. There is some variation between countries and between men and women, however. Satisfaction among women is highest in Romania (average score on satisfaction is 9.01) and lowest in Russia (score 8.07), while for men Romania scores highest (score 9.22) and Lithuania lowest (score 8.67). In all countries, men are more satisfied than women. In Bulgaria, Romania and Georgia, women thought the least about breaking-up (about 4-5%), whereas in Russia 25% had thoughts about breaking-up. For the men the percentages are 0.7-3.02% and 14%, respectively.

⁷ Excluding emotion work from the analyses did not yield to different results.

Looking at the independent variables we observe that in many countries women on average have more resources relative to their spouses than the other way around (not for earnings, but for education and occupational status). This might have to do with the fact that we are looking at relatively young people. When we select older cohorts women's relative resources reduce. Also note that we only consider working men and women (because for defining status having a job is necessary).⁸

[Table 2]

Trivariate associations: breakdowns by relative and absolute levels of resources

Before looking at the regression analyses, we show the associations between the resources of both men and women and relationship instability. In Table 3, both for women's and men's reports, mean satisfaction and the percentage experiencing thoughts about divorce are presented. In this way, we not only get an idea of the strength of effects of relative resources (off-the-diagonal), but we can also see the strength of the absolute resources effects (on-the-diagonal). Observing the diagonals of the first panel (for *women's reports*), most satisfaction and thoughts about breaking up occur among the highest resources couples (apart from earnings and having thoughts about breaking-up). As for relative resources, most dissatisfied are high educated women in a union with middle educated men or middle educated women with low educated men. Most thoughts about breaking up are present among couples with a high resource woman and a low resource man.

With respect to *men's reports*, men in high educated and occupational status couples have the highest scores on thoughts about divorce. Men in low resources

⁸ Notice the gender bias in reporting. Men report more often that they are higher educated than women.

couples are the most dissatisfied. For earnings there is no positive relationship between resources and thoughts of divorce or marital satisfaction. Off-the-diagonal, we don't see a clear pattern for earnings, but we do see that in couples with a high educated wife and a low educated man, men report more dissatisfaction and thoughts about divorce. Furthermore, low status men that are together with a high status woman are the most dissatisfied and think most about breaking up.

In sum, not only wife's *relative* resources matter, but also increasing *levels* of resources are associated with relationship instability. Most of the time more absolute resources of the couple go together with more satisfaction, but also more thoughts about breaking-up (as we expected). Furthermore, it are mainly the highly resourceful women with lower resources men that report more thoughts about breaking-up (both men's and women's reports). For marital satisfaction, we see a similar pattern. Couples of higher and mid resourceful (educated) women who live together with a low resourceful (educated) partner usually are less satisfied with their relationship than other couples (both men's and women's reports).

[Table 3]

Multivariate models: main effects of resources

In Tables 4 and 5, we estimate multivariate models for each of the two outcomes. We find the following in Table 4: The higher the couple's earnings, the more the men reports to be satisfied with his relationship. The higher her relative education, the lower her marital satisfaction is. In contrast, the higher a couple's mean education, the more satisfied the couple is with their relationship. A higher average occupational status is also related to more marital satisfaction for both men and women. There are no cross-

partner effects on marital satisfaction for men, meaning that her resources do not affect his satisfaction, whichever resources of the wife are considered. Furthermore, in more gender egalitarian societies women are more satisfied with their relationships.

With respect to thoughts about divorce/separation, we find effects of both relative earnings and educational resources, but no influence of relative status on such thoughts.

The more earnings she has, the more she thinks about breaking-up. The more educational resources she has, the more thoughts about breaking-up she has. However, higher educated couples think less about breaking up than lower educated couples.

Finally, women of higher status couples think less about divorce/separation. In addition, there is an influence of the degree of gender egalitarianism of the context. More egalitarian societies have more exit thinkers (both men and women) than traditional societies. There is no relationship between her relative resources and his exit thoughts.

