



Political economy of family life: couple's earnings, welfare regime and union dissolution[☆]



Amit Kaplan^{a, *}, Haya Stier^b

^a Department of Government and Society, Tel Aviv-Yaffo Academic College, Israel

^b Department of Labor Studies, Department of Sociology, Tel Aviv University, Israel

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 14 July 2015

Received in revised form 21 April 2016

Accepted 6 June 2016

Available online 9 June 2016

Keywords:

Union dissolution

Welfare regime

Relative earnings

Earning dependency

Economic independence

Couple relations

ABSTRACT

This study examines how institutional settings moderate the relation of couples' relative and absolute earnings to the likelihood of union dissolution. Based on ECHP data, it covers 12 countries in four welfare regimes. The relationship between a couple's economic dependence and the likelihood of union dissolution were found to differ across regimes. With regard to relative earnings, equality in earnings lowered the risk of separation only in regimes characterized by a high degree of defamilialization, through either the state or the market. As for absolute earnings, women's and men's earnings were significantly related to the risk of union dissolution only in regimes where state defamilialization is low.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

This study examines how institutional settings moderate the relation of couples' relative and absolute earnings to the likelihood of union dissolution. The transformation of family behavior in the second half of the 20th century, especially the increase in divorce in all industrial countries, has been at the center of much scholarly work in recent years (Amato, 2010). In an attempt to identify the social mechanisms associated with greater marital instability, theoretical and empirical attention has concentrated on the concurrent changes in the gendered division of labor with the massive entry of women into the labor market (Blossfeld and Muller, 2002; Cooke et al., 2013; Kalmijn et al., 2007; Oppenheimer, 1997; Rogers, 2004).

Various theoretical approaches offer explanations for the association of women's economic power with marital stability. Economic theory (Becker, 1981) sees the eradication of the specialized division of labor between home and market work as a destabilizing mechanism. Since women most often do the care work, their economic independence (deriving from market work) is perceived as harmful to marriage (Blossfeld and Muller, 2002; Chan and Halpin, 2003; Kalmijn et al., 2007). Feminist theories also see the economic independence of women as increasing the risk of divorce, but from a different angle: it allows women to end unhappy marriages (Hobson, 1990; Walby, 1990). Others, however, suggest that women's employment and spouses' equality in resources reinforce marriage stability by increasing their economic interdependence and by contributing to overall family wellbeing (Cooke and Gash, 2010; Oppenheimer, 1997).

[☆] The research was supported by ISF grant no. 1005/06 and by IFT grant no. 27/44.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: amitka@012.net.il (A. Kaplan).

Numerous studies have examined the relation of women's employment to their economic resources and marital instability (e.g., [Kalmijn et al., 2007](#); [Nock, 2001](#); [Rogers, 2004](#); [Sayer and Bianchi, 2000](#); [Weisshaar, 2014](#)). Findings are generally mixed: a detrimental effect of women's economic activity and resources on marriage stability was found, along with an opposite or non-linear relation (for a review, see [Amato, 2010](#); [Cooke et al., 2013](#); [Kalmijn et al., 2007](#); [Sayer and Bianchi, 2000](#)). The rich body of literature furnishes no consistent support for either theoretical approach.

Our study suggests that these inconsistencies partly result from a heavy emphasis on the market as the principal venue for achieving economic independence; less attention has been paid to other institutional contexts, specifically the state and the general culture, as moderating the association between economic resources (especially women's) and marital outcomes. We contend that family relationships, as well as the gendered division of labor, are embedded in institutional and gender arrangements, which in turn shape the relation between men's and women's economic resources and union dissolution. More specifically, in countries which diverge in their production and allocation of social welfare ([Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999, 2015](#)) and in their "gendered institutional context" and outcomes ([Mandel, 2009](#)), the relation between women's earnings and the marital bond is affected differently. We assume that welfare regimes, through their policies and arrangements, can determine how far the individual's wellbeing depends on the family (or on private arrangements). Since welfare regimes also vary in their gender ideologies ([Orloff, 2001](#); [Mandel, 2009](#)), they also set the norms of family behaviors and the patterns of partners' mutual economic dependence that are considered "legitimate." Hence, our theoretical model rests on the assumption that "private-familial" relations cannot be separated from "social" relations, but rather should be seen as an integral part of them. We assume that the individual's behavior and institutional arrangements respond reciprocally to each other over time ([Pfau-Effinger, 2004](#)).

Recently, several studies have focused on the institutional level in general, and on the role of the state in particular, in shaping the effect of economic resources on the likelihood of divorce ([Blossfeld and Muller, 2002](#); [Cooke, 2006](#); [Cooke and Gash, 2010](#); [Cooke et al., 2013](#); [Harkonen and Dronkers, 2006](#); [Van Damme and Kalmijn, 2014](#)). However, none of these comparative studies have focused on how the institutional context affects the relation of the couple's income interdependence to the stability of their union.

Our study contributes to the existing literature in three main ways. Firstly, following the studies mentioned above that emphasize the institutional context, we provide a theoretical model that demonstrates how economic dependency impacts union dissolution under different types of welfare regimes. Secondly, we test contextual effects (captured by the effect of the regime typology) on family behavior. Prior studies used typologies to test contextual differences in divorce patterns, their consequences, and their relation to women's employment (e.g., [Andreeß et al., 2006](#); [Cooke et al., 2013](#); [Blossfeld and Muller, 2002](#)), but the effect of couple's earnings on union dissolution and its relation to welfare regime have not been examined directly. Lastly, while numerous studies focus on women's labor force participation as the main indicator of their economic role, we concentrate on the effect of the couple's relative and absolute earnings on union dissolution in different institutional contexts. Theoretically, relative earnings are important since they best capture the notion of economic dependence in a relationship, thereby furnishing a direct test of the various theoretical arguments explaining the relation between women's and men's economic power and union dissolution. A look at income resources also allows us to capture the dual-earner families' heterogeneity in economic relations. Our aim then is to examine how the couple's economic dependence relates to the likelihood of union dissolution, and whether the effect varies across different welfare regimes.

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. Economic resources and divorce

Women's economic (in)dependence in marriage is considered important for explaining their social and political standing in general and their family behavior in particular ([Lister, 1997](#); [Hobson, 1990](#); [Huber et al., 2009](#)). The rise in divorce in most Western countries, concomitant with the rise in women's labor force participation, has drawn attention to the role of women's economic independence in weakening, or conversely strengthening, their marriage ([Oppenheimer, 1997](#)). Several theories attempt to explain the complex relation of women's access to independent economic resources, acquired through market activity, to family behaviors.

The New Home Economics ([Becker, 1981](#)) postulates that a major gain from marriage is the specialized division of labor, where one spouse (usually the woman) specializes in housework and care work and the other (usually the man) specializes in market work. This gendered specialization is based on the comparative advantage of each, which is further enhanced by socialization, parental investments, the gender pay gap and biology. This specialization benefits the household as a unit: it leads to the partners' mutual dependence, and hence contributes to the stability of the relationship. Divorce is more likely to take place when specialization has ceased to dominate intra-family arrangements, and a major indicator for specialization is each partner's relative earnings. In Becker's words, "The gain from marriage is reduced by a rise in the earnings and labor force participation of women and by the fall in fertility because a sexual division of labor becomes less advantageous. And divorce is more attractive when the gain to marriage is reduced" (1981: 248). From an economic viewpoint, when both participate in paid employment, and even more when they contribute equally to the family's income, the marriage is more likely to dissolve.

While Becker assumes that all family members pool their resources in an effort to maximize the utility of the family, others (e.g., [Hobson, 1990](#); [Sayer and Bianchi, 2000](#)) emphasize gender power relations between spouses and see women's access to money of their own as fostering the dissolution of unhappy marriages. Women's economic dependence reflects their

disadvantaged position in the labor market and in the family. As [Hobson \(1990\)](#) argues, economically dependent women have a weaker “voice” in marriage and fewer opportunities to “exit” it than those who have economic resources of their own.

The division of labor is not only an economic phenomenon, but also a cultural one ([Crompton, 1999: 204](#)). Therefore, in addition to the material relation between spouses, feminists emphasize forms of “gender relations that regulate symbolic displays of masculine or feminine accountability” ([Brines, 1994: 654](#)). According to the “gender display” approach ([Brines, 1994; West and Zimmerman, 1987](#)), husbands and wives “do” gender as they exchange resources, so when a couple’s income dependence violates normative gender expectations, they are at greater risk of divorce. By this reasoning, women’s economic dependence increases the risk of divorce mainly when they become the main providers for the family because they threaten men’s traditional role as providers ([Blossfeld and Muller, 2002](#)).

