Fair or Unfair? Perceived Fairness of Household Division of Labour and Gender Equality among Women and Men

The Swedish Case

Mikael Nordenmark and Charlott Nyman
UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT The main aim of this study is to analyse how time use, individual resources, distributive justice and gender ideology influence perceptions of fairness concerning housework and gender equality. The analyses are based on survey data as well as on an interview study, both including Swedish couples. The quantitative results show that it is only factors connected to time use (division of housework and leisure time) that are significantly correlated to both perceptions of fairness concerning division of household labour and gender equality. Although the qualitative results in part confirm this picture, they also illustrate the complexity of concepts like fairness and equality. The interviews show that there are several factors and mechanisms at work in influencing perceptions of fairness and equality that were not possible to see from the quantitative analysis alone.

KEY WORDS distributive justice ◆ fairness ◆ gender equality ◆ gender ideology ◆ housework ◆ men ◆ resources ◆ time use ◆ women

INTRODUCTION

A general political goal in Sweden is to work towards gender equality. The official government definition of gender equality states that women and men should have the same rights, obligations and possibilities in all

The European Journal of Women's Studies Copyright © 2003 SAGE Publications (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), Vol. 10(2): 181–209
[1350-5068(200305)10:2;181–209;030795]

important areas of life. An equal society is one in which the uneven balance of work and power between the sexes is eliminated (Regeringens proposition 1987/8: 105: 3). Central to this is every individual's right to economic independence via paid employment. For this to be possible, at least two things are necessary: men and women must have equal chances on the labour market, and both must share the responsibility for home and children. These are seen as central if the political goal of equality between men and women is to be realized. The results of these efforts can be seen in the high level of women's labour market participation in Sweden, but also in Swedes' attitudes: 78 and 83 percent of men and women respectively feel that both partners should share responsibility for breadwinning, and 77 and 86 percent respectively feel that housework should be shared equally (Roman and Vogler, 1999).

Despite this fact, and the fact that the distribution of labour is more equal now than a generation ago, statistics show that paid employment and housework are still shared according to traditional patterns. Women still have primary responsibility for housework and caring for children (Benjamin and Sullivan, 1996; Gallie et al., 1994; Kalleberg and Rosenfeld, 1990; Liem and Liem, 1988; Nermo, 1994; Nordenmark, 2000; Presser, 1994; Szinovacz and Harpster, 1994) and even though men have taken on more of the responsibility for household work, it has not been to the same degree as women's increased engagement in paid work (Bäck-Wiklund and Bergsten, 1996; Holter and Aarseth, 1994; Statistics Sweden, 2000). This has resulted in what Hochschild (1989) has referred to as a 'second shift' for women but not for men. This study explores the extent to which Swedish men and women regard the household division of labour as fair; it also takes a look at how gender equal they regard themselves. In addition, factors that are believed to influence these perceptions are analysed.

Despite the unequal distribution of household labour that exists in the societies analysed, many studies have found that a majority of both men and women see the household division of labour as fair. A Swedish study by Ahrne and Roman (1997) supports the picture of an unequal division of housework and shows that only 13 percent of the couples in their study were described as equal in terms of how they shared housework. Surprisingly, they also found that only 30 percent of the women and 20 percent of the men felt that the division of housework was unfair. A large number of international studies have also found that a majority of cohabiting or married women and, especially, men regard the division of labour as fair and equitable (Baxter, 2000; Lennon and Rosenfeld, 1994; Perry-Jenkins and Folk, 1994; Sanchez, 1994; Sanchez and Kane, 1996; Wilkie et al., 1998).

Understanding why so many women and men see unequal sharing of time and work as fair, and the variation in experienced fairness is a growing topic of academic discussion and debate. However, few studies

have analysed how perceptions of fairness concerning housework are related to perceptions of gender equality in general, which is one aim of this study. Drawing on the overview by Sanchez and Kane (1996), we present a brief summary of some of the central factors used for explaining perceptions of fairness. These explanations can also be assumed to be central for explaining perceptions of gender equality.

How household work is understood is central to many of the theories used to study both the actual distribution of household work as well as attempts to understand perceptions of fairness regarding housework. One group of approaches looks at housework in a pragmatic, instrumental way. Theoretical approaches that would fit into this group have to do with time use and availability, new home economics and economic-based power theories. These highlight the importance of things like time use and availability, individual resources and power in explaining housework outcomes, all of which can also be used to understand perceptions of fairness and equality. A majority of the research emphasizing this perspective points out that the understanding of fairness is, in one way or another, related to the actual division of labour and time within the household. Spouses who share paid and unpaid work more often report that the division of labour is fair, compared to those who do not share work to the same extent (Baxter, 2000; Lennon and Rosenfeld, 1994; Perry-Jenkins and Folk, 1994; Sanchez, 1994; Sanchez and Kane, 1996; Wilkie et al., 1998). Some studies have found that women's estimated degree of experienced fairness is primarily related to men's time spent on female tasks (Blair and Johnsson, 1992; Dempsy, 1999; Lennon and Rosenfield, 1994). Individual resources, power and options have also been identified as important for how perceptions of fairness are formed: women who have small economic resources have been found to be more likely to see an unequal division as fair, compared to women who have extensive economic resources (Lennon and Rosenfield, 1994).

Another group of theories emphasizes symbolic and relational meanings of gender, housework and childcare. One such approach that has been successfully used to study justice in families is the distributive justice approach (Dempsy, 1999; Gager, 1998; Greenstein, 1996; Major, 1987; Thompson, 1991). Central assumptions of this approach are that feelings of (in)equity are based on subjective evaluations of outcomes, the degree to which outcomes are valued, and that perceptions of fairness and equity are the result of comparison with others (Greenstein, 1996; Major, 1987; Thompson, 1991). Rules of justice may be an equal (50:50) division of housework, however research has shown that this ideal is rare since it is regarded as too impersonal and routinized to be used in a marital context (Noddings, 1984). Whether we make intra-gender or inter-gender comparisons is also important; if a woman compares her partner's contributions with her own she will probably be less satisfied with them than if

she compares them with other men's. If the outcomes we receive are in line with our expectations, equity, or fairness, is experienced; however if outcomes fall short of our expectations, we feel deprived (Greenstein, 1996). The legitimacy of the procedures that created outcomes, or justifications, are also important. Justifications that are seen as adequate will most likely foster perceptions of fairness despite inequality (Dempsy, 1999; Gager, 1998; Major, 1987; Thompson, 1991). Several studies have demonstrated the usefulness of this approach (Dempsey, 1999; Gager, 1998; Hawkins et al., 1998).

Another approach that can be included among the symbolic approaches is gender ideology. Gender ideology has been found to play an important role in forming perceptions of fairness by its role in shaping expectations and behaviour of women and men in couple relationships (Blair and Johnson, 1992; Greenstein, 1996; Hochschild, 1989). A person's gender ideology will influence what outcomes are valued and what standards and references are used to judge outcomes. For instance, women with a traditional gender ideology might value stability and harmony, while women with an egalitarian gender ideology might value autonomy and independence (Greenstein, 1996). Women with different gender ideologies then might evaluate the same division of housework in different ways; as long as the rewards a woman receives coincide with her expectations, she will probably experience the outcome as equitable and fair. A woman's evaluation of the division of housework may also vary depending on whether she sees the outcome as the result of a legitimate or justifiable process.