Multivariate models: contextual effects

In Table 5, we show the influence of context moderating the relationship between relative resources and our two outcomes. First of all, we observe that there is no moderation by the degree of egalitarianism of a society on women's marital satisfaction. The same applies to men's satisfaction, except for the effect of her relative educational resources. In traditional societies her resources go together with less marital satisfaction for him [-0.069], while in the most gender egalitarian countries the opposite occurs [0.107]. Also, there are interactions of the context with absolute resources on marital satisfaction: A higher average education and higher average status of the couple are associated with higher marital satisfaction in traditional contexts, whereas the reverse is true in more egalitarian societies.

With regard to thoughts about breaking-up, we find no moderation of the relationship between her relative resources and exit thoughts. We do find moderations of relationships between absolute resources and her exit thoughts. For instance, a couple's average education is negatively related to her thoughts about breaking up in traditional societies, but even more so in egalitarian ones. For men, there are no spill-over or cross-partner effects.

When it comes to a couple's SES, we find no interaction of SES with relative resources, even though we do find a main positive SES effect on marital satisfaction of both men and women. For instance, a one unit increase on the SES index is related to a 0.203 increase in marital satisfaction. Also for thoughts about breaking-up we do not find significant interaction effects, although we observe that women in higher SES couples think less about divorce/separation.

Conclusion and discussion

In this paper, we have examined the relationship between resources and relationship instability. We expected that more relative resources would go together with more power and consequently a higher likelihood to think about divorce (at least in egalitarian societies). Related to that we expected that spouses would be less satisfied with their relationships if the wife had relatively more resources. In this paper we did not only take into account couple's relative resources, but also their absolute levels because absolute levels may distort the effects of relative resources. We looked at earnings, education, and occupational status as resources and scrutinized effects on satisfaction with the relationship and thoughts about divorce.

Our findings are the following. For satisfaction with the relationship, absolute resources matter most (positive effect) (both education and occupational status). Furthermore, the more relative education women have, the less satisfied they are with the relationship. More relative resources (earnings and education) also go together with more thoughts about breaking-up for women, whereas more absolute educational and occupational resources are related to less thoughts about divorce/separation. We find no cross-partner or spill-over effects for men.

In addition, we found some contextual effects: Women in more egalitarian societies are more satisfied with their relationships. And exit thoughts occur more and more the more egalitarian a society is. Higher SES couples are also more satisfied with their relationships. More absolute resources (education and occupational status) have a weaker, more negative effect on marital satisfaction in more gender egalitarian countries according to men's reports. But the positive effect of relative education on men's marital satisfaction is stronger in more egalitarian contexts. Furthermore, women of higher educated couples think more about divorce/separation in traditional societies, probably because they don't have the option to negotiate a better position for themselves within the household due to the persistent traditional behaviour of their spouses (England & Kilbourne, 1990; Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015). Still, one could have expected that more gender egalitarianism would go together with more tolerance of divorce and higher divorce rates (van Damme & Kalmijn, 2014), especially for highly educated couples. Other research on recent macro-level associations between marital stability and gender egalitarianism shows a curvilinear relationship (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015), however. Divorce rates are highest in countries that are in transition from a more traditional society to a more gender egalitarian one.

Looking at subjective indicators of relationship instability has its disadvantages. For instance, the correlation between such subjective indicators and actual divorce is not perfect (Janssen et al., 1998). Many couples don't break up even if they are dissatisfied with their relationship or think about exiting it. They try to solve their problems or problems may just simply disappear. Moreover, alternatives outside of marriage may look not attractive enough. On the other hand, one could argue that there is the problem of selective attrition (still many unstable relations end up in divorce so analysing existing relationships gives an optimistic picture of reality). In any case, we had no other option than to look at these indicators of marital stability as divorce/separation could not be cross-nationally and retrospectively examined using the GGS (many of our independent variables were only observed at the time of interview and not retrospectively). We hope in the future it will be.

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Tables

Table 1. Gender Empowerment Measure scores for eight countries.