Theoretical approaches that focus on women’s economic independence, commonly known as the *independence hypothesis*, have been criticized for adopting a traditional model of the gendered division of labor ([Cooke, 2004](#)). An alternative argument is raised by [Oppenheimer \(1997\)](#), which [Cooke and Gash \(2010\)](#) termed the *flexibility hypothesis*. Oppenheimer argues that the gendered (or specialized) division of labor in contemporary capitalist societies destabilizes the marriage because the family is economically stronger when both partners contribute to its wellbeing. The blurring of gender roles adds to spouses’ interdependence through their earnings, because together they achieve greater welfare than each could separately. Thus equal earnings of spouses strengthen the relationship, as this condition increases each partner’s dependence on the other’s resources.

The aforementioned theories lead to two different conceptualizations of women’s and men’s economic (in)dependence: the relative conceptualization, which emphasizes the importance of the couple’s relative contribution to the family, and the absolute conceptualization, which focuses on the spouses’ actual economic resources as the important factor that motivates their familial behavior. Relative earnings represent only one aspect of women’s economic independence, which assumes that there are gains in marriage as long as men provide for the family more than women ([Sayer and Bianchi, 2000](#)). As [Oppenheimer \(1997\)](#) argues, women’s absolute level of earnings is another important aspect of their gains from marriage. Oppenheimer in fact suggests that the relative earnings measure is not easy to interpret, since it may reflect women’s as well as men’s position in the labor market. Women with high earnings may be able to establish a separate independent household, but women with higher relative earnings than their partners may still have insufficient means to exit the marriage, intensifying the partners’ interdependence. Since the effect of relative earnings may differ from (or even contradict) that of absolute earnings, both must be taken into account.

Empirical evidence on the relation of women’s (and men’s) employment to divorce is inconclusive ([Amato, 2010; Blossfeld and Muller, 2002; Kalmijn et al., 2007; Sayer and Bianchi, 2000; Weisshaar, 2014](#)). Some studies found that the risk of separation was higher when women outearned their spouses or had high earnings ([Chan and Halpin, 2003; Jalovaara, 2003; Kalmijn et al., 2007](#)). Some found a non-linear (and inconsistent) relationship pattern: for example, [Ono \(1998\)](#) found a lower risk of divorce in couples with equal earnings, while [Nock \(2001\)](#) and [Rogers \(2004\)](#) found a reverse pattern, where equal-earner couples had a higher risk of separation. Other studies found that the relation of women’s earnings to risk of separation depended on other factors, such as marital satisfaction ([Sayer and Bianchi, 2000](#)), individuals’ gender role attitudes and cultural values ([Kalmijn et al., 2004; Oláh and Gähler, 2014; Sayer and Bianchi, 2000](#)), race ([Teachman, 2010](#)), and type of union ([Kalmijn et al., 2007; Weisshaar, 2014](#)).

Most studies and theoretical arguments concerning the topic at hand pertain to US society, and hence heavily emphasize the market as a main venue for achieving economic independence. Recent research in a variety of European countries provides evidence of the role of the state and its institutions in shaping the effect of economic resources on family behavior (e.g., [Blossfeld and Muller, 2002; Chan and Halpin, 2003; Cooke, 2004, 2006; Cooke and Gash, 2010; Cooke et al., 2013; De Graaf and Kalmijn, 2006; Kalmijn et al., 2007; Van Damme and Kalmijn, 2014](#)). However, only a few studies took a comparative perspective, and only [Harkonen and Dronkers \(2006\)](#) and [Van Damme and Kalmijn \(2014\)](#) tested directly the effect of country characteristics on the relation of women’s education to the risk of union dissolution. In the current research we add to this knowledge by focusing on how institutional arrangements mediate the relations between couples’ earnings dependence and the stability of their relationship.

2.2. Institutional arrangements of economic dependence

Researchers of the family, as well as of social stratification and gender inequality, point to the importance of the institutional context within which individuals make their work and family decisions ([Blossfeld and Muller, 2002; Esping-Andersen, 2015; Gornick and Meyers, 2003; Fuwa and Cohen, 2006; Hampden-Thompson, 2013; Iversen et al., 2005; Mandel, 2009; Stier et al., 2001](#)). This growing interest has resulted in various typologies that group countries on the basis of similarities and differences in the institutional context of the work–family nexus. In the current research we use the pre-dominant approach of [Esping-Andersen \(1990, 1999; 2015\)](#), who clusters capitalist countries into three major regimes on the basis of welfare state characteristics: the liberal, social-democratic and conservative regimes.

This approach has been criticized by feminists for neglecting gender-related criteria of welfare (such as mode of care-giving) and the gendered nature of welfare states and their ideological underpinnings. Accordingly, critics argue that the triple typology is insensitive to variations among welfare regimes with respect to gender ideology or welfare state policies that might be relevant to women and families in general and women’s economic independence in particular (e.g., [Daly, 1994; Gornick and Meyers, 2003; Hobson, 1994; Lister, 1997; Orloff, 1993, 2001; Sainsbury, 1999](#)). Following these critiques, in his

later work (1999) Esping-Andersen added *defamilialization* as an important character that distinguishes welfare regimes. It denotes provision of services outside the family, by either state or market. A regime with a high degree of defamilialization decreases women's economic dependency by increasing their employment (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Lister, 1997; Orloff, 2001). Familialism, by contrast, denotes that service provision is mainly relegated to families. A high degree of familialism increases women's economic dependence on family ties and contributes to a lower level of women's employment (Orloff, 2001). Including defamilialization in the analysis yielded recognition of the southern European countries as a distinct – familialistic – regime (Esping-Andersen, 1999), which provides security for workers, as in the conservative regime, but delegates primary responsibility for welfare and for care work to the family (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Orloff, 2001). In this context divorced and unmarried mothers depend mostly on the labor market and kin support, and are generally invisible to the state (Lewis and Hobson, 1997).

In the current research we use the four-regime typology, which combines Esping-Andersen's power resource theory with the feminist responses to it, to frame theoretical expectations regarding the effect of the couple's economic dependency on union dissolution. The purpose of the current study is to link welfare state configurations to the relations between labor market earnings and family behavior (rather than validating welfare state typologies). Since welfare state strategies affect patterns of women's earnings dependency (Bianchi et al., 1999; Huber et al., 2009; Mandel, 2009), in each institutional context a different meaning of women's economic independence emerges. For example, high support for single-parent families may reduce the costs of divorce even for women who have only limited access to market resources, rendering them less dependent on their own earnings when deciding to end a relationship (see also Huber et al., 2009). In familialistic countries, with a normative traditional perception of gender roles, any deviation from a clear-cut gendered division of labor may be penalized normatively and lead to separation. Hence account must be taken of the specific contextual arrangements that produce economic dependence for an understanding of the complex relation of economic dependence to union dissolution on the micro level.

2.3. Micro-level hypotheses across welfare regimes

How might the context described above mediate the basic relation of women's and men's economic (in)dependence to risk of union dissolution? Our main theoretical assertion is that it varies, depending on the specific institutional regime. Next we detail our expectations for the direction and magnitudes of the relation between relative and absolute earnings and the risk of relationship dissolution in each regime.

The southern regime is characterized by a low degree of state defamilialization (Esping-Andersen, 1999), as the state provides divorced women with minimal support (Lewis and Hobson, 1997). Hence, the relation of labor market resources to familial behavior is expected to be strong. As for the pattern of the relations, since the basic ideology is the man as breadwinner (Lewis and Hobson, 1997; Orloff, 2001), we expect the independence hypothesis to dominate: specialized couples, in which the man is the main provider, will have the greatest stability. Because of this regime's familialistic character – that is, these are also countries with a traditional gender ideology – we further expect a high likelihood of union dissolution when women outearn their partners. Accordingly,

H1. *The risk of union dissolution in the southern regime will be lowest when men are the main providers and highest when women earn more. Equal earners will fall in between.*

The conservative regime is characterized by a high degree of de commodification for breadwinners (Esping-Andersen, 1999) combined with a gendered division of labor with rights and protection for mothers (Mandel, 2009). It is assumed that mothers care for their children; therefore the state compensates them for their care work (Orloff, 2001). This may lead to a high risk of union dissolution when neither men nor women fulfill their expected gender roles. Hence we expect a higher risk of separation when the woman earns more than the man. However, since the state provides support for the family when the market fails to do so, and single mothers are supported at least until their children reach school age (Orloff, 2001) – i.e., there is a higher degree of state defamilialization than in the southern regime – women can exit unhappy unions even if they are not entirely independent economically. Accordingly,