Understanding how the terms studied in this article are conceptualized by respondents is also crucial for interpretation of the data. 'Fairness' is a vague term and can be defined in many ways, for instance in terms of equality, equity or need (Dempsy, 1999; Thompson, 1991; Wilkie et al., 1998). How housework and responsibility for it are defined will most likely be important for perceptions of fairness. Housework can be defined narrowly to include only the regular and frequent tasks of cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping and such. It can also be defined broadly as including *all* of the tasks that must be done in a home, which include infrequent tasks such as repairs. 'Gender equality' is a term often used in Swedish public debate and official definitions of this focus on women's and men's chances to similar conditions and their influence on the labour market and in politics. However, it becomes more diffusely conceptualized on the level of the family and little is known about how individuals interpret and apply this term in their daily lives. How this is understood on a personal and family level will of course influence perceptions of it. Gender equality can been operationalized and measured in terms of how housework and money are shared between spouses and perceptions of fairness regarding this can be understood in terms of the partners' influence in

decision-making; partners may also have different understandings of what gender equality is (Björnberg and Kollind, 1997; SOU, 1998).

With this study we hope to contribute to the general understanding of how perceptions of fairness are formed and how gender equality is conceptualized by Swedish women and men. The aim of this article is to study the importance of time use, individual resources, distributive justice and gender ideology for perceptions of fairness and understandings of gender equality. Two Swedish studies are used to do this, a survey study and a qualitative interview study.

DATA AND VARIABLES

The quantitative study provides the possibility to gain an overview of the various factors and variables, as well as to draw general conclusions about the centrality of different factors when studying perceptions of fairness and equality. The qualitative study can facilitate increased understanding of how men and women perceive fairness related to housework and gender equality by allowing us to go beneath the surface of survey data. The survey study does not provide data on all of the aspects discussed in the previous section, and consequently, the importance of time use and individual resources are the focus for this study. These factors are also discussed in the qualitative section. In addition, the qualitative analyses incorporate the more subjective and elusive distributive justice perspective and gender ideology. This study tries to combine the advantages of each method and the hope is that the two sets of data will complement one another and provide a unique opportunity to further our understanding of perceptions of fairness and gender equality.

The quantitative data set is called 'Work and Economy in Swedish Households' (WESH) and consists of 472 couples with children. The survey was done as a supplementary study to Statistics Sweden's annual Survey of Living Conditions (SLC), which is a face-to-face interview study of 5732 randomly selected Swedish respondents. SLC was carried out continuously during 1998 and WESH consists of all cohabiting respondents with children in the SLC, plus their partner, who were interviewed during the second half of 1998. These couples were personally given questionnaires by the SLC interviewer, one for the woman and one for the man. For 78 percent of all couples both the woman and the man answered the questionnaire, resulting in a data set consisting of 472 women and 472 men. The analyses include couples where both the man and the woman are in the labour force, which resulted in 410 couples. Respondents were asked questions about the sharing of time and money within the household and how the division of these tasks was perceived.

There are two main dependent variables in the quantitative analyses.

One measures the respondents' perceived degree of fairness regarding the division of household work by asking: 'Do you feel that you and your partner share household work in a fair way?' The other question indicates perceptions of gender equality by asking how gender equal the respondent's partner relationship is. Other variables used in the analyses connected with perceptions of fairness are one question concerning the extent to which the respondent and their partner disagree regarding the division of housework and two questions asking respondents if they think that they or their partner should do more housework. The response options consist of a 10-step scale concerning the question about inequality and four-step scales concerning the other questions.

Independent variables measuring time use are: *division of housework*, which is an index consisting of seven questions about who does different tasks in the household. The questions are: who usually shops for food, cooks meals, washes dishes, does laundry, cleans and tidies up, buys clothes and shoes for children and does activities together with children? The index varies between –7 to 7, where –7 means that it is the woman who usually takes care of all seven of the household tasks and 7 indicates that it is the man who has the main responsibility for all of the domestic duties; w*orking hours*, *difference in working hours* (man's working hours minus woman's working hours) and *leisure time in relation to partner* (less, equal, more). Variables measuring individual resources are: *control over household economy* (woman, share, man), which is measured with a question about who has overall responsibility for planning the family economy and seeing to it that there is money for bills, *monthly* w*age, wage difference* (man's wage minus woman's wage), *occupational position* (unskilled worker, skilled worker, lower white collar, self-employed, middle white collar, higher white collar) and *difference in occupational position* (man's occupational position minus woman's occupational position).

The qualitative data consist of interviews conducted in 1996 and 2000. The couples included in the first interview study were chosen randomly from a list acquired from the Swedish tax authorities of men aged between 30 and 40 who had a child born in 1989, which was thought to ensure that the couple has been together long enough to have established routines of sharing. So as to get as complete a picture as possible of family life and to avoid what Safilios-Rothschild (1969) called a 'wives' sociology of the family', both the husband and the wife were interviewed separately (see Nyman, 1999, for a more detailed methodological discussion). The second interview study was started in 2000 and is currently still in process. These interviews consist of an interview with the couple followed by separate interviews with the man and woman a week or two later. These couples were found through acquaintances of acquaintances or through flier and/or local newspaper. The individuals interviewed were all between

the ages of 27 and 42 at the time of the interview and all had children. All of the individuals had some form of income and their educational levels and incomes varied. The questions in all the interviews were primarily open-ended, designed to stimulate reflection and discussion. The main topics of interest were the sharing of money and time within households and how these were discussed, negotiated and perceived.

One obvious drawback with this kind of sample is the risk of self-selection; couples who agreed to participate in the study were probably fairly happy with their relationship and not going through major marital or economic difficulties. Although the sample size of 14 couples may seem small, ample data are provided to offer a deeper understanding of the issues at hand. Due to the nature of the interview study not all topics were discussed in equal depth with each individual yet they provide insight into several interesting areas. Finally, one large advantage of both the qualitative and the quantitative data is that they include information about both spouses *from* both spouses, which provides a more balanced picture and makes possible comparisons within as well as between couples.

This article draws on interviews with six of the couples that participated in the two studies. No conscious selection of these couples took place before starting work on this article. The couples here represent in illustrative and clear ways the points discussed in the article and quotes from them were chosen on the basis of how well they illustrated the topics at hand.

FINDINGS

This section analyses first the quantitative data set, which will be followed by an analysis of the qualitative data. The quantitative part studies the relationships between perceived unfairness regarding the household division of labour, gender inequality, time use and individual resources. All analyses are done separately for men and women, which allows comparisons between men's and women's perceptions. In the qualitative analysis, the goal is to analyse the usefulness of a distributive justice approach and the role of gender ideology for perceptions of equity related to the sharing of housework. It also attempts to shed more light on the results presented in the quantitative section in order to increase our understanding of the complexity which characterizes perceptions of fairness and gender equality.

Results from the Quantitative Study

Table 1 presents the extent to which Swedish couples regard the division of housework as fair and judge their relationship as equal. Compared to

TABLE 1
Experienced Degree of Unfairness Concerning Division of Housework and Degree of Inequality within the Relationship among Women and Men

	Women		Men	
	N	%	*N*	%
Fairness concerning housework				
Yes, absolutely fair	29	7	33	8
Yes, pretty fair	191	48	220	55
No, not really fair	133	34	129	32
No, not fair at all	44	11	18	5
Gender equality				
1 Totally equal	112	29	139	35
2	41	11	47	12
3	84	21	89	23
4	43	11	56	14
5	18	5	9	2
6	26	7	21	5
7	32	8	21	5
8	20	5	11	3
9	7	2	0	0
10 Not equal at all	3	1	3	1

earlier studies, a relatively large percentage of both Swedish men and women perceive the division of housework as unfair. About 45 percent of women and 37 percent of men responded that the division of household work is not fair. However, it is interesting to note that a majority of both women and men still regard the division as fair. When considering gender equality, the picture is similar. On the gender equality scale, which varies from 1 (completely equal) to 10 (not equal at all), the medium average score is 3.4 for women and 2.9 for men, indicating that most of the couples regard themselves as fairly equal. As much as 29 percent of the women and 35 percent of the men see their relationship as totally equal. Also interesting here is that men, to a larger degree than women, feel that the sharing of housework is fair and that they live in a gender-equal relationship.