	Bulgaria	Russia	Georgia	France	Romania	Belgium	Lithuania	Czech Republic
1995	0.481	0.375	0.335	0.433	0.352	0.479	0.451	0.473
1996	0.486	0.385	0.340	0.437	0.368	0.580	0.460	0.486
1997	0.487	0.395	0.345	0.452	0.381	0.591	0.470	0.497
1998	0.462	0.405	0.350	0.489	0.402	0.600	0.479	0.511
1999	0.457	0.415	0.355	0.499	0.400	0.610	0.517	0.524
2000	0.453	0.426	0.360	0.506	0.405	0.725	0.531	0.537
2001	0.446	0.434	0.365	0.517	0.449	0.692	0.474	0.546
2002	0.439	0.450	0.370	0.535	0.450	0.706	0.483	0.560
2003	0.431	0.440	0.381	0.566	0.460	0.695	0.499	0.579
2004	0.424	0.467	0.387	0.556	0.465	0.808	0.508	0.586
2005	0.604	0.477	0.416	0.582	0.488	0.828	0.614	0.595
2006	0.595		0.407			0.855	0.635	0.615
2007/8	0.606			0.718		0.850	0.669	0.627
2009	0.613			0.779		0.874	0.628	0.664

Since 2010 the GEM is not available anymore

Table 2. Descriptives of dependent and main independent variables (women or men's reports). Percentages and means (standard deviations in brackets); range

		Bulgaria	Russia	Georgia	France	Romania	Belgium	Lithuania	Czech Republic
<i>Dependent variables</i>									
Marital satisfaction									
	Women	8.79 (1.64)	8.07 (2.17)	8.49 (1.76)	8.57 (1.32)	9.01 (1.14)	8.72 (1.27)	8.26 (1.61)	8.65 (1.72)
		0 - 10	0 - 10	0 - 10	0 - 10	1 - 10	1 - 10	1 - 10	1 - 10
	Men	9.08 (1.32)	8.87 (1.59)	9.06 (1.33)	8.77 (1.21)	9.22 (1.02)	8.94 (1.20)	8.67 (1.30)	8.80 (1.59)
		4 - 10	1 - 10	0 - 10	3 - 10	1 - 10	0 - 10	1 - 10	1 - 10
Having thought about breaking-up									
	Women	4.58	24.5	4.61	18.9	4.22	13.5	20.1	12.7
	Men	0.70	14.1	3.02	11.5	1.73	8.97	12.3	9.50
<i>Relative resources</i>									
Relative earnings									
	Women	-32 (141)	-87 (199)	-66 (160)	-336 (1004)	-48 (142)	-138 (936)	-84 (294)	-120 (267)
		-1101 - 2147	-2843 - 853	-1753 - 351	-5000 - 3300	-1474 - 546	-5000 - 3000	-3472 - 2314	-1670 - 568
	Men	-48 (127)	-73 (151)	-88 (259)	-609 (1117)	-68 (217)	-419 (956)	-125 (278)	-151 (248)
		-1616 - 230	-2133 - 324	-5000 - 482	-5000 - 3521	-2457 - 2457	-5000 - 3500	-1851 - 2025	-1302 - 1086
Average earnings partners									
	Women	88 (85)	112 (132)	49.9 (90)	1241 (732)	124 (118)	1054 (749)	191 (210)	245 (243)
		0 - 1074	0 - 2070	0 - 955	0 - 5000	0 - 1507	0 - 5000	0 - 1736	0 - 1954
	Men	79 (79)	99 (107)	59 (135)	1355 (775)	132 (157)	1157 (813)	212 (225)	269 (212)
		0 - 880	0 - 1494	0 - 2500	0 - 5000	0 - 1982	0 - 5000	0 - 1592	0 - 1010
Relative education									
	Women	0.27 (1.03)	0.10 (1.13)	0.01 (1.07)	0.17 (1.84)	-0.07 (0.86)	0.23 (1.34)	0.22 (1.09)	0.02 (1.11)
		-3 - 3	-3 - 3	-5 - 3	-5 - 5	-3 - 3	-5 - 4	-3 - 4	-4 - 4
	Men	0.25 (0.97)	0.49 (1.14)	-0.06 (1.07)	-0.07 (1.86)	-0.07 (0.81)	0.16 (1.32)	0.08 (1.04)	-0.12 (1.15)
		-3 - 3	-3 - 3	-3 - 4	-5 - 5	-3 - 3	-5 - 4	-2 - 4	-4 - 3
Average educational level partners									
	Women	3.44 (1.01)	4.12 (0.79)	3.82 (0.93)	3.95 (1.31)	3.25 (0.94)	3.78 (1.16)	3.71 (0.87)	3.34 (0.90)
		0 - 5.5	1.5 - 5.5	0 - 6	0 - 6	0.5 - 6	0 - 6	1.5 - 6	2 - 6
	Men	3.26 (0.94)	4.13 (0.77)	3.78 (0.93)	3.91 (1.30)	3.20 (1.00)	3.76 (1.16)	3.65 (0.92)	3.34 (0.91)
		0 - 5.5	2 - 5.5	0 - 5.5	0 - 6	0 - 6	0 - 5.5	0 - 5.5	2 - 6
Relative occupational status									
	Women	3.00 (15.6)	6.08 (18.4)	6.40 (16.7)	3.08 (15.3) ^a	2.63 (13.5) ^a	3.28 (17.2) ^a	5.01 (17.8)	2.55 (15.9)