H2. *In the conservative regime, when women outearn men, the risk of union dissolution will be higher than under all other arrangements.*

A different logic applies to the social-democratic regime, characterized by a high degree of both de commodification and defamilialization through state policies (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Orloff, 2001). In such countries, the state actively reduces the interdependence of market and family life. The promotion of women's economic independence through employment implies that women's assumption of the role of main provider does not necessarily harm the couple's stability. Hence we do not expect an effect of partners' economic arrangements on the risk of union dissolution. However, if such an effect is found, we expect it to follow the gender-neutral flexibility hypothesis:

H3. *In the social-democratic regime couples with different relative earning compositions will not differ in the risk of union dissolution.*

Lastly, in the liberal regime, we expect the flexibility hypothesis to dominate. Since state support is low and only a marginal and highly select minority is eligible for it (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999), couples' interdependence is achieved

through their market work. The consequences of family behaviors such as divorce are left to the market (Sigle-Rushton, 2009). Because defamilialization through the market promotes women's employment, women, especially the highly qualified, have access to lucrative jobs (Mandel, 2009). They therefore stand a good chance of becoming economically independent (Orloff, 2001). These are women who, according to Oppenheimer (1997), are the most attractive as mates (see also McLanahan, 2004), and their families are the most likely to achieve a high standard of living. Therefore, couples who contribute equally to the family's wellbeing are expected to have a more stable relationship than those under any other arrangement. We therefore expect the relationship to be more robust than under the social-democratic regime:

H4. *In the liberal regime equal-earner couples will be at lower risk of union dissolution than other couples.*

Regarding absolute resources, in the southern regime, where the state provides less support to single-headed families than in the conservative regime, and women are not expected to participate in the labor force (Mandel, 2009), women need more resources to maintain independent households. Moreover, because of the traditional gender ideology, men are expected to be able to provide for the family. Therefore:

H5. *The risk of union dissolution in the southern regime will rise as women's earnings increase, and also as men's economic resources decrease.*

In the conservative regime, where the state assumes greater responsibility for women's and men's welfare, one's own resources are expected to have a weaker effect on the stability of the relationship. Still, the traditional gender ideology yields the following supposition:

H6. *In the conservative regime the relation of men's and women's resources to the risk of union dissolution will be weak, with a somewhat higher risk with an increase in women's earnings and a decrease in men's earnings.*

In the social-democratic regime men's and women's economic resources are not expected to affect their decision to end the relationship, since welfare arrangements which assume economic independence of the two partners allow those with lower resources to exit unhappy unions. In this case,

H7. *In the social-democratic regime women's or men's absolute resources will be inconsequential for the risk of union dissolution.*

Lastly, in the liberal regime the absolute resources of both men and women are expected to affect their decision to dissolve the relationship, since the ability to establish an independent household is closely related to the individual's market power. In this regime the ideology promotes a dual-earner family (Mandel, 2009); however, since the state does not provide support for families, and care work is treated as a private issue (as in the UK in contrast to other European countries: see Lewis and Campbell, 2007), it is the couple's own resources that allow them to exit the union. Because of the heavy dependence on the market,

H8. *In the liberal regime an increase in women's and men's economic resources will reduce the risk of union dissolution.*

3. Data, variables and methods

3.1. Data

We drew on the European Community Household Panel (ECHP), which contains longitudinal information for 1994–2001. This dataset proved suitable for our research as it provides comparable data on a relatively large number of countries. We based our analysis on 12 of the 15 countries covered by the survey. Following previous research (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Mandel, 2009), we assigned countries to the four-regime typology as follows: Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece represent the southern familialistic regime; Austria, Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands represent the conservative regime; Finland and Denmark represent the social-democratic regime; and the UK represents the liberal regime.¹ All countries except Austria and Finland joined the ECHP in 1994. Austria's first survey was conducted in 1995 and Finland joined in 1996.

The ECHP had two major advantages as the data source for our research question. First, it was important to test the micro–macro theoretical model in several countries with comparable micro-level longitudinal information. The ECHP was designed to achieve such comparability, which is rare in cross-national studies on divorce. Second, the panel design facilitated testing our main hypotheses on the effect of couples' income since it provided information on each partner's earnings during the time their union remained intact. However, there were some disadvantages to the ECHP data. First, the duration of the panel was rather short (up to eight years), so the number of separations was small, especially in countries where divorce is not frequent. Second, some indicators which have proved important determinants of union dissolution were not available in this dataset. This primarily concerned relationship duration, about which we had no information for cohabiting couples. Since we

¹ Sweden, a prototype of the social-democratic regime, was excluded because too many values in the marital/cohabitation variable were missing (about 40% in the first wave). Luxemburg was excluded because of the small number of cases. Since Ireland differs from the UK in terms of family support for childcare, as well as divorce rates, we included only the UK in the analysis. Results including Ireland were in the same direction and can be obtained from the authors.

included these as well as married couples (see also [Van Damme and Kalmijn, 2014](#)), we could not use duration as a determinant of union dissolution. To control for the effect of duration on union dissolution in the ECHP data, we replicated the analyses for married couples only (see [Results](#) below).

We chose not to limit our analysis to married couples, as that would create bias given the high prevalence of cohabitation in some of the countries under study ([Heuveline and Timberlake, 2004](#); [Soons and Kalmijn, 2009](#)). For example, the percentage of cohabiting couples in our sample was 28% in Denmark, 20% in Finland and 18% in the UK, while in Italy the rate was less than 3% (see [Appendix A](#) for all countries). These differences between countries are in accordance with previous studies ([Heuveline and Timberlake, 2004](#); [Soons and Kalmijn, 2009](#)). Also, countries differ in the relation of socio-economic characteristics, such as education, to marital status ([Blossfeld, 1995](#)). Because cohabitation affects the likelihood of union dissolution differently from marriage, the regression analysis includes a control of cohabitation versus married status.

We selected women aged 18–60 who were married or single and living with a partner in 1994, the year of the first interview wave, and who defined themselves as heads of households or the head's partner. We then merged with the women's file the information obtained from their partners and information on their household in 1994 (or at the earliest time point). The total sample amounted to 29,304 women respondents.² From this starting point we created a person–year file, to which each woman contributed an observation for every year she was in the relationship (i.e., until the union dissolution or until 2001, the year of the last survey). This resulted in 158,739 observations.

As women's information was sometimes missing in certain years, and as we applied leastwise deletion (complete case analysis), the final tally was 138,062 person–year files, representing 27,896 women (of which 24,952 were married women). A comparison of the original and final samples with respect to the research variables showed similarities in key characteristics (see [Appendix B](#)). In addition, in a subsequent analysis we calculated a mean value for the missing cases for all variables in the regression and repeated the regression analysis for the whole sample ($n = 158,739$ person–year files) including missing dummies. All the coefficients of interest were in the same direction, indicating the robustness of key effects.

3.2. Variables

The dependent variable was defined as the likelihood of a woman undergoing union dissolution (dissolution = 1; otherwise = 0) at time t . This variable was measured using the women's marital and cohabitation status in each observation.

Independent variables: All independent variables except earnings were measured at $t-1$ (the year prior to the specific observation) and pertain to personal and household characteristics. Earnings were measured at $t-2$ to take into account changes in the individual's work activity due to a planned separation. Our main interest was to test the effect of relative and absolute earnings on the risk of union dissolution and its interaction with the given welfare regime.

To indicate relative earnings, we created a measure of the women's share of the spouses' net annual earnings at $t-2$. This measure ranged from 0 (only the man earns money) to 1 (only the woman earns money). We then divided this indicator into three categories: the man earns more (the woman provides 0%–39.9% of the household income); earnings are equal (the woman provides 40%–59.9%); and the woman earns more (she provides 60% or more) (see also [Nock, 2001](#)).

Absolute earnings were measured at the individual level and indicated by the net annual earnings two years prior to the interview wave. Since countries differ in their currencies, we standardized this measure for each country by calculating the relative difference of each respondent's earnings from the maximum earnings in the country (see [Gornick et al., 1997](#) and [Stier et al., 2001](#) for similar procedures). Non-earners were coded as having zero earnings.