After studying these figures we analyse how perceptions of unfairness concerning household division of labour and gender inequality are related to other variables indicating conflicts and desires associated with the division of household labour. In Table 2, the gender inequality scale, questions concerning unfairness and disagreements concerning housework, and questions indicating desires about whether the respondent herself or her partner should do more household labour are studied. The table presents correlation coefficients (Pearson's) that indicate the strength of the relationships between the variables; the greater the value, the stronger the relationship.

TABLE 2
Correlation Matrix on Perceptions of Unfairness (Pearson's)

	Disagreements	Should do more	Partner should do more	Inequality
Women				
Unfairness	.457***	−.221***	.648***	.479***
Disagreements		−.111*	.544***	.405***
Should do more			−.078	−.177***
Partner should do more				.453***
Men				
Unfairness	.158***	.435***	−.125*	.367***
Disagreements		.184***	.185***	.276***
Should do more			−.131**	.231***
Partner should do more				−.042

*p = .05; **p = .01; ***p = .001.

First, the results show that the variables that are related to the degree of controversy concerning housework are significantly correlated to each other for both women and men. Those who report that the division of housework is unfair also report to a higher degree that they often disagree about the sharing of domestic work, and this is especially significant for women. The question measuring whether the respondent thinks that she or he should do more housework and questions indicating perceptions of unfairness/disagreements concerning the division of housework are negatively correlated to each other for women and positively related to each other for men. In fact, relationships between perceptions of unfairness/disagreements and the question of whether the partner should do more domestic work go in opposite directions. These results indicate that most men and women, who judge the household division of labour as unfair, regard the division as unfair towards the woman. Second, questions measuring the degree of controversy concerning the distribution of housework are strongly related to perceptions of inequality between spouses. Especially women, but also men, who perceive the division of unpaid labour as unfair, also see their relationship as unequal.

Table 3 analyses how conceptions of unfairness and gender inequality are related to variables measuring time use and individual resources within households. The B-coefficients generated from a logistic regression indicate how the independent variables are related to unfairness and inequality. A significant positive value means that there is a higher risk that the respondent sees the household division of labour as unfair and the relationship as unequal in relation to the reference category. A negative coefficient means that there is a lower risk in relation to the reference category (reference category within brackets). When the

TABLE 3
OLS Regression: Perceptions of Unfairness and Gender Inequality Related to Time Use and Individual Resources (Unstandardized B-coefficients)

	Women		Men	
	Unfairness	Inequality	Unfairness	Inequality
Constant	1.195	.632	1.736	−.407
Time use				
Division of housework	−.187***	−.163**	−.104***	−.168***
Working hours	.007	−.027	.003	.002
Difference in working hours	.000	.000	.000	.003
Leisure time in relation to partner				
More	.005	−.357	.301***	.536*
Less	.244**	.744**	.061	.352
(Equal)	0	0	0	0
Individual resources				
Control over economy				
Respondent	.176	.332	.151	.264
Partner	.050	.667	.160	.356
(Share)	0	0	0	0
Wage	.000	.000	.000	.000
Difference in wage	.000	.000	.000	.000
Occupational position	.027	.145	.031	.047
Difference in occupational position	.016	.063	−.018	.041
Unfairness concerning housework		1.125***		.763***
R^2	.312	.333	.187	.191
N	327	310	331	319

*p = .05; **p = .01; ***p = .001.

independent variable is continuous a positive coefficient means that the higher the score on the independent variable the greater risk for experiencing unfairness and inequality. A negative coefficient indicates that the higher the score on the independent variable, the lower the risk for experiencing unfairness and inequality.

The results show that mainly factors connected to time use prove to be significantly related to perceptions of fairness concerning household division of labour and gender equality. Both the division of housework and the division of leisure time activity are of relevance for women's and men's perceptions of fairness and equality. The larger the share of the household work that is done by the man, the fairer the division of housework and the more equal the relationship is perceived to be. Further, spouses who divide leisure time equally also see the division of household labour as more fair and feel more gender equal, compared to those

in which women have less leisure time than men. Surprisingly, the amount of time spent on doing paid work is not significantly related to perceptions of fairness and gender equality.

Analysing the significance of individual resources, Table 3 indicates that the centrality of this factor for explaining perceptions of fairness and inequality seems to be limited. There are no significant results when analysing the importance of control over household economy, wage, difference in wages, occupational position and difference in occupational position within the household. Finally, unfairness concerning division of unpaid labour is strongly correlated with a sense of inequality even in the multivariate analysis. The stronger the feeling of unfairness, the higher the risk for feelings of inequality.

In conclusion, the preceding analyses show that a majority of both Swedish women and men regard the division of housework as fair and perceive themselves as relatively gender equal in general even though research has pointed out that women do most of the household work. When trying to explain the variation in perceptions of fairness concerning the division of housework and gender equality, time use within the household is more important than individual resources within the household. The actual division of household labour is strongly related to perceptions of unfairness concerning division of housework, and both the division of household work and feelings of unfairness related to the division of housework are strongly correlated with perceptions of inequality between spouses. Also, the division of leisure time between spouses is of relevance, while the time spent on paid labour seems to play only a marginal role in determining perceptions of fairness and gender equality.

Although the actual division of housework clearly matters, the results indicate that a considerable proportion of both women and men who live in relationships where the woman does the majority of household tasks respond that the distribution of housework is fair and that they live in fairly equal relationships. How can one understand why so many women and men perceive that they share household duties fairly when studies of household division of labour contradict this picture? This and related issues are interpreted further in the qualitative analyses following.

Results from the Qualitative Study

The main result from the previous section was that the division of time, and especially the division of housework, is the most important factor for experiences of fairness and gender equality. It could also be seen in the interviews, explicitly or implicitly, that women who did more housework than their husbands felt that this was unfair. Though not all of these women *explicitly* expressed feelings of unfairness, some did. Helena, for instance, does more housework than her husband Nils. She works 75

percent of full time in order to spend more time with their children. She is prepared to do a somewhat larger share of the housework since she is at home more than her husband. She does all laundry, washing up, cooking during the week, while Nils helps out with cooking and cleaning, especially on weekends. However, Helena feels that she has ended up doing too much of the housework, despite her attempts to even out the division somewhat. This unequal sharing of housework is experienced as unfair by her, in part because it infringes on time with her children and this unfairness is something she admits. In the following quote, Helena explains how she feels about the division of housework:

> *Helena:* Yes, of course I feel that I take, that I do too much, I do.
>
> *Interviewer:* That it is like this, is it something you have come to an agreement about, that you are to do more of the housework?
>
> *Helena:* No, it's not something that we've reached an agreement about explicitly, it isn't. . . . I guess it's maybe that I, I guess it's partly my fault too that I've taken a larger share. But I think I have *too* big a share of housework, I do.

Nils and Helena have different notions of their division of housework. According to Nils, they share cooking and cleaning fairly equally but he agrees that she does almost all laundry and washing up. He also explains that they have talked through and agreed on the division. He feels that their division of housework in which Helena does more is fair, in part because she has more time since she works 75 percent:

> *Interviewer:* Does it feel fair that she has a larger share of the responsibility [for housework]?
>
> *Nils:* Yes, she had more leisure time on weekdays, right after work, than I have.
>
> *Interviewer:* That she spends more time taking care of the house, that's OK?
>
> *Nils:* Yes, the home and the kids. Yes.