		-66 – 50	-72 – 69	-56 – 53	-46 - 55	-44 - 53	-45 - 57	-43 - 53	-69 - 53
	Men	5.04 (15.7)	6.77 (18.9)	6.05 (17.8)	1.75 (15.9) ^a	3.20 (13.1) ^a	2.46 (17.4) ^a	2.89 (17.3)	-0.24 (15.4)
		-50 – 67	-59 – 61	-47 – 59	-46 - 49	-43 - 48	-55 – 55	-56 - 59	-57 - 41
Average occupational status partners									
	Women	44.1 (11.4)	44.3 (12.2)	42.9 (11.7)	46.2 (11.8) ^a	41.4 (13.4) ^a	48.6 (12.6) ^a	44.4 (12.9)	43.9 (11.2)
		16 – 88	16 – 88	16 – 88	23 - 80	16 - 80	23 - 80	16 - 80	19 - 88
	Men	42.9 (9.83)	44.0 (12.2)	43.2 (12.3)	47.4 (12.1) ^a	41.0 (12.3) ^a	48.8 (12.2) ^a	45.3 (13.3)	43.7 (10.6)
		16 – 85	16 – 88	19 – 87	23 - 80	16 - 80	24 - 80	16 - 88	20 - 85
N									
	Women	834	652	722	636	624	868	580	574
	Men	565	518	737	410	758	739	677	533

^a For France, Romania, and Belgium, only the first two digits of the ISCO codes are asked for.

Table 3. Trivariate associations between both spouses' level of resources and each outcome.

		Satisfaction with relationship (mean)			Having thought about breaking-up (%)		
<i>Women's report</i>		Men			Men		
Earnings ^a		Low	Middle	High	Low	Middle	High
Women	Low	8.25	8.40	8.52	10	7.1	7.6
	Middle	7.76	8.35	8.48	15	8.6	12
	High	8.10	8.42	8.43	20	9.5	11
<i>Education^b</i>							
Women	Low	8.31	8.45	8.17	5.1	6.3	11
	Middle	8.12	8.40	8.34	10	8.3	13
	High	8.28	8.16	8.49	16	13	10
<i>Occupational status^c</i>							
Women	Low	8.13	8.24	8.21	9.4	11	13
	Middle	8.22	8.42	8.53	12	10	10
	High	8.05	8.24	8.44	14	13	12
<i>Men's report</i>							
Earnings ^a		Low	Middle	High	Low	Middle	High
Women	Low	8.67	8.75	8.73	6.9	5.8	8.7
	Middle	8.67	8.87	8.72	4.8	4.3	7.3
	High	8.85	8.85	8.74	9.2	6.8	7.5
<i>Education^b</i>							
Women	Low	8.72	8.87	8.71	2.9	3.0	4.6
	Middle	8.72	8.85	8.80	5.1	5.1	5.2
	High	8.64	8.70	8.88	8.2	8.3	7.8
<i>Occupational status^c</i>							
Women	Low	8.65	8.71	8.64	4.8	6.5	6.2
	Middle	8.72	8.88	8.82	6.0	5.3	7.2
	High	8.57	8.70	8.84	9.4	8.8	7.5