We also controlled for variables found to significantly affect the risk of union dissolution (following, e.g., [Amato, 2010](#); [De Graaf and Kalmijn, 2006](#); [Harkonen and Dronkers, 2006](#)). These included the woman's age, whether she was married or cohabiting, the presence in the household of children under the age of 14, the educational level of the woman and her partner (either of them possessing a university or comparable degree, ISCED levels 5–7), the interaction between the woman's age and her education (to capture possible changes in the effect of education across cohorts, following [Harkonen and Dronkers, 2006](#)), whether the couple owned their dwelling, and a household division of care work. Earlier studies found an effect of housework on divorce ([Cooke, 2006](#)). As we lacked information on the actual division of housework, we examined the division of care work based on whether each partner was looking after a child or other needy person that year. Care work and housework have proven to affect divorce in the same direction, although they may be qualitatively different ([Sigle-Rushton, 2010](#)). We differentiated between four types of couples based on their care-work division: dual carers, where both spouses did the care work; man carer; woman carer (reference category); and no carer, where neither spouse did care work. Since there were insufficient cases in the man carer category, we combined it with dual-carer couples to denote couples where men contributed to care work.

The models also controlled for men's and women's weekly work hours (those who reported having no paying job were coded as having zero weekly hours of work). Some models also controlled for total net household income, standardized as described above to achieve comparability across countries. The descriptive statistics of all variables are presented in [Appendix B](#).

² When the analysis was limited to married women this number fell to 24,952; the main reduction in size was in Denmark, Finland and the UK. See the distribution of cases and percentage of union dissolution by country in [Appendix A](#).

Table 1
Distribution of union dissolution and relative earnings by welfare regime (percentages)^a.

Welfare regime	Southern	Conservative	Social-democratic	Liberal
Union dissolution (%)	2.82	7.10	10.52	11.07
Relative earnings (%)				
Man earns more	65.09	62.85	47.88	61.76
Both earn equally	26.52	28.03	39.12	27.02
Woman earns more	9.39	9.12	13.00	11.22
N	11,263	11,359	3371	1903

^a These figures were measured as weighted percentages using the base weight variable of the first interview wave analyzed. The base weight is the appropriate weight to use for longitudinal analysis of ECHP data.

3.3. Data analysis

To examine whether the relation between couples' relative and absolute earnings and their likelihood of union dissolution varied across welfare regimes, we used a series of discrete-time event-history analysis models. As earnings, work hours, number of children and division of care work are likely to change across time, event-history analysis is the most suitable way to assess these dynamic relationships (Allison, 1984; Cooke, 2004). This model, which allowed us to consider the timing of the union dissolution, was also the most appropriate for the relatively short interval we analyzed. The analysis was divided into two stages for each independent variable. First, we tested whether the effect of relative and absolute earnings on union dissolution varied across regimes by comparing a set of nested logistic models. Second, based on the results of the first step, we tested specific hypotheses on the pattern of relations in each regime. Because we used person–year files, all observations were clustered around individuals. We adjusted the error terms to account for clustering of individuals within countries, and weighted the analyses.³

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive results

We begin the analysis by describing variation in union dissolution rates by regime, presented in Table 1. Rates during the study period were 11.1% of all couples in the liberal regime; 10.5% in the social-democratic regime, 7.1% in the conservative regime; and only 2.8% in the familialistic setting of the southern regime. These figures correspond to earlier results across countries (Blossfeld and Muller, 2002; Kalmijn, 2007). Looking at only those couples who were formally married, divorce rates were 9.5% in the liberal regime, 7.3% in the social-democratic regime, 5.7% in the conservative regime and 2.9% in the southern regime (see Appendix A). This variation between regimes might result from cultural, institutional or compositional differences.

Table 1 also presents relative earnings in the four regimes. Following earlier findings (Huber et al., 2009; Mandel, 2009; Stier and Mandel, 2009), in all regimes and among most couples the man is the main provider, i.e., earns more than the woman. This is true of about 65% of all couples in the southern, conservative and liberal regimes, while it holds for less than half (48%) in the social-democratic regime (all differences are statistically significant). In contrast, the rate of equal earners is about 39% in the social-democratic regime and about a quarter in all other regimes. Women who outearn men are still a minority, but their percentage is higher in the social-democratic than the conservative and southern regimes (13.0% in the former; 9.1% and 9.4% in the latter, respectively), while the liberal regime falls in between (11.2%).

4.2. Relative earnings and union dissolution across regimes

To test whether this economic dependency is related to the risk of union dissolution, and whether this relation varies across regimes, we first estimated a set of nested logistic regression models. Model statistics for the various specifications and comparisons between them are presented in Table 2. The first model, which serves as a baseline for comparing the effect of our variables of interest, includes all control variables at the individual and household levels. Model 2 adds to this model the couple's relative earnings, Model 3 adds the effect of the welfare regime and Model 4 adds the interaction between regime and relative earnings. Model 5 adds to Model 3 the interactions of all control variables and regimes, and, lastly, Model 6 adds to Model 5 the interactions between relative earnings and regimes.

Our main interest is in models 4 and 6, which add the interaction between regime and the couple's relative earnings to models 3 and 5, respectively. The addition of the interaction in Model 4 improves the fit of Model 3 ($X^2 = 29.97$ with 6 degrees of freedom), indicating that the effects of relative earnings change across welfare regimes. Furthermore, the $-2LL$ value associated with Model 6 is significantly lower than in Model 5 ($X^2 = 16.66$ with 6 degrees of freedom), indicating again that a couple's relative earnings relate diversely to the likelihood of union dissolution in different socio-political contexts, as we

³ We used the base weight variable which is provided for the first wave in each country for our descriptive and multivariate analyses.

Table 2

Models explaining the risk of union dissolution by relative earnings and welfare regime.

Model	–2 Log likelihood	df	χ^2 change	df change
1. Base model	11703.1674	12		
2. Base model + relative earnings	11678.6684	14		
3. Model 2 + regime	11514.0912	17		
4. Model 3 + regime \times relative earnings	11484.1232	23		
5. Model 3 + regime \times base model	11445.0860	53		
6. Model 5 + regime \times relative earnings	11428.4254	59		
Comparisons:				
Model 2 vs. Model 1			24.4990**	2
Model 3 vs. Model 2			164.5772**	3
Model 4 vs. Model 3			29.9680**	6
Model 5 vs. Model 3			69.0052**	36
Model 6 vs. Model 4			55.6978*	36
Model 6 vs. Model 5			16.6606**	6

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

expected. These findings support our main theoretical argument that the relationship between a couple's economic dependence and the likelihood of union dissolution differs across regimes.

We now examine the specific hypotheses we raised regarding the patterns of these relationships in each type of welfare regime. For clarity, we examine each regime separately, corresponding to the further improvements in Model 6 over Model 5.

Table 3 shows the results of a logistic regression model in each regime to test hypotheses H1 to H4. Each model presents the effect of all control variables and couples' relative earnings on the risk of union dissolution (the reference category is households where the men earn more than the women). For the southern regime, the pattern partially supports hypothesis H1. In this familialistic regime, the highest risk of union dissolution is evident in couples where women outearn men: the likelihood of dissolution is 2.3 ($e^{0.82}$) times higher than in couples where the man earns more than the woman and 1.6 ($e^{0.82-0.31}$) times higher than in equal-earner couples. Contrary to our expectations, no significant differences were found between couples where the man earns more and couples where both earn equally. A similar pattern of relationships, though significantly less pronounced, is found in the conservative regime, partly supporting our expectation (H2). Here too the risk of union dissolution is 1.5 ($e^{0.38}$) times higher when the woman outearns the man than in the case of equal earners. However, no significant differences were found between couples where the woman outearns the man than in couples where the man outearns the woman. As we anticipated, the risk of union dissolution for equal-earner couples and for those where the man is the main provider is similar.

Our expectation of no (or small) differences on the basis of relative earnings in the social-democratic regime (H3) was partly supported. Indeed, couples in which men outearn women have the same risk of union dissolution as couples in which women outearn men, while equal earners tend to be less likely to end the relationship than couples where women outearn men ($b = 0.61$, $p = 0.01$). Equal earners do not differ significantly in their risks of union dissolution compared to couples where men outearn women. This finding is similar to that observed in the conservative regime, which may indicate that the

Table 3

Logistic effects of couples' relative earnings on union dissolution in four welfare regimes, coefficient (clustered standard error).