Nils says here that Helena's larger share of housework is fair because she has more leisure time, which in turn is due to her working part-time. He is in effect then saying that she should do more housework than him because she works (paid) less than he does. Leisure time then seems to be an aspect that is taken into consideration when evaluating the fairness of time spent doing housework, which Helena's response also shows:

> *Interviewer:* Do you feel that this is unfair, that you do more [housework], even though you have taken it upon yourself more or less voluntarily?
>
> *Helena:* Yes, I do. I think that Nils has, if you look at the number of hours that he can spend on leisure, then Nils has more of that bit. . . . Even though he

> works full time, partly he has more free, that is more scheduled leisure activities away from home. He does sports and such, but even that aside he has more free time than I do.
>
> . . .
>
> *Helena:* . . . Nils says that he doesn't stop me from taking a painting course or whatever. I don't think it's only about that either. But I think that it's an unequal division [of leisure time] and it's something I would like to change.

Both Helena and Nils seemed to evaluate the sharing of housework partly in terms of what it means for their access to leisure time, something which was important for perceptions of fairness regarding housework in the regression analysis as well. Nils responded that it was fair that Helena did more housework because she worked fewer hours (in paid employment), which according to Nils meant that she had more leisure time. Yet when asked which of them had more leisure time, both responded that he had more than Helena did. However, Nils's response becomes somewhat confusing when asked about how he defines leisure time:

> *Interviewer:* When you consider her leisure time, do you count the time, the time she spends working in the home?
>
> *Nils:* No, I don't. I wouldn't choose to do that in my leisure time, so. It's about from the time she gets home, that we're both home, when you've come home from work. That's what I count as leisure.

He seems to be saying that she should spend her leisure time doing housework since she has this extra time compared to him. At the same time however, he also says that time she spends doing housework does not count as leisure time since housework is not a leisure activity. However, his understanding of leisure time, as something that starts when they come home from work, does not allow time for housework or childcare, something he does not comment on but which is important for his understanding of leisure time. These somewhat confused responses seem to indicate that the reason for the division of housework is not thoroughly thought through. It also suggests a lack of understanding of the time it takes to keep house and care for children. This view was supported by a response from Helena, in which she explains that she had recently been out of town for a few days and Nils had been left alone with the children:

> *Helena:* . . . It was three, four days and then he saw how much there is to do when he alone is responsible for the kids. That you have to drive them here and there and go with them to the pool and remember to be. . . . Otherwise in the day to day he doesn't see it since I do most of it.

This discrepancy in Helena's and Nils's experiences of and insight into

daily family life means that Nils (as most other men who do not equally share responsibility for the domestic sphere) may not really understand what having most of the responsibility for the home and children actually entails in terms of work and time (see Nyman, 1999, regarding money). In addition, it seemed that respondents included childcare in their definition of housework, which is an area that is even more strongly defined as women's responsibility than is housework. If women include childcare in the conception of housework, as Helena does in the preceding quote, and men do not, then women's work load is even larger than men may realize. These differences in women's and men's definitions of domestic work may partly explain their different perceptions regarding the fairness of the division of housework. Men may simply not realize how much there actually is to do. This may also help explain the interesting phenomenon that some men, while perceiving unfairness, do not take any measures to change it. In addition, there seems to exist a clear relationship between perceptions of fairness regarding housework and perceptions of the sharing of leisure time. This relationship was found in several of the other interviews as well as is evident in the following.

Allan and Barbara are another couple in which the wife does more housework and childcare according to both of their responses. Both Barbara and Allan are aware of the skewed division and Allan says the following about how he thinks this situation is experienced by his wife.

> *Allan:* Sometimes I just go and leave everything. And there she stands with three screaming children and has to do everything. And I understand that she gets furious, to put it mildly! I would too if she just left like that.
>
> *Interviewer:* Is this something that you feel you should do something about?
>
> *Allan:* Yes, it's something that only I can do something about. It's not fair, it's that simple.

Allan also sees a connection between housework and leisure time, one that seems to be shared by Barbara in the following. She does the overwhelming majority of housework, while her husband Allan engages rather freely in his leisure activities.

> *Interviewer:* Leisure time, who has more leisure time?
>
> *Barbara:* He does.
>
> *Interviewer:* Is that because you have responsibility for the home?
>
> *Barbara:* No, it's because he takes the time it takes to go out and do [his hobby]. But I feel like there's never enough time. That's why I don't take the time.
>
> *Interviewer:* This . . . about time, how does it feel?
>
> *Barbara:* Yes, it doesn't feel that good. It feels kind of a little, yea, I think that

> he runs away sometimes . . . . And it's often just at the time of day when the kids are to be put to bed and I think it's maybe, I think it's a little unfair.

This couple, like Helena and Nils, illustrate that an important aspect of evaluations of fairness regarding the division of housework is how this division affects access to leisure, *relative to one's partner*.

Unfairness was also expressed in less explicit ways by the respondents. Several of the women interviewed *implicitly* expressed feelings of perceived unfairness in relation to how housework was shared, which Sofie provides an example of. Sofie and her husband William both work full-time, Sofie in childcare and William in sales and marketing. Because of varied working hours and conditions, Sofie's salary has varied considerably and she had been earning less than her husband. William travels a great deal in his job and occasionally brings work home with him. Sofie's workday runs from 6:00 a.m. until 4:00 or 5:00 in the evening; in addition, she spends time in the evenings and on weekends planning menus, activities and the like. Sofie does virtually all of the housework and childcare on weekdays while William does some tasks on the weekends. Sofie does almost all of the caring for their children, something she says she enjoys.

The interviewer asked her several times throughout the interview about how she perceived the fairness of how they shared housework and time. The quotes which follow are presented in the order they were spoken.

> *Interviewer*: Do you feel that it is fairly fair like it is?
>
> *Sofie:* Yes. It's not fair that he can sleep all Sunday and that I have to clean and take [care of] the children and such.
>
> . . .
>
> *Interviewer:* Do you think that it's a fair sharing of time, how you use time, you and William?
>
> *Sofie:* Mmmm. Yes, it's hard to be fair too, I think, when you have children. Or it's probably possible if [one] wants to [be].
>
> . . .
>
> *Interviewer:* Does it feel unfair then?
>
> *Sofie:* No. He has to work a lot. I think that's important. And I think, I, I think that's really important, his job. . . . It' . . . our only way out of this [strained financial situation], I think somehow. So then of course I do my bit to help and take the kids and everything around that. But sometimes, it's like I feel that . . . I, I'm only human. I don't know.

We can see here that Sofie's responses are somewhat ambivalent. She offers both explicit and implicit responses, which seem to express different things and even contradict each other at times. In the first quote she starts by responding with a clear 'yes' about whether their division of

housework is fair. However, she immediately changes direction and states explicitly that 'it's not fair' regarding at least one specific aspect. In the second quote, her response is a bit more wavering and uncertain and she seems to be avoiding a direct answer. She answers yes to the question of whether the sharing of time is fair but immediately qualifies her answer by explaining how difficult it is to be fair, perhaps as if to explain why it is *not* fair. In the third quote, she starts with an explicit response ('no') but this is followed by her explaining how important her husband's job is.