^a Low earnings is lower tercile, middle earnings is middle tercile, high earnings is highest tercile.

^b Low educated is ISCED 1-2, middle educated is ISCED 3-4, high educated is ISCED 5-6.

^c Low status is ISEI 10-30, middle status is ISEI 31-49, high status is ISEI 50-90.

Table 4a. Multilevel regression of marital satisfaction (women's and men's reports).

	Marital satisfaction					
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Relative earnings	-0.000	0.000				
Mean earnings	0.000	0.000*				
Relative education			-0.040*	-0.004		
Mean education			0.135***	0.091***		
Relative occupational status					-0.002	-0.001
Mean occupational status					0.010***	0.005**
His share of housework tasks	0.060***	-0.001	0.055***	-0.003	0.054***	-0.002
His share of emotion work	0.014	-0.009	0.016	-0.009	0.015	-0.009
Age at union formation	-0.011***	-0.001	-0.013***	-0.002	-0.013***	-0.001
Union duration	-0.003*	-0.002	-0.003*	-0.002	-0.003*	-0.002
Union duration ²	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Premarital cohabitation	-0.023	-0.097*	-0.014	-0.077*	-0.009	-0.081*
Education of mother when age 15	0.031*	0.053***	-0.010	0.024	0.002	0.038**
Commitment values	0.263***	0.210***	0.259***	0.206***	0.265***	0.209***
Number of working hours	-0.002	-0.003*	-0.000	-0.003	-0.001	-0.004*
Outsourcing	-0.025	0.027	-0.038	0.024	-0.042	0.025
Children under 6 years	0.014	-0.015	0.017	-0.016	0.019	-0.010
Children 7-17 years	-0.156**	-0.104*	-0.135**	-0.095*	-0.127**	-0.094*
GEM	0.677*	-0.287	0.843**	-0.117	0.688*	-0.164
Constant	7.775***	8.524***	7.914***	8.617***	7.913***	8.597***
Variance countryyear level	.27 ²	.16 ²	.29 ²	.17 ²	.27 ²	.17 ²
Variance individual level	1.60 ²	1.34 ²	1.60 ²	1.34 ²	1.60 ²	1.34 ²
Residual intra-class correlation coefficient	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02
N	6448	5775	6448	5775	6444	5766

Table 4b. Multilevel logistic regression of thoughts about breaking up (women's and men's reports).

	Having thought about breaking-up					
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Relative earnings	0.000***	-0.000				
Mean earnings	0.000	-0.000				
Relative education			0.104***	0.037		
Mean education			-0.144***	0.007		
Relative occupational status					0.003	0.003
Mean occupational status					-0.011**	0.003
His share of housework tasks	-0.036**	0.048*	-0.029*	0.044*	-0.026*	0.043*
His share of emotion work	-0.046*	0.143**	-0.050*	0.145**	-0.049*	0.145**
Age at union formation	0.007	-0.007	0.009*	-0.007	0.009*	-0.007
Union duration	0.006	0.007	0.006	0.006	0.006	0.006
Union duration^2	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000
Premarital cohabitation	0.448***	0.555***	0.461***	0.551***	0.437***	0.555***
Education of mother when age 15	0.076**	0.053	0.119***	0.050	0.107***	0.044
Commitment values	-0.421***	-0.312***	-0.410***	-0.305***	-0.421***	-0.310***
Number of working hours	-0.004	0.010*	-0.005*	0.011*	-0.005*	0.011*
Outsourcing	-0.051	0.329**	-0.015	0.313*	-0.014	0.310*
Children under 6 years	-0.350***	-0.311**	-0.363***	-0.306**	-0.367***	-0.313**
Children 7-17 years	0.313***	0.199	0.285**	0.209	0.273**	0.206
GEM	1.142	2.344**	1.201*	1.927*	1.393*	1.910*
Constant	-1.208**	-3.343***	-1.407***	-3.368***	-1.358***	-3.348***
Variance countryyear level	.64	.74	.65	.74	.63	.74
Variance individual level	3.29	3.29	3.29	3.29	3.29	3.29
Residual intra-class correlation coefficient						
N	6377	5775	6371	5772	6374	5572