Welfare regime	Southern	Conservative	Social-democratic	Liberal
Age	–0.05** (0.009)	–0.06** (0.006)	–0.06** (0.001)	–0.07** (0.01)
Married couples (base = cohabiting)	–1.85** (0.33)	–1.15** (0.13)	–0.97** (0.17)	–1.09** (0.25)
Children in household (base = no)	0.18 (0.29)	0.22 (0.14)	–0.16 (0.23)	–0.26 (0.31)
Higher education, woman (base = less)	–1.23 (0.80)	–1.21* (0.49)	–1.18 (0.66)	0.26 (0.78)
Woman's education \times age	0.04* (0.02)	0.03* (0.01)	0.04* (0.02)	–0.007 (0.02)
Higher education, man (base = less)	–0.15 (0.23)	–0.04 (0.13)	0.02 (0.17)	–0.19 (0.19)
Home ownership (base = no)	–0.40* (0.19)	–0.51** (0.09)	–0.74** (0.17)	–0.39 (0.24)
Household income	0.56 (0.79)	0.28 (0.23)	–0.28 (1.25)	1.45 (0.86)
Weekly work hours, woman	0.007 (0.005)	0.010** (0.003)	0.008 (0.004)	0.007 (0.006)
Weekly work hours, man	–0.009 (0.005)	–0.002 (0.003)	0.006 (0.005)	–0.005 (0.005)
<u>Division of care work (base = woman carer)</u>				
Dual/man carer	–0.38 (0.21)	–0.24 (0.13)	–0.59* (0.24)	0.13 (0.22)
No carer	–0.10 (0.22)	–0.16 (0.15)	–0.71** (0.25)	–0.43 (0.31)
<u>Relative earnings (base = man earns more)</u>				
Both earn equally	0.31 (0.24)	–0.13 (0.13)	–0.21 (0.18)	–0.73** (0.25)
Woman earns more	0.82** (0.30)	0.25 (0.18)	0.40 (0.24)	–0.27 (0.30)
Intercept	–1.60** (0.60)	–1.43** (0.30)	0.07 (0.49)	0.06 (0.60)
χ^2 (14)	167.04**	469.33**	238.48**	144.85**
N (person-year files)	58,963	55,382	13,712	9794
N (women)	11,263	11,359	3371	1751

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ (one-tailed test).

Table 4

Logistic effects of married couples' relative income on their divorce in four welfare regimes, coefficient (clustered standard error).

Welfare regime	Southern	Conservative	Social-democratic	Liberal
Age	−0.05* (0.02)	−0.02* (0.01)	−0.04 (0.03)	−0.07** (0.02)
Marriage duration	0.008 (0.02)	−0.05** (0.01)	−0.02 (0.02)	0.002 (0.02)
Children in household (base = no)	−0.52 (0.28)	0.16 (0.22)	−0.01 (0.37)	−1.14** (0.34)
Higher education, woman (base = less)	−0.95 (0.72)	−1.55* (0.68)	−1.56 (0.90)	0.56 (0.84)
Woman's education × age	0.04* (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)
Higher education, man (base = less)	−0.04 (0.23)	0.07 (0.16)	0.40 (0.25)	−0.04 (0.22)
Home ownership (base = no)	−0.48** (0.19)	−0.40** (0.13)	−0.81** (0.24)	−0.68** (0.27)
Household income	0.07 (0.84)	−0.36 (0.28)	−3.83 (2.41)	0.93 (1.13)
Weekly work hours, woman	0.009 (0.005)	0.02** (0.004)	0.009 (0.006)	0.004 (0.007)
Weekly work hours, man	−0.006 (0.006)	−0.003 (0.004)	0.002 (0.006)	0.004 (0.006)
<u>Division of care work (base = woman carer)</u>				
Dual/man carer	−0.34 (0.20)	−0.54** (0.16)	−0.08 (0.32)	0.02 (0.23)
No carer	−0.32 (0.24)	−0.23 (0.20)	−0.38 (0.34)	−1.09** (0.35)
<u>Relative earnings (base = man earns more)</u>				
Both earn equally	0.29 (0.23)	−0.12 (0.17)	−0.08 (0.24)	−0.37 (0.27)
Woman earns more	0.90** (0.29)	0.31 (0.25)	0.47 (0.35)	0.11 (0.34)
Intercept	−2.73** (0.68)	−2.94** (0.53)	−1.82 (0.96)	−0.17 (0.88)
X ² (14)	100.70**	152.14**	76.59**	71.98**
N (person-year files)	58,109	41,960	10,555	8678
N (women)	11,098	9711	2582	1529

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01 (one-tailed test).

level of defamilialization matters. In terms of the relations between family outcomes such as divorce and earnings, these two regimes have more in common than expected. Supporting hypothesis H4, and as anticipated by the flexibility hypothesis (Oppenheimer, 1997; Cooke and Gash, 2010), equal-earner couples in the liberal regime are at a significantly lower risk of union dissolution ($b = -0.73$) than are couples where the man is the main provider, but not compared to couples where the woman earns more (the coefficient is in the expected direction, but non-significant). This finding is in line with Cooke's (2006) results for the US (which also belongs to the liberal regime), where dual-earner couples were found to have the greatest stability.⁴

As to the effects of other variables (Table 3), in all regimes and consistent with other studies (Henz and Jonsson, 2003; Rogers, 2004), older women are less likely to exit the union because they have a greater investment in the relationship than younger women or because they are “positively selected.” As also found in earlier studies (Henz and Jonsson, 2003; Kalmijn et al., 2007; Van Damme and Kalmijn, 2014; Poortman and Lyngstad, 2007), marriage decreases the probability of separation compared to cohabitation across all regimes. In the conservative regime the main effect of women's education has a negative effect on union dissolution; namely, highly educated wives are less likely to exit the relationship, as found in previous studies (De Graaf and Kalmijn, 2006; Kaplan and Herbst, 2015; Matysiak et al., 2014). In addition, in the social-democratic, conservative and southern regimes the interaction between education and age is positive, in line with Harkonen and Dronkers' (2006) findings; this may indicate a period effect where higher education in older women's cohorts leads to higher rates of union dissolution. However, these educational effects are not significant in the liberal regime, as found in earlier studies on countries belonging to that regime (Chan and Halpin, 2003; Cooke, 2006). In the conservative regime, when the woman has more weekly work hours in the labor force, the couple's relationship is destabilized, as found in other studies (Chan and Halpin, 2003; Poortman, 2005; Poortman and Kalmijn, 2002). Men's education and work hours have no effect on the risk of union dissolution, nor has the presence of children.

As for household characteristics, home ownership lowers the likelihood of union dissolution in all regimes (albeit in the liberal regime the coefficient is significant at $p = 0.10$), as may be expected on theoretical as well as empirical grounds (see, e.g., Wagner and Weiß, 2006). Household income has no significant effect on the risk of union dissolution. Lastly, the care composition of the household has a significant effect on the likelihood of union dissolution only in the social-democratic regime. Corresponding to the gender ideology in this regime, as well as the high level of state responsibility to reconcile paid jobs with care roles (Mandel, 2009), the wife being the sole carer – all else being equal – raises the risk of union dissolution above that of other couples.

In order to check the effect of the duration of the union, as well as whether the effect of relative earnings on union stability varies by marital status (Brines and Joyner, 1999), we re-ran the models for married couples only, where we have the starting dates for each union. Results are presented in Table 4. Note that marriage duration has no effect except for in the conservative regime, and most of the previous effects remain. In the liberal regime the effect of relative earnings becomes insignificant but in a similar direction. Notably, in this regime a high proportion of couples were not married; hence, the sample size declined

⁴ Since the effect of relative earnings may differ from (or even contradict) that of absolute earnings, Oppenheimer (1997) claimed that both must be taken into account. To test the sensitivity of our results in accordance with this claim, we reran the models, controlling for women's total earnings. The analysis yielded the same results (not shown).

significantly. That is, marital status, while affecting the overall rate of union dissolution, is not the driving force behind our results.

4.3. Absolute earnings and union dissolution across regimes

To examine the effect of women's and men's absolute earnings on union dissolution, and whether this effect varies across welfare regimes, we again tested a set of nested logistic regression models. The first model contains all control variables (Model 1 in Table 5), Model 2 adds the effect of women's and men's absolute earnings, Model 3 adds the regime and Model 4 adds the interactions of all control variables and regimes. Models 5 and 6 add the interactions between regime and women's earnings and the regime and men's earnings, respectively. Model 7 adds to Model 4 the interaction between regime and women's and men's earnings. The results of the models' -2LL and X^2 comparisons are presented in Table 5.

A comparison of Model 2 and Model 1 shows a non-significant effect of women's and men's earnings on the risk of union dissolution in a model that assumes these effects are the same across regimes ($X^2 = 2.60$, $df = 2$). However, models 5 to 7 indicate that the effect of men's and women's earnings differs across regimes. When the interaction of women's earnings and welfare regime is added (Model 5), the model improves significantly ($X^2 = 10.54$, $df = 3$). Including men's earnings also improves the model significantly ($X^2 = 10.97$; $df = 3$). The last model (7), which contains both men's and women's earnings, further improves on models 5 and 6 (which contain only women's or men's earnings, respectively). Hence, we base our analysis on Model 7.