Sofie's careful and ambivalent expressions of unfairness can be understood in several ways, however it is important to be aware of the context and a few circumstances in their lives. The couple had very high bank loans due to an unsuccessful real estate affair several years earlier. Before moving to the town in which they now live, which is also William's hometown and far from Sofie's family, they had run a successful business together and their salaries were fairly equal, Sofie's being even somewhat higher so that she (they) would receive higher parent's cash benefit when she took parental leave. Their finances were very strained when the interview took place, in part due to their attempts to pay off the loan as soon as possible. During the interview, Sofie described an unequal division of housework and childcare in which she worked the extra 'second shift' after her day's work. Her responsibility for housework and childcare was established earlier when she worked less than William; prior to the arrival of their children they shared housework equally. The ambivalence in her responses may be a reflection of, and an attempt to legitimize or explain a division of labour that she realizes may appear to be unequal to an outsider. However, this division of time and housework was the most practical and rational for them at the time because of their specific circumstances. Sofie also explained that her job at home allows her to spend a great deal of time with her children, something she values.

The connection between the division of housework and leisure time is also evident in Sofie's response. The following is a response to the interviewer's question of whether she misses time for herself.

> *Sofie*: Yes, sometimes I feel that it's tough.
>
> *Interviewer:* Would it be possible to arrange in some way, to . . . ?
>
> *Sofie:* No, it's so difficult! . . . I go to personnel meetings once a month and then a girl comes to help [look after the children].
>
> . . .
>
> *Interviewer:* Does either of you have more leisure time do you think, you or him?
>
> *Sofie:* No, his is maybe more marked, in some way. When he's home from work he's free. But I don't have, I don't know, I'm always working, I feel.
>
> . . .

Interviewer: Do you think that it's a fair division of time, how you use time, you and William?

Sofie: Hmmm, yes, it's hard to be fair too, I think, when you have children. Or I guess it's possible if you want to.

Sofie's almost sole responsibility for the home and children in combination with a demanding full-time job is directly related to her low access to and level of leisure time. Sofie sees this arrangement in the context of the family's whole situation and seems to accept it as fair *because* it is best for the family as a whole and *because* it is difficult to be much fairer if you have children and the jobs that they have. This couple clearly subscribed to a traditional gender ideology and a hope for the near future was that they could manage on his salary alone so that Sofie could devote her time to being a housewife and mother. According to their shared traditional gender ideology, their division of responsibility for the home, children and careers is as it should be. Sofie justifies her scarce leisure time as something inevitable, a result of a division of labour she otherwise seems satisfied with and sees as fair.

The picture that Sofie and William painted of how they share housework and time is one characterized by hard work and long hours for both of them. Framed in this context, Sofie's responses can be seen in a new, or rather more informed, light. Her responses are to questions about how they share time and housework and the implicit unfairness she expresses may actually be referring to how they share housework. However, in her responses she refers not only to housework but also to other things such as leisure time, paid employment and their difficult financial situation. Knowing what we know about this couple, it becomes reasonable to suspect that her responses may also include expressions of her feelings about a number of interconnected aspects that woven together, directly or indirectly, relate back to how housework is shared. This makes the ambivalence and inconsistencies in her responses more comprehensible. We cannot be sure that it is the sharing of housework that Sofie's implicit expressions of unfairness refer to. The way they share housework is intricately connected to the conditions of their respective jobs, which in turn are in part a result of their strained finances and desire to get back on their feet economically as quickly as possible. It seems that their shared gender ideology and the total situation of the family, for instance strained finances, jobs and personal and family priorities, all play a role in decisions about how to share housework, and affect how sharing is perceived. This illustrates the complexity and interrelatedness which characterize family life and which influence the perceptions and responses of respondents. Other respondents' responses included the same kind of ambivalence expressed by Sofie and it is safe to assume that each individual's and couple's specific

context is important for their perceptions and for understanding their responses.

The ways in which housework, and whose responsibility the different tasks are, are defined may be important in shaping perceptions of fairness. A broad definition of housework, that divides tasks into traditionally female and male tasks, was common in the couples interviewed. Lena is on parental leave with their second child. She lost her job when she was expecting their first child and worked only sporadically before their second child was born; she has therefore no job to return to. Lena and her partner Fredrick both explained that their circumstances made it more practical for her to have responsibility for the home during this period; since she is home with the children anyway, she does the housework during the days, or on weekends. Lena does the laundry in part because they both see Fredrick as somewhat incompetent at this task. Earlier in their relationship, however, they shared housework, including laundry, more evenly than they do now. Fredrick commutes to work and has long work days so Lena tries to have dinner ready when he comes home so that he can spend a few hours with the children before they are put to bed. Below is what she says about housework and how they share it.

> *Lena:* He makes dinner one, . . . on weekends and such if we're having company. Then it's usually him that makes dinner . . . and he takes care of the car, he takes care of . . . he vacuums once in a while . . . he fixes and screws and moves pictures . . . maybe moves some furniture or fixes things . . .
>
> . . .
>
> *Lena:* Yes, I'm fairly satisfied anyway. [Housework] could be a little more evenly shared, for example, but on the other hand I see all that Fredrick does with . . . with all the other stuff . . .

Both responded that this division is fair and Lena felt that it was quite 'natural'. Their division of work is quite traditional, even though Fredrick also sometimes does some traditionally female chores. Lena however would like him to do more of the daily chores, more of *her* chores. Fredrick explains in the following quote what aspects of household chores he is responsible for.

> *Fredrick:* Ehh . . . household tasks for me, that can be that I cook once or twice a week. Usually I make breakfast on the weekends, I . . . usually take care of snow [shovelling], cutting the lawn and maintenance of . . . the home, whatever that . . . wallpapering, floors and . . . less to do with cleaning and washing up and laundry . . .
>
> . . .
>
> *Fredrick:* Well . . . During a week I spend maybe . . . (*sigh*) . . . what could it be, four hours maybe. And then I mean that I shovel snow, maybe a day a

> week and, [fix] a little furniture in the house, and then prepare snacks and breakfast and lunch and dinner and such.
>
> . . .
>
> *Fredrick:* . . . cleaning and stuff I would say that, daily, it's Lena who definitely does more because I don't have [the time] to do it but when I do have time then it's me who cleans the windows . . . the more demanding big jobs.

Lena and Fredrick do not have a sharp division of chores but they do define housework in terms of major areas of responsibility; Lena does the regular 'small' jobs while Fredrick does the more seldom 'big' tasks. They explained both implicitly and explicitly that they took into account the total workload (paid and unpaid labour) when negotiating the division of labour at home. Fredrick has a physically tiring job and works long hours, and both feel that he should not have to work when he comes home as well. However, neither of them mention the hard work and long days involved in taking care of two small children and a house on one's own. Lena's major responsibility is the regular domestic work and childcare while Fredrick's is breadwinning. Fredrick helps out with the housework and does a few other tasks, while Lena also contributes financially in the form of her parent's cash benefit (80 percent of her income prior to parental leave). They speak of this division as fair because they see the total workload as being shared quite equally between them. They perceive that they share equally in the things that go with a family. It is interesting to note that the total amount of work was not found to be significant in the regression analysis, yet several of the couples (e.g.Fredrick and Lena, Sofie and William) stated that total workload was important for how they divided up housework. Implicit in the way they discussed housework, childcare and paid labour was an understanding that Fredrick's paid work seemed to be valued more (and thereby counted as more work) than Lena's childcare and housework. Fredrick expressed more traditional values regarding a gendered division of labour than did Lena. However, the fact that they saw their current division of labour as the result of a joint agreement based on the shared understanding that it was the most practical considering their circumstances may also, in itself, have made the outcome seem fair to both of them.

Marie and Stefan both work full-time and earn about the same. They explained that she does most of the cooking, initiates and does the cleaning and straightening up, which is a situation that often causes conflicts. About her husband's responsibilities she said the following:

> *Marie:* But I know that Stefan can do a lot of other things, I mean we have . . . we can't forget that, if I'm to be honest and upfront here and that's that we have a special house . . . which means that Stefan spends a lot of time

> with those things, . . . chop wood, go get wood, carry in wood and I don't do much of that. So I mean to be honest Stefan does a lot, but not cleaning. . . . But there's a lot that I don't do that Stefan does . . .