Table 5a. Multilevel regression of marital satisfaction (women's and men's reports). Interactions of relative resources*GEM and relative resources*SES.

	M1		M2		M3		M4		M5		M6	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Relative earnings	-0.000	0.000					-0.000*	0.000				
Mean earnings	0.000	0.000					-0.000***	-0.000*				
Relative education			-0.044*	-0.010					-0.045*	-0.010		
Mean education			0.139***	0.093***					0.092**	0.068*		
Relative occupational status					-0.002	-0.001					-0.003*	-0.002
Mean occupational status					0.010***	0.005**					0.005*	0.000
GEM	0.770*	-0.347	0.911**	-0.059	0.693*	-0.052						
Relative earnings*GEM	0.000	0.000										
Mean earnings*GEM	-0.000	0.000										
Relative education*GEM			0.157	0.328*								
Mean education*GEM			-0.220	-0.283*								
Relative occupational status*GEM					0.002	-0.010						
Mean occupational status*GEM					-0.002	-0.024*						
SES							0.203***	0.112***	0.061*	0.030	0.072**	0.070**
Relative earnings*SES							0.000	-0.000				
Relative education*SES									0.008	0.010		
Relative occupational status*SES											0.001	0.001
Variance countryyear level	.27	.16	.29	.18	.27	.17	.28	.17	.29	.17	.27	.17
Variance individual level	1.60	1.34	1.60	1.34	1.60	1.34	1.60	1.34	1.60	1.34	1.60	1.34
Residual intra-class correlation coefficient												
N	6448	5775	6448	5775	6444	5766	6444	5766	6444	5766	6444	5766

Table 5b. Multilevel logistic regression of thoughts about breaking up (women's and men's reports). Interactions of relative resources*GEM and relative resources*SES.

	M1		M2		M3		M4		M5		M6	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Relative earnings	0.000**	-0.000					0.000***	-0.000				
Mean earnings	0.000	-0.000					0.000***	-0.000				
Relative education			0.100**	0.057					0.080*	0.042		
Mean education			-0.120**	0.020					-0.117*	0.048		
Relative occupational status					0.003	0.003					0.002	0.003
Mean occupational status					-0.010**	0.003					-0.008	0.009
GEM	1.223	2.249**	1.405*	2.144**	1.505*	1.918*						
Relative earnings*GEM	-0.000	-0.000										
Mean earnings*GEM	-0.000	0.000										
Relative education*GEM			0.129	-0.471								
Mean education*GEM			-0.748*	-0.367								
Relative occupational status*GEM					0.005	0.023						
Mean occupational status*GEM					-0.039	-0.013						
SES							-0.233***	0.050	-0.043	-0.056	-0.043	-0.099
Relative earnings*SES							-0.000	-0.000				
Relative education*SES									0.034	-0.007		
Relative occupational status*SES											0.002	-0.000
Variance countryyear level	.64	.74	.65	.73	.63	.74	.65	.74	.66	.73	.64	.75
Variance individual level	3.29	3.29	3.29	3.29	3.29	3.29	3.29	3.29	3.29	3.29	3.29	3.29
Residual intra-class correlation coefficient												
N	6377	5575	6371	5572	6374	5572	6368	5570	6368	5570	6368	5570