These findings support our claim that the effect of men's and women's earnings on the risk of union dissolution varies in different institutional contexts. Table 6 displays these effects, which provide partial support for our initial expectations. We find support for the independence hypothesis, based on a gendered division of labor, in the southern regime. As we anticipated (H5), the likelihood of union dissolution rises as women's earnings increase. Contrary to our expectations, men's earnings have no significant effect on the odds of separation in this regime. Again we found high similarity between the conservative and social-democratic regimes: there are no significant effects of women's or men's earnings in either regime, as expected (H6 and H7). According to our theoretical perspective, state support for families and decommunitizing practices weaken the relationship between individuals' economic resources and their ability to establish independent households in the case of union dissolution. While we expected such differences in the conservative regime because of its more traditional treatment of family relations, the level of defamilialization, again, appears to be the main force that weakens the relation between economic resources and separation. The findings are quite different for the liberal regime. Contrary to expectations (H8), as the men's economic situation improves, they are more likely to end the relationship, while women's earnings have no significant effect on the risk of union dissolution. Rerunning the model on married couples only (Table 7) yielded similar patterns of relations across all four regimes.

5. Discussion

The current study aimed at revealing relations between couples' relative and absolute earnings and union dissolution, focusing on how institutional settings moderate these relations. The theoretical debate on the relation between the couple's economic dependencies, which has been mostly on the micro level, centers on the question of what kind of dependence stabilizes the relationship: dependence resulting from the specialized, usually gender-based, division of labor (Becker, 1981; Parsons, 1955), or interdependence, manifested in the blurring of gender roles and greater equality of partners (Oppenheimer, 1997; Cooke and Gash, 2010). Our main argument is that answering this question should consider the contexts and

Table 5

Models explaining the risk of union dissolution by couple's absolute earnings and welfare regime.

Model	–2 Log likelihood	df	χ^2 change	df change
1. Base model	11749.0148	11		
2. Base model + women's and men's absolute earnings	11746.4104	13		
3. Model 2 + regime	11578.9546	16		
4. Model 3 + regime \times base model	11511.6470	49		
5. Model 4 + regime \times women's absolute earnings	11501.1062	52		
6. Model 4 + regime \times men's absolute earnings	11500.6808	52		
7. Model 4 + regimes \times women's and men's absolute earnings	11489.2640	55		
Comparisons:				
Model 2 vs. Model 1			2.6044	2
Model 3 vs. Model 2			167.4558**	3
Model 4 vs. Model 3			67.3076**	33
Model 5 vs. Model 4			10.5408*	3
Model 6 vs. Model 4			10.9662**	3
Model 7 vs. Model 4			22.3830**	6
Model 7 vs. Model 5			11.8422**	3
Model 7 vs. Model 6			11.4168**	3

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 6

Logistic effects of couples' absolute earnings on union dissolution in four welfare regimes, coefficient (clustered standard error).

Welfare regime	Southern	Conservative	Social-democratic	Liberal
Annual earnings, woman	2.43** (0.95)	1.28 (0.82)	−0.49 (1.61)	−3.71 (2.51)
Annual earnings, man	−0.49 (1.05)	0.19 (0.56)	−1.53 (1.09)	2.22** (0.76)
Intercept	−1.31** (0.54)	−1.39** (0.29)	0.27 (0.47)	−0.27 (0.57)
X ² (13)	175.16**	470.05**	232.87**	141.50**
N (person-year files)	59,447	55,439	13,715	9794
N (women)	11,275	11,361	3372	1751

**p < 0.01 (one-tailed test).

institutional arrangements in which couples' relationships are embedded. Accordingly, we examined whether these relationships varied in their effect on union dissolution across different welfare regimes, focusing on relative and absolute earnings. We found that women's and men's economic (in)dependence does not necessarily destabilize the relationship. Instead, these effects greatly depend on the specific context.

With regard to the couple's relative earnings, these matter for union stability in all contexts, but the pattern of the relationship varies by degree of defamilialization, by *either* state or market. The southern regime is characterized by moderate levels of decommmodification together with low levels of defamilialization and is based on the ideology that ties social rights to motherhood (Mandel, 2009). In this setting the risk of union dissolution follows gendered expectations: it is higher for couples in which women outearn men, in keeping with the independence hypothesis. In addition, this is the only setting in which couples where the man earns more are more stable, especially compared to couples where the woman earns more. In contrast, in the liberal regime, which offers low levels of decommmodification and defamilialization through the market (Esping-Andersen, 1999), an equal contribution by partners to the family income tends to stabilize their relationship, as argued by the flexibility hypothesis (Oppenheimer, 1997; Cooke and Gash, 2010), especially compared to couples where the man earns more. In the social-democratic regime, characterized by both a high degree of state defamilization and a gender ideology that supports the dual-earner model, equality in a couple's earnings also decreases the likelihood of exiting the relationship, but only in contrast to couples where the woman earns more. Surprisingly, the same pattern of relations was observed in the conservative regime, which is characterized by a moderate level of defamilialization through the state.

Contrary to our expectations, in most regimes no differences were found between couples where the man outearns the woman and those where the woman earns more. In fact, we found that in three out of four regimes, what used to be considered the most stable household (Becker, 1981) – the male main breadwinner model – is no longer the case. In these three regimes equal earners tend to be more stable than other unions. In the liberal regime they have lower risk than unions in which the man earns more, and in the social-democratic and conservative regimes they have lower risk than couples where the woman earns more. It seems that moderate to high levels of defamilialization, either through the state or the market, create a context in which couples' symmetric economic dependence strengthens their relationship. This explains how different institutional configurations can lead to similar (and perhaps unintended) consequences. The findings also suggest that while the conservative regime is perceived as "traditional" in terms of family relations, the state's support of a variety of family types (including support for children, for working parents and for lone mothers) also affects the conditions that facilitate union dissolution, similar to that of more family-supporting regimes, such as the social-democratic. This may point to a need to revise the characteristics of the familial regime in these settings.

With regard to absolute earnings, an interesting pattern emerges wherein women's and men's earnings are significantly related to the risk of union dissolution only in regimes where state defamilialization is low. More specifically, in the social-democratic regime, which has the highest levels of decommmodification as well as state defamilialization, money is less of an issue in determining the relationship's stability. Similar non-significant effects were found in the conservative regime. However, in the two regimes with higher dependence on the market for economic support (and the lowest support of single mothers), absolute earnings have a significant effect on the risk of union dissolution, but in opposite directions. In the southern regime, in keeping with the independence hypothesis, women's earnings heighten the risk of union dissolution, while in the liberal regime men's earnings do so. The findings for the liberal regime are not in line with either the independence or the flexibility hypothesis. In this case, another explanation is warranted. This may be because men on average earn more than women, and as their earnings rise, their families become less dependent on the woman's salary. In other words, in a low commodified context, the couple's reliance on the man's resources becomes important for understanding the stability of their relationship.

Considering relative and absolute earnings together, the connection between earnings and the odds of union dissolution generally prove weaker (or non-significant) in regimes where the state assumes major responsibility for welfare compared to regimes where welfare responsibilities are relegated to the market or the family. State responsibility for welfare apparently lessens the dependence of family behavior on material market resources. At the same time, in regimes that support women's employment, women's earnings are less important with regard to separation, in keeping with the recent findings of Van Damme and Kalmijn (2014).

The findings of the current study support our theoretical model, whereby the institutional setting moderates the relation of couples' relative and absolute earnings to the likelihood of union dissolution. The mediation effect of welfare regime on

Table 7

Logistic effects of married couples' absolute earnings on their divorce in four welfare regimes, coefficient (clustered standard error).