By including more than the daily housework in the definition of housework, the number and percentage of tasks that Stefan does is larger than if housework had been defined more narrowly, which may contribute to the perception that sharing is fair.

Nils was also careful to point out that tasks other than those normally regarded as women's tasks should be included when discussing the division of household work:

> *Nils*: Yes, but in housework I also include mowing the lawn and shovelling snow in the winter, and I usually do those, that part.

His wife Helena, however, did not seem to take these kinds of tasks into consideration when defining housework.

For the couples quoted, the uneven division of housework may seem fair because: (1) housework is defined as the 'small' daily tasks of cleaning, washing and cooking, which in turn are defined as primarily the woman's responsibility, (2) other tasks, albeit more infrequent but 'bigger' ones are defined as men's responsibility and his doing them facilitates the evaluation that sharing is quite equal, (3) male tasks are more visible because they are separated out from 'other' housework and are of a more dramatic (dirty, heavy) nature, with the result that men get more recognition and credit for what they do, (4) perceptions of and responses to housework are interwoven with other aspects of family life; responses about the one may actually include and be connected to perceptions about other areas of a couple's life.

Another couple, Monica and Richard, had a different way of defining housework, which influenced their way of sharing and perceiving it. Sharing responsibility for the daily housework was important to them, as we can see in their responses from the couple interview.

> *Monica:* It's my firm belief that if Richard wasn't able to see that it was . . . dirty in the corners as well as I see it, then I wouldn't be as much in love with him as I am. I feel that it's important, for me, I mean it feels so incomprehensible . . . that there are people who say that they *help out* at home when both work.
>
> *Richard:* The fact that neither of us see it as me helping out at home or that you [directed to Monica] do, it's a given that we both participate . . . that it's our responsibility.
>
> . . .
>
> *Interviewer:* It feels then fair, the way it is?
>
> *Richard:* Yes I think so (*Monica:* Yes). That's all you can go by, how it feels.

This couple defined housework to include everything that needed to be done in the home, but as something that they both shared responsibility for equally, without gendered divisions of responsibilty. Tasks were not strictly divided into his and hers along traditional gender lines and the rule of justice was a 50:50 division.

Traditionally female tasks such as preparing food, cleaning and such, are usually defined as the responsibility of the woman, even if the husband may 'help' with these. Typically male chores such as chopping wood and small household repairs are defined as the man's work. Defining housework in a broad enough way to include *everything* that must be done over the course of a year allows for a more generous evaluation of men's contributions. Then, chopping wood, hanging pictures and mowing the lawn are counted as housework and taken into account when evaluating spouses' contributions. An evaluation based on only daily tasks might have resulted in a verdict of a more unequal and possibly less fair division.

Gender equality is a concept that is seen and heard often in various contexts in Swedish society, however it seemed to be an abstract concept for many of the respondents. In the following, Marie's response to the question of whether they were equal seemed to be a long inner dialogue about what it actually means. Her husband, who also spoke at length, seemed however to have a clearer understanding of it.

> *Marie:* It's a difficult question really. It's this, what is it that is gender equality anyway? . . . But then, when it comes down to it . . . we have different areas that we prioritize, or how should I put it, that are quite female and male, they really are! And if that means that, based on that, we're not equal, well that's just . . . I think we're victims of our generation so to speak, we, well, ... I have certain things with me from my upbringing, like, how you're supposed to be as a mother and a homemaker . . . I mean you could say a lot about it . . . but it's not like I feel, 'God how unequal we are!', I don't feel that . . .
>
> *Stefan:* It's such a sweeping term . . . uhh . . . but I, if you read into it the value that you share responsibility equally . . . for the common household, your common life together then we're very equal! Uhh, then there's this that you [directed to Marie] maybe clean more and I chop wood and things like that but I don't know, that's the traditional male–female and I don't know if there's anything wrong with that . . .

The couple who seemed to actually live in a gender-equal relationship, Monica and Richard, seemed to have the clearest notion and also had the most succinct response to the question of whether they thought they were equal:

> *Monica:* Yes, I think we [are] to a very high degree . . . it's hard to see sometimes but it feels good.

Not sharing household work and breadwinning would clash with their efforts to live in a gender-equal manner and thereby also be perceived as unfair. The equal sharing of breadwinning (their incomes were about the same), housework and all of the other tasks that are inherent to family life were (for them) natural consequences of their way of defining gender equality. Any other arrangement would have been perceived and defined as unfair. For this couple, the importance of gender equality was plain to see and played a central role in how tasks were defined and shared. While Marie, quoted earlier, seemed to be trying to define gender equality during the course of the interview, it seemed that Monica and Richard had a clear idea of what *they* meant by gender equality and had found ways of organizing their daily life together accordingly.

Gender equality seemed to be conceived of in terms of the division of housework and leisure time by several of the respondents, perhaps as a way of making this vague concept more concrete. In fact, several of the discussions about gender equality turned into, or included unsolicited discussions about housework. This connection between gender equality and the division of housework and leisure time supports the findings from the regression analysis. Carina, for instance, in response to a question about whether she thought their way of sharing housework was different from others', spontaneously associated the question of housework to gender equality, which her response to the question about housework illustrates:

> *Carina*: I think that we, if we compare ourselves with many others then we're pretty [gender] equal. You hear that among our couple-friends anyway.

The analysis of the survey data in the previous section showed that, in addition to the division of housework, perceptions of fairness and gender equality were also associated with division of leisure time, which was clearly supported in the interview data as well. For Monica and Richard, who share housework equally and allow each other time and space for their leisure activities, access to leisure time was a valued outcome of their relationship and was a central aspect of their feelings of fairness as well as gender equality. They felt that their division of housework and time is fair. Their definition of gender equality included equal sharing of work and leisure and the way they shared these provided them with this valued outcome, one which is very important and that they have worked hard at achieving.

One way of defining gender equality then seemed to be in terms of the division of housework; it was also evaluated in relation to what they expected and what felt 'right', or in comparison with the couple's friends and their ways of sharing housework. Gender equality was not discussed

explicitly in all of the interviews but where it was, all of the couples defined themselves as equal regardless of how household work was shared. In fact, discussions of gender equality resembled discussions of fairness in that the definitions of both seemed to accommodate and include the couple/individual being interviewed, though not always so easily. This term is used extensively in many different discourses in Swedish society, but it was apparent in the interviews that it is not always clear what is meant by gender equality. The vagueness of the term and individuals' apparent difficulty defining it for themselves suggest that people may be responding to very different notions. A variety of ways of organizing family life and sharing the different aspects of it can be seen by the couples themselves as being in a gender-equal way, regardless of what the 'objective' picture is. Many of the respondents seemed to be struggling as individuals as well as couples to find ways of understanding gender equality and applying it to their own lives and relationships in ways that work. Despite the general awareness of gender equality on a more abstract level in Sweden, it is perhaps not something that most people have defined in a personal way.

Several examples of the usefulness of a distributive justice approach were found in the interviews. A rule of justice based on equality, that is a 50:50 split seemed to be unusual unless housework was defined to include the more seldom done traditionally male tasks. The exception was Monica and Richard, who had an egalitarian gender ideology. Though intra-gender comparisons were found in the interview data, we could also see that Swedish women do in fact use inter-gender comparisons when evaluating the fairness of how housework and even access to leisure time are shared (i.e. Helena and Nils, Barbara and Allan), which may lead to higher levels of experienced unfairness if these prove to be uneven. Whether Swedish women use these comparative referents more than other women is difficult to say but the strong ideal of gender equality in Sweden would make this likely since the emphasis is often on the equal sharing between women and men. In addition, valued outcomes, which are in turn influenced by gender ideologies, seem to be an important factor in evaluating fairness. The feeling that a decision (how to share housework) was arrived at together, as well as justifications for a decision that are accepted also seemed to be important for perceptions of fairness. As we saw in the quantitative analysis this study finds more perceived unfairness by women than other studies.