Welfare regime	Southern	Conservative	Social-democratic	Liberal
Annual earnings, woman	2.51** (0.98)	1.67 (1.06)	−1.46 (2.03)	−2.28 (2.94)
Annual earnings, man	−0.72 (1.03)	−0.0 (0.66)	−1.47 (1.36)	1.81* (0.90)
Intercept	−2.39** (0.66)	−2.85** (0.52)	−1.88 (0.99)	−0.22 (0.86)
X ² (13)	97.57**	149.00**	63.76**	75.23**
N (person-year files)	58,612	42,015	10,556	8678
N (women)	11,110	9712	2582	1529

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01 (one-tailed test).

gender inequality in the labor market (Mandel, 2009) and in the household division of labor (e.g., Stier et al., 2001) has been tested before. However, how welfare regimes mediate the relation of couples' earning dependencies to the risk of union dissolution has been analyzed less. Most importantly, our study demonstrates that women's (or men's) earnings do not have a universal, homogeneous effect on family behaviors. An increase in women's earnings, or a decrease in men's, is not always linked to higher levels of union dissolution. Rather, like Cooke et al. (2013) in their recent study, we found that, in regimes supportive of women's employment, and especially where defamilialization is substantial, partners' equality of earnings serves as an equalization mechanism. Hence this study joins a growing body of literature that highlights theoretically and empirically the conditions under which the economic theory of divorce operates (Blossfeld and Muller, 2002; Cooke and Gash, 2010; Cooke et al., 2013; Iversen et al., 2005; Kalmijn et al., 2007; Poortman and Kalmijn, 2002; Sayer and Bianchi, 2000; Van Damme and Kalmijn, 2014; Weisshaar, 2014). It also supports the institutional approach regarding economic resources and divorce (Blossfeld and Muller, 2002; Cooke, 2006; Cooke and Gash, 2010; Cooke et al., 2013; Harkonen and Dronkers, 2006; Van Damme and Kalmijn, 2014).

The results also highlight the importance of conceptualizing the notion of economic independence. Since data on earnings are not always available to researchers, many studies have used the wife's labor force participation as a proxy for women's economic resources (Kalmijn et al., 2007). Moreover, in most contexts women now provide for their families, as most couples are dual-earner. Since such couples are heterogeneous, measures such as partners' relative and absolute earnings are needed to capture different levels of economic dependence.

That said, it is important to bear in mind the limitations of our study. The relationship between institutional context and individual behaviors is complex. State support and existing cultural beliefs and attitudes may facilitate specific behaviors, but it is the individuals' behaviors that cause a change in institutional arrangements (and attitudes). Moreover, it is important to remember that welfare state and national culture are endogenous and that the patterns found here may be driven as much by culture as by public policy (Pfau-Effinger, 2004). Finally, a longer time frame is needed to understand the reciprocal effects of the macro and the micro processes, and to capture changes in institutions, policies and cultural beliefs that can affect countries' placement in specific regimes. While the short time frame in our analysis allowed us to assume a relatively stable institutional context, it cannot serve as a test for causality in the effect of macro-level institutions on individual behaviors. Further, future studies, using more updated data sources, would be able to test whether the relations found in our study, which support the theoretical model connecting couples' dependencies to welfare regimes, still holds. Nevertheless, in light of the negative social perception of divorce (Coltrane and Adams, 2003) and the emphasis on women's participation in the economy as a cause of increased risk of divorce, our study suggests that the relation of women's paid work to union stability not only is socially constructed, but also serves as a mechanism for reproducing gender inequality.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Yasmin Alkalay (Tel Aviv University) for her invaluable comments, to Helene Hogri for her important contribution and to the anonymous reviewers of this journal for their enlightening comments and suggestions.

Appendix A. Number of relationships and rates of union dissolution by country.

Country	All couples			Married couples	
	N of relationships	% Cohabiting couples	% Union dissolution by 2001	N of relationships	% Divorced by 2001
Southern Regime					
Greece	2298	1.09	1.78	2273	1.72
Italy	3626	0.55	2.54	3606	2.76
Portugal	2267	1.54	3.07	2232	2.99
Spain	3072	2.77	3.87	2987	3.82
Total	11,263	1.46	2.82	11,098	2.85
Conservative Regime					
Austria	1341	5.22	4.36	1271	3.52
Belgium	1494	15.66	8.23	1260	6.44

(continued)

Country	All couples			Married couples	
	N of relationships	% Cohabiting couples	% Union dissolution by 2001	N of relationships	% Divorced by 2001
France	3127	16.47	6.71	2612	6.78
Germany	3042	14.92	9.16	2588	7.61
Netherlands	2355	15.92	5.64	1980	3.62
Total	11,359	14.51	7.10	9711	5.67
<u>Social-democratic Regime</u>					
Denmark	1333	28.28	13.16	956	7.80
Finland	2038	20.22	8.94	1626	7.07
Total	3371	23.41	10.52	2582	7.31
<u>Liberal Regime</u>					
UK	1903	17.97	11.07	1561	9.52
Total Sample	27,896	10.44	6.08	24,952	4.78

Appendix B. Weighted means (SD) and percentages^a of variables, pooled person-year files.

Variables	Analytical sample	Total Sample
<u>Wife's characteristics</u>		
Weekly work hours ^b	34.38 (12.63)	34.75 (13.01)
Annual earnings (standardized) ^b	0.09 (0.08)	0.09 (0.08)
Education: % with recognized third-level education (ISCED 5–7)	18.53	17.84
Age	42.29 (9.94)	42.42 (9.98)
Marital status: % married	94.45	93.73
<u>Husband's characteristics</u>		
Weekly work hours ^b	44.85 (11.41)	45.04 (11.64)
Annual earnings (standardized) ^b	0.16 (0.11)	0.15 (0.11)
Education: % with recognized third-level education (ISCED 5–7)	21.74	21.00
<u>Household division of care work (%)</u>		
Dual carer	27.37	27.07
Woman carer	27.78	28.93
Man carer	1.52	1.57
No carer	43.33	42.44
<u>Relative earnings (%)</u>		
Both earn equally	28.41	28.32
Man earns more	62.25	62.12
Woman earns more	9.34	9.56
<u>Other</u>		
Household income (standardized)	0.18 (0.15)	0.19 (0.15)
Home ownership (%)	73.59	73.98
Children in household (%)	78.47	77.73
N	27,896	29,304
N (person-year files)	138,062	158,739

^a These figures were measured as weighted means and percentages using the base weight variable of the first interview wave analyzed. The base weight is the appropriate weight to use for longitudinal analysis in ECHP data.

^b Calculated for those in the labor force.

References

- Allison, P.D., 1984. *Event History Analysis: Regression for Longitudinal Event Data*. Sage, London.
- Amato, P.R., 2010. The marriage go-round: the state of marriage and the family in America today. *J. Marriage Fam.* 72 (5), 1455–1457.
- Andreß, H.-J., Borgloh, B., Bröckel, M., Giesselmann, M., Hummelsheim, D., 2006. The economic consequences of partnership dissolution: a comparative analysis of panel studies from Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Italy and Sweden. *Eur. Sociol. Rev.* 22 (5), 533–560.
- Becker, G.S., 1981. *A Treatise on the Family*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Bianchi, S.M., Casper, L.M., Peltola, P.K., 1999. A cross-national look at married women's earnings dependency. *Gend. Issues* 17 (3), 3–33.
- Blossfeld, H.-P., 1995. *The New Role of Women. Family Formation in Modern Societies*. Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford.
- Blossfeld, H.-P., Muller, R., 2002. Union disruption in comparative perspective: the role of assortative partner choice and careers of couples. *Int. J. Sociol.* 32 (4), 3–35.
- Brines, J., 1994. Economic dependency, gender, and the division of labor at home. *Am. J. Sociol.* 100, 652–688.
- Brines, J., Joyner, K., 1999. The ties that bind: principles of cohesion in cohabitation and marriage. *Am. Sociol. Rev.* 64 (3), 333–355.
- Chan, T.W., Halpin, B., 2003. Union dissolution in the United Kingdom. *Int. J. Sociol.* 32 (4), 76–93.
- Coltrane, S., Adams, M., 2003. The social construction of the divorce 'problem': morality, child victims, and the politics of gender. *Fam. Relat.* 52 (4), 363–372.
- Cooke, L.P., 2004. The gendered division of labor and family outcomes in Germany. *J. Marriage Fam.* 66, 1246–1259.
- Cooke, L.P., 2006. 'Doing' gender in context: household bargaining and risk of divorce in Germany and the United States. *Am. J. Sociol.* 112 (2), 442–472.
- Cooke, L.P., Gash, V., 2010. Wives' part-time employment and marital stability in Great Britain, West Germany and the United States. *Sociology* 44 (6), 1091–1108.
- Cooke, L.P., Erola, J., Evertsson, M., Gähler, M., Härkönen, J., Hewitt, B., Jalovaara, M., Kan, M.-Y., Lyngstad, T.H., Mencarini, L., Mignot, J.-F., Mortelmans, D., Poortman, A.-R., Schmitt, C., Trappe, H., 2013. Labor and love: wives' employment and divorce risk in its socio-political context. *Soc. Polit.* 20 (4), 482–509.

- Crompton, R., 1999. Discussion and conclusions. In: Crompton, R. (Ed.), *Restructuring Gender Relations and Employment*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 201–214.
- Daly, M., 1994. Comparing welfare states: toward a gender friendly approach. In: Sainsbury, D. (Ed.), *Gendering Welfare States*. Sage, London, pp. 101–119.
- De Graaf, P.M., Kalmijn, M., 2006. Change and stability in the social determinants of divorce: a comparison of marriage cohorts in the Netherlands. *Eur. Sociol. Rev.* 22 (5), 561–572.
- Esping-Andersen, G., 1990. *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Esping-Andersen, G., 1999. *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Esping-Andersen, G., 2015. Welfare regimes and social stratification. *J. Eur. Soc. Policy* 25 (1), 124–134.
- Fuwa, N., Cohen, P.N., 2006. Housework and social policy. *Soc. Sci. Res.* 36, 512–530.
- Gornick, J.C., Meyers, M.K., 2003. *Families that Work: Policies for Reconciling Parenthood and Employment*. Russell Sage, New York.
- Gornick, J.C., Meyers, M.K., Ross, K.E., 1997. Supporting the employment of mothers: policy variation across fourteen welfare states. *J. Eur. Soc. Policy* 7 (1), 45–70.
- Hampden-Thompson, G., 2013. Family policy, family structure, and children's educational achievement. *Soc. Sci. Res.* 42, 804–817.
- Harkonen, J., Dronkers, J., 2006. Stability and change in the educational gradient of divorce: a comparison of seventeen countries. *Eur. Sociol. Rev.* 22 (5), 501–517.
- Henz, U., Jonsson, J.O., 2003. Union disruption in Sweden: does economic dependency inhibit separation? *Int. J. Sociol.* 33 (1), 3–39.
- Heuveline, P., Timberlake, J.M., 2004. The role of cohabitation in family formation: the United States in comparative perspective. *J. Marriage Fam.* 66, 1214–1230.
- Hobson, B., 1990. No exit, no voice: women's economic dependency and the welfare state. *Acta Sociol.* 33 (3), 235–250.
- Hobson, B., 1994. Solo mothers, social policy regimes, and the logics of gender. In: Sainsbury, D. (Ed.), *Gendering Welfare States*. Sage, London, pp. 170–189.
- Huber, E., Stephens, J.D., Bradley, D., Moller, S., Nielsen, F., 2009. The politics of women's economic independence. *Soc. Polit.* 16 (1), 1–39.
- Iversen, T., Rosenbluth, F., Soskice, D., 2005. Divorce and the gender division of labor in comparative perspective. *Soc. Polit.* 12 (2), 216–242.
- Jalovaara, M., 2003. The joint effects of marriage partners' socioeconomic position on the risk of divorce. *Demography* 40 (1), 67–81.
- Kalmijn, M., 2007. Explaining cross-national differences in marriage, cohabitation and divorce in Europe, 1990–2000. *Popul. Stud.* 61 (3), 243–263.
- Kalmijn, M., De Graaf, P., Poortman, A.-R., 2004. Interactions between cultural and economic determinants of divorce in the Netherlands. *J. Marriage Fam.* 66, 75–89.
- Kalmijn, M., Loeve, A., Manting, D., 2007. Income dynamics in couples and the dissolution of marriage and cohabitation. *Demography* 44, 159–180.
- Kaplan, A., Herbst, A., 2015. Stratified patterns of divorce: earnings, education and gender. *Demogr. Res.* 32, 947–982.
- Lewis, J., Campbell, M., 2007. UK work/family balance policies and gender equality, 1997–2005. *Soc. Polit.* 14 (1), 4–30.
- Lewis, J., Hobson, B., 1997. Introduction. In: Lewis, J. (Ed.), *Lone Mothers in European Welfare Regimes: Shifting Policy Logics*. Jessica Kingsley, London, pp. 1–20.
- Lister, R., 1997. *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*. Macmillan, London.
- Mandel, H., 2009. Configurations of gender inequality: the consequences of ideology and public policy. *Br. J. Sociol.* 60 (4), 693–719.
- Matysiak, A., Styrac, M., Vignoli, D., 2014. The educational gradient in marital disruption: a meta-analysis of European longitudinal research findings. *Popul. Stud.* 68 (2), 197–215.
- McLanahan, S., 2004. Diverging destinies: how children are faring under the second demographic transition. *Demography* 41 (4), 607–628.
- Nock, S.L., 2001. The marriages of equally dependent spouses. *J. Fam. Issues* 22 (6), 756–777.
- Oláh, L.S., Gähler, M., 2014. Gender equality perceptions, division of paid and unpaid work, and partnership dissolution in Sweden. *Soc. Forces* 93 (2), 571–594.
- Ono, H., 1998. Husbands' and wives' resources and marital dissolution. *J. Marriage Fam.* 60 (3), 674–689.
- Oppenheimer, V.K., 1997. Women's employment and the gain to marriage: the specialization and trading model. *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* 23, 431–453.
- Orloff, A.S., 1993. Gender and the social rights of citizenship: the comparative analysis of gender relations and welfare states. *Am. Sociol. Rev.* 58 (3), 303–328.
- Orloff, A.S., 2001. *Gender Equality, Women's Employment: Cross-national Patterns of Policy and Politics*. Paper prepared for a meeting of the International Sociological Association Research Committee 19, Poverty, Social Welfare and Social Policy: Old and New Social Inequalities: What Challenges for Welfare States?, University of Oviedo, Spain, September 6–9.
- Parsons, T., 1955. The American family: its relations to personality and to the social structure. In: Parsons, T., Bales, R.F. (Eds.), *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process*. The Free Press, Glencoe, IL, pp. 3–34.
- Pfau-Effinger, B., 2004. Development of Culture, Welfare States and Women's Employment in Europe. Ashgate, Burlington, VT.
- Poortman, A.-R., 2005. Women's work and divorce: a matter of anticipation? A research note. *Eur. Sociol. Rev.* 21 (3), 301–309.
- Poortman, A.-R., Kalmijn, M., 2002. Women's labour market position and divorce in the Netherlands: evaluating economic interpretations of the work effect. *Eur. J. Popul.* 18 (2), 175–202.
- Poortman, A.-R., Lyngstad, T.H., 2007. Dissolution risks in first and higher order marital and cohabiting unions. *Soc. Sci. Res.* 36, 1431–1446.
- Rogers, S.J., 2004. Dollars, dependency, and divorce: four perspectives on the role of wives' income. *J. Marriage Fam.* 66 (1), 59–74.
- Sainsbury, D., 1999. *Gender and Welfare State Regimes*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Sayer, L.C., Bianchi, S.M., 2000. Women's economic independence and the probability of divorce. *J. Fam. Issues* 21 (7), 906–943.
- Sigle-Rushton, W., 2009. Great Britain: 'things can only get better...'. In: Andreß, H.-J., Mummelsheim, D. (Eds.), *When Marriage Ends: Economic and Social Consequences of Partnership Dissolution*. Edward Elgar, Northampton, pp. 155–177.
- Sigle-Rushton, W., 2010. Men's unpaid work and divorce: reassessing specialization and trade in British families. *Fem. Econ.* 16 (2), 1–26.
- Soons, J.P.M., Kalmijn, M., 2009. Is marriage more than cohabitation? Well-being differences in 30 European countries. *J. Marriage Fam.* 71, 1141–1157.
- Stier, H., Lewin-Epstein, N., Braun, M., 2001. Welfare regimes, family-supportive policies, and women's employment along the life-course. *Am. J. Sociol.* 106 (6), 1731–1760.
- Stier, H., Mandel, H., 2009. Inequality in the family: the institutional aspects of women's earning contribution. *Soc. Sci. Res.* 38, 594–608.
- Teachman, J., 2010. Wives' economic resources and risk of divorce. *J. Fam. Issues* 31 (10), 1305–1323.
- Van Damme, M., Kalmijn, M., 2014. The dynamic relationships between union dissolution and women's employment: a life-history analysis of 16 countries. *Soc. Sci. Res.* 48, 261–278.
- Wagner, M., Weiß, B., 2006. European research on divorce risks: findings from a meta-analysis of European longitudinal studies. *Eur. Sociol. Rev.* 22 (5), 483–500.
- Walby, S., 1990. *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Weisshaar, K., 2014. Earnings equality and relationship stability for same-sex and heterosexual couples. *Soc. Forces* 93 (1), 93–123.
- West, C., Zimmerman, D.H., 1987. Doing gender. *Gen. Soc.* 1 (2), 125–151.