Another factor that seemed to be important to take into account is the specific and entire life situation faced by the individual couples. Many of the couples gave examples of their unique situation and how it affected their way of organizing their family life and perceiving the fairness of the outcomes. In the case of Sofie and William, their large burdensome loans were given as the reason for William's long hours and hard work and

Sofie's second shift was her way of contributing to getting out of their common plight. In the case of Lena and Fredrick, the fact that she had no job to return to, and his physically exhausting job and long days, were given as the reasons for Lena's sole responsibility for housework and childcare. For Maria and Stefan, their special house and the extra work it required was said to be the reason for Maria taking on the lion's share of responsibility for the regular housework.

Gender ideologies are also important to consider when trying to understand perceptions of fairness regarding the sharing of housework, in part because a couple's or individual's gender ideology will influence what outcomes are valued. In the case of Sofie and William, childcare and housework were defined as the responsibility of Sofie according to their shared traditional gender ideology. Sofie's acceptance of William's role as over-time working breadwinner and of her responsibility for the domestic sphere (the second shift) on top of her full-time job can be seen as a result of their gender ideologies. Departing from this arrangement would most likely be regarded as neglecting their responsibility as wife and mother in the case of Sofie, and as main breadwinner in William's case. Questioning the order of things would imply a questioning of their shared gender ideology, and their responses do not indicate that this is something they were inclined to do. It follows then that the unequal sharing of housework (defined as *her* work) is regarded as fair because *his* work is breadwinning and 'helping out' with housework. Despite the unequal division, both received the outcomes they valued. Several of the respondents expressed somewhat traditional gender ideologies regarding their understandings of division of responsibilities and housework, and outcomes often reflected these. Lena and especially her husband Fredrick expressed traditional values regarding men's and women's work and the outcome of their division coincides with this valued (at least for Fredrick) outcome. Speaking of housework, Jenny, who had main responsibility for housework and childcare, summarized this nicely, 'as a woman [I] kind of feel that the main responsibility is mine'.

The gender ideologies then clearly seemed to influence what outcomes were valued, and these differed, as we could also see regarding Sofie and Monica. Sofie, at least in part because of her traditional gender ideology, values caring for her family, raising her children as she sees fit, being supportive of her husband in his career and keeping peace and order in the house while also valuing her husband's breadwinning abilities. The fact that she receives the valued outcomes of spending time with her children, keeping her house as she wants it and feeling proud of her husband's accomplishments may mean that she is less inclined to experience her heavier workload as unfair. In contrast, Monica and Richard's egalitarian gender ideology meant that they value equal sharing of responsibility for all aspects of their life together. They felt it important

that each have adequate leisure time, that they share the burden of supporting the family as well as all the tasks inherent to family life. Finally, gender ideology may also influence how individuals perceive and report their housework contributions (Press and Townsley, 1998).

Finally, it was clear in the respondents' discussions about housework, leisure and gender equality that these can be, and sometimes are, understood very differently by different individuals, even individuals in the same couple. Housework could be defined broadly as including even non-regular activities such as home and car maintenance or more narrowly. How it was defined had consequences for how fairness regarding the division of it was perceived. Leisure, is a vague concept and can also be defined differently, and we saw that discussions about housework often included leisure time as well, indicating that the two are linked in important ways. Gender equality is a term that is in some respects overused and underdefined in Sweden, leading to ambiguities and uncertainties when trying to apply it to people's daily lives. Interpreting responses about such vague and multifaceted concepts as these can be problematic but the richness of information to be learned about them is great if their complexity is borne in mind.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The main research question to be answered in this article was how time use, individual resources, distributive justice and gender ideology influence experienced fairness regarding household division of labour and gender equality. Both the quantitative and the qualitative analyses indicated that the division of time, and especially the division of time spent doing household work, is a central factor. Perceptions of fairness concerning division of housework and gender equality are strongly related to the actual division of housework. That there should be an association between the division of housework and experienced fairness regarding housework is not so unexpected; however the fact that the division of paid work proved to be of so little importance is somewhat surprising. This is even more relevant in the case of perceptions of gender equality. Also, these analyses show that the division of household labour, and perceptions related to this division, appear to be of great importance at the same time as the division of paid work was of no significance. The results here then coincide with results from earlier studies showing that the division of housework is a key factor in determining perceptions of fairness in relation to the household division of labour. This study also shows that these two factors are strongly related to perceptions of gender equality in general, which suggests that perceptions of fairness and gender equality are not separate and isolated from each other.

From the interviews we learned that there are several factors and mechanisms at work influencing perceptions of fairness and gender equality that were not possible to see from the quantitative analysis alone. The way that the division of housework affects access to leisure time seemed to be important in how equity regarding housework was evaluated, which supports the results from the regression analysis. Though not found to be important in the regression analysis, the interviews suggested that the sharing of the overall workload, paid and unpaid work, was important for perceptions of fairness. We also saw in the interviews that the context and circumstances of a couple's life were also taken into account when evaluating fairness regarding the division of housework. In addition, the many different aspects inherent to family life may be impossible, and at best difficult, to separate from each other and perceptions about one may be coloured by perceptions of the others. It seems likely that the different areas of a couple's daily life together constitute a whole, which in turn is the basis upon which perceptions of fairness and gender equality are formed. The different areas of family life and a family's entire situation not only influence the organization of the couples' daily lives, but also influence perceptions of fairness.

How the concepts of housework, fairness and gender equality were defined and understood was important for respondents' perceptions of fairness and gender equality, which is important to bear in mind when interpreting results from this (and any) survey study. When housework was defined in a broad way to include traditionally male tasks, men's contributions increased, which may facilitate an evaluation of fair sharing. Defining tasks in terms of gendered areas of responsibility also seemed to be important in that these coincided with a traditional gender ideology. Housework not defined in terms of men's and women's work indicated, and reflected, an egalitarian gender ideology.

Gender ideology was found to be useful in increasing our understanding of perceptions of fairness. The respondents' gender ideology seems to influence what outcomes we value and who or what we compare outcomes with. It is likely that the gender ideology of the respondent in relation to the public gender equality discourses in Sweden plays a role in forming perceptions of fairness and gender equality as well as in influencing individuals' perceptions of unfairness. Further, it was found that traditional ideas about family life still exist in Swedish families side by side with their own as well as official discourses, measures and policies aimed at increasing gender equality in Sweden. This may be creating conflicting goals, contradictory behaviour and ideas, and thus ambivalence in individuals' responses. This ambivalence may be a sign that individuals are struggling with their understanding of fairness and gender equality and trying to find ways to integrate gender equality into their

lives. This kind of ambivalence is difficult to capture in large surveys and may make interpretation of results difficult.

A distributive justice framework for interpretation allowed us to see that comparative referents and justifications may play an important role in how fair we regard the division of housework, and that these are influenced by gender ideologies. We saw for instance that a 50:50 sharing of tasks was in fact used as a rule of justice by some, and inter-gender comparisons were sometimes made when evaluating equity; both of these may increase the likelihood of perceiving unequal sharing of housework as unfair. In addition, gender ideologies influenced what justifications for unequal sharing were accepted. A belief in equal sharing meant that unequal sharing would be more likely to be deemed unfair while a more traditional gender ideology allowed for the evaluation of a more gendered, and unequal division of time and housework as fair.

The results from this study indicate that measures of fairness, gender equality and sharing need to be developed so that large-scale surveys can better capture the complexity inherent in these concepts. Individuals' varied and vague understanding of central concepts, ambiguous responses stemming from conflicting needs and ideals, and the inter-relatedness of different aspects of couples' lives may lead to misleading and inadequate interpretations of results from large-scale survey studies. For the reasons presented earlier, both quantitative and qualitative studies should be included in studies of family life if we truly want to increase our understanding of the various aspects of fairness and gender equality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the following for financing this study: the SFR, FRN, Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation and German Research Foundation.

REFERENCES

Ahrne, Göran and Christine Roman (1997) *Hemmet Barnen och Makten: Förhandlingar om Arbete och Pengar i Familjen*, SOU 1997:139. Stockholm: Fritzes.

Bäck-Wiklund, M. and B. Bergsten (1996) 'Moderna fäder mellan tradition och relation', *Sociologisk forksning* 1: 48–70.

Baxter, Janine (2000) 'The Joys and Justice of Housework', *Sociology* 34(4): 609–31.

Benjamin, O. and O. Sullivan (1996) 'The Importance of Difference: Conceptualising Increased Flexibility in Gender Relations at Home', *The Sociological Review* 44(2): 226–51.

Björnberg, Ulla and Anna-Karin Kollind (1997) 'Lojalitet, tid och pengar – Hur kvinnor och män argumenterar om jämställdhet i familjer', pp. 31–57 in

Göran Ahrne and Inga Persson (eds) *Familj, makt och jämställdhet*, SOU 1997:138. Stockholm: Fritzes.

Blair, S.L. and M.P. Johnson (1992) 'Wive's Perceptions of the Fairness of the Division of Household Labour: The Intersection of Housework and Ideology', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 54: 570–81.

Dempsy, Kenneth, C. (1999) 'Attempting to Explain Women's Perceptions of the Fairness of the Division of Housework', *Journal of Family Studies* 5(1): 3–24.

Gager, Constance, T. (1998) 'The Role of Valued Outcomes, Justifications, and Comparison Referents in Perceptions of Fairness among Dual-Earner Couples', *Journal of Family Issues* 19(5): 622–48.

Gallie, D., J. Gershuny and C. Vogler (1994) 'Unemployment, the Household and Social Networks', in D. Gallie, C. Marsh and C. Vogler (eds) *Social Change and the Experience of Unemployment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Greenstein, Theodore, N. (1996) 'Gender Ideology and Perceptions of the Fairness of the Division of Household Labor: Effects on Marital Quality', *Social Forces* 74(3): 1029–42.

Hawkins, A.J., C.M. Marshall and S.M. Allen (1998) 'The Orientation toward Domestic Labour Questionnaire: Exploring Dual-Earner Wives' Sense of Fairness about Family Work', *Journal of Family Psychology* 12(2): 244–58.

Hochschild, Arlie (with Anne Machung) (1989) *The Second Shift*. New York: Avon Books.

Holter, Öysten Gullvåg and Helene Aarseth (1994) *Mäns livssammanhang*. Stockholm: Bonnier Utbildning.

Kalleberg, A.L. and R.A. Rosenfeld (1990) 'Work in the Family and in the Labour Market: A Cross-National, Reciprocal Analysis', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52: 331–46.

Lennon, M.C. and S. Rosenfeld (1994) 'Relative Fairness and the Division of Housework: The Importance of Options', *American Journal of Sociology* 100: 506–31.

Liem, R. and J.H. Liem (1988) 'Psychological Effects of Unemployment on Workers and their Families', *Journal of Social Issues* 44: 97–105.

Major, Brenda (1987) 'Gender, Justice and the Psychology of Entitlement', pp. 124–48 in P. Shaver and C. Hendrick (eds) *Sex and Gender*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Nermo, M. (1994) 'Den ofullbordade jämställdheten', pp. 161–83 in J. Fritzell and O. Lundberg (eds), *Vardagens Villkor*. Stockholm: Brombergs.

Noddings, N. (1984) *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Nordenmark, M. (2000) 'Unemployment and Family Life: The Relationship among Employment Status, Household Division of Labour and Well-Being', pp. 25–41 in C. Harvey (ed.) *Walking a Tightrope: Meeting the Challenges of Work and Family.* London: Ashgate.

Nyman, C. (1999) 'Gender Equality in "The Most Equal Country in the World"? Money and Marriage in Sweden', *The Sociological Review* 47(4): 766–93.

Perry-Jenkins, M. and K. Folk (1994) 'Class, Couples, and Conflict: Effect of the Division of Labour on Assessments of Marriage in Dual-Earner Families', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 56: 165–80.

Press, Julie E. and Eleanor Townsley (1998) 'Wives' and Husbands' Housework Reporting: Gender, Class and Social Desirability', *Gender and Society* 12(2): 188–218.

Presser, H.B. (1994) 'Employment Schedules among Dual-Earner Spouses and the

Division of Household Labor by Gender', *American Sociological Review* 59: 348–64.
Regeringens proposition (1987/8) Om jämställdhetspolitiken inför 90-talet, 105:3.
Roman, C. and C. Vogler (1999) 'Managing Money in British and Swedish Households', *European Societies* 1(3): 419–56.
Safilios-Rothschild, Constantina (1969) 'Family Sociology or Wives' Family Sociology? A Cross-Cultural Examination of Decision-Making', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 31: 290–301.
Sanchez, Laura (1994) 'Gender, Labor Allocations, and the Psychology of Entitlement within the Home', *Social Forces* 73(2): 533–53.
Sanchez, Laura and Emily Kane (1996) 'Women's and Men's Constructions of Perceptions of Housework Fairness', *Journal of Family Issues* 17(3): 358–87.
SOU (1998) *Ty makten är din . . . Myten of den rationella arbetslivet och det jämställda Sverige*, SOU 1998:6. Stockholm: Fritzes.
Statistics Sweden (2000) *På tal om kvinnor och män* [Women and Men in Sweden]. Stockholm: Statistics Sweden.
Szinovacz, M. and P. Harpster (1994) 'Couples' Employment/Retirement Status and the Division of Household Tasks', *Journal of Gerontology* 49: 125–36.
Thompson, Linda (1991) 'Family Work. Women's Sense of Fairness', *Journal of Family Issues* 12(2):181–96.
Wilkie, J.R., M.M. Ferree and K.S. Ratcliff (1998) 'Gender and Fairness: Marital Satisfaction in Two-Earner Couples', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60: 577–94.

Mikael Nordenmark *is a holder of the Torgny Segerstedt National Postdoctoral Fellowship and lecturer at the Department of Sociology, Umeå University. His main research interests are questions concerning the labour market in relation to family life and gender. Recent publications include: 'Unemployment and Family Life: The Relationship among Employment Status, Household Division of Labour and Well-Being', in C. Harvey (ed.)* Walking a Tightrope: Meeting the Challenges of Work and Family *(London: Ashgate, 2000) and 'Multiple Social Roles – A Resource or a Burden?'*, Gender, Work and Organization *9(2): 125–45. Address: Department of Sociology, Umeå University, SE-901 87 Umeå, Sweden. [email: mikael.nordenmark@soc.umu.se]*

Charlott Nyman *attained her PhD in sociology with her thesis 'Mine, Yours or Ours? Sharing in Swedish Couples' from Umeå University in Sweden. Her main research interests include various aspects of the sharing of resources, especially money, in couples. Other research and teaching interests are family sociology, labour market questions and gender equality, all from a gender perspective. Address: Department of Sociology, Umeå University, SE-901 87 Umeå, Sweden. [email: charlott.nyman@soc.umu.se]*

